Entering the Heart of the Laṅkāvatāra, Exploring the Profound

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Ten Profound Discourses

Today, the fifth day of the tenth lunar month, is the sacred birthday of Patriarch Bodhidharma. In those days, Patriarch Bodhidharma crossed the sea from the west and came to China, directly pointing to the mind so that one might see one’s nature

and attain Buddhahood. He once transmitted the four fascicles of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra to the Second Patriarch, Huike, saying: “I observe that in China only this sūtra exists. If you practice in accordance with it, you will naturally attain liberation in this world.”

That is to say, the capacities of people in China are especially suited to this sūtra. This sūtra is the essential gateway to the mind-ground of the Tathāgata and can enable all sentient beings to open, reveal, awaken to, and enter it. In ancient times, the Chan school was called the “Laṅkāvatāra school,” and Chan masters were called “Laṅkāvatāra masters.” This shows how profound the influence of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra has been upon the Chan school. Therefore, any explanation of this sūtra will inevitably involve the Chan school.

Quite a number of fellow practitioners have asked me to explain the general meaning of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra. To begin speaking on it today, the sacred birthday of Patriarch Bodhidharma, is a most auspicious conjunction of causes and conditions. I would not presume to call this expounding a sūtra; let us explore it together. Some say that the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra is very profound and mysterious, so let us together “enter the heart of Laṅkā and explore the profound.” Before discussing the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra itself, let us first speak of its “Ten Gates of Profound Discussion.”

What are the “Ten Gates of Profound Discussion”? Before expounding a sūtra, great masters of ancient times would first introduce the text from ten perspectives. For example, when we teach a language-arts lesson today, we also discuss the historical background of the text, its central theme, the main idea of each paragraph, a brief account of the author, and so forth. The Ten Gates of Profound Discussion are far more meticulous than this.

Chinese culture has been transmitted down to the present not only with radiant principles and splendid expression, but also with an exceptionally rich foundation and depth of content. Does not the format of modern language-arts lesson plans derive from the ancient method of expounding sūtras through the “Ten Gates of Profound Discussion”? It has merely been simplified.

What are the ten gates of the “Ten Gates of Profound Discussion”? Although the explanations given by the great masters of ancient times differed slightly, the differences were not great. They are listed below:

I. The causes and conditions for the arising of the teaching.

II. Its classification within the scriptural collections.

III. The distinctions among exoteric teachings.

IV. The divisions and scope of its principles and meanings.

V. The capacities for which it is suited.

VI. The substance of the teaching that expounds.

VII. The tenet and purport that are expounded.

VIII. Its categories, transmission, and translation.

IX. A general explanation of the sūtra title.

X. A detailed explanation of the text and its meaning.

Below, I will briefly discuss the ten gates of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra—that is, its ten attributes.

I. Origins of the Teaching

All the Dharma taught by the Buddha was taught in response to causes and conditions. Naturally, the Buddha's teaching of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra was likewise in response to causes and conditions. What causes and conditions prompted the Buddha to teach this sūtra? These are known as the "causes and conditions for the arising of the teaching."

The Lotus Sūtra says: "The Tathāgata appears in the world solely because of one great cause and condition: to open, reveal, awaken, and lead beings into the Buddha's knowledge and vision." That is to say, all the sūtras taught by the Buddha aim to open up the Buddha's knowledge and vision for sentient beings, reveal it clearly to them, enable them to awaken to it, and lead them into it. This is the general explanation. More specifically, what causes and conditions prompted the Buddha to teach the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra? They may be explained under the following ten headings:

I. Following ancient precedent.

II. Fulfilling vows.

III. Responding to capacities.

IV. Destroying evil.

V. Turning back what is mistaken.

VI. Eliminating attachments.

VII. Answering questions.

VIII. Removing doubts.

IX. Revealing reality.

X. Bringing benefit to fruition.

These ten causes and conditions will now be briefly explained:

I. Following ancient precedent. The Buddhas of the past also taught this innerly realized Dharma of mind on the summit of Mount Laṅkā. Śākyamuni, the World-Honored One, taught this sūtra to sentient beings by following the path of mind of the ancient Buddhas.

II. Fulfilling vows. In the past, Śākyamuni, the World-Honored One, heard the ancient Buddhas teach this sūtra and made a vow that he too would later teach this innerly realized Dharma of mind. Now that he had become a Buddha, he taught this sūtra in fulfillment of his original vow.

III. Responding to capacities. The prajñā faculties of the great bodhisattvas and the Dharma-protecting deities had matured; this conjunction of conditions moved the Tathāgata to teach this sūtra.

IV. Destroying evil. The sūtra was taught in order to eradicate the poisonous and evil minds of the man-eating rākṣasas, exhorting them not to kill people or eat human flesh.

V. Turning back what is mistaken. The sūtra was taught in order to destroy the erroneous views of all kinds of non-Buddhist paths and lead them all back to right view.

VI. Eliminating attachments. The sūtra was taught in order to eradicate the attachment to dharmas held by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, causing them to turn from the lesser vehicle toward the great vehicle.

VII. Answering questions. The sūtra was taught in order to answer the one hundred and eight questions of Mahāmati Bodhisattva, as well as other questions.

VIII. Removing doubts.

Beginning bodhisattvas may develop three doubts regarding the profound meaning of the Mahāyāna: (1) on hearing the teaching of “ultimate emptiness,” they may suspect that it denies cause and effect; (2) on hearing of “ultimate reality” and that “Buddha-nature possesses all merit and virtue,” they may suspect that this is the divine self of non-Buddhist paths; and (3) on hearing of the subject and object of

mind and its objects, they may mistakenly think that dharmas can be obtained outside the mind, and thus doubt that all phenomena are consciousness-only.

This sūtra clearly points out that true emptiness necessarily does not undermine illusory presence; that the inherent possession of merit and virtue does not obstruct true emptiness in itself; and that all illusory objects are manifestations of consciousness-only. The sūtra was therefore taught in order to eliminate these and many other such doubts.

IX. Revealing reality. The sūtra was taught in order to reveal the fundamental true meaning of the Mahāyāna—the One-Vehicle Seal of the True Characteristic.

X. Bringing benefit to fruition. The sūtra was taught in order to bring the great bodhisattvas to fulfillment and benefit them, leading them from right faith to direct realization, so that they may cut off delusion and realize truth.

II. Included in the Tibetan Collection

“Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions” refers to the three piṭakas and the twelve divisions of the teachings. “The three piṭakas” are the Sūtra Piṭaka, Vinaya Piṭaka, and Abhidharma Piṭaka, collectively called the three piṭakas of sūtras, discipline, and treatises. “The twelve divisions” refers to the classification of Buddhist scriptures into twelve categories according to their form and content. They are called the twelve divisions of scripture, or the twelvefold teaching. The twelve divisions are listed below:

1. Prose. Teachings directly expounded in prose, without a fixed number of characters in each sentence. The sentences may therefore be quite long, hence the name “prose.”

2. Repetition in verse. After a teaching has been set forth in prose, its content is restated in verse; this is called repetition in verse.

3. Spontaneous verse. A teaching not previously set forth in prose but presented directly in verse is called spontaneous verse.

4. Causes and conditions. Accounts of the causes and conditions for seeing the Buddha and hearing the Dharma, or for the Buddha’s teaching and transforming beings.

5. Previous accounts. Accounts of the causes and conditions experienced by the Buddha’s disciples in their past lives.

6. Birth stories. Accounts of the Buddha’s own causes and conditions in his past lives.

7. Marvelous events. Records of inconceivable events, such as the Buddha’s manifestation of various spiritual powers.

8. Parables. The various analogies used by the Buddha when teaching the Dharma, enabling sentient beings to understand the meaning of the scriptures more easily.

9. Discourses. Scriptural passages consisting of doctrinal discussion, debate, questions and answers, and the like.

10. Self-spoken teachings. Scriptural passages that the Buddha expounded himself, without anyone first asking a question.

11. Broad and extensive teachings. The upright and vast truth, belonging to Mahāyāna doctrine.

12. Predictions. Records of the Buddha’s advance predictions of the time, name, and other details of the future Buddhahood of bodhisattvas or śrāvakas.

Of these twelve divisions, the first three—prose, repetition in verse, and spontaneous verse—are forms of scriptural composition, while the remaining nine concern scriptural content. In addition, Hīnayāna scriptures do not contain the last three divisions—self-spoken teachings, broad and extensive teachings, and predictions—and thus the Hīnayāna has only nine divisions of scripture. Some also maintain that, apart from causes and conditions, parables, and discourses, the other nine divisions all belong to Mahāyāna scriptures.

Others maintain that the nine divisions of scripture are the nine other than parables, birth stories, and discourses. Still others maintain that the nine divisions of scripture are the nine other than self-spoken teachings, parables, and discourses. Of these two classifications, nine divisions and twelve divisions, the teaching of nine divisions is the more ancient. The nine divisions of scripture are also called the ninefold teaching or the nine divisions of Dharma. Moreover, there have been differing views throughout the ages as to which of the three piṭakas—sūtras, discipline, or treatises—includes these twelve divisions, so they will not be listed one by one here.

To which of the three piṭakas does the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra belong? Since this sūtra was spoken by the Buddha, it clearly belongs to the Sūtra Piṭaka. It is generally held that teachings spoken by bodhisattvas belong to the Abhidharma Piṭaka. However, this sūtra also contains teachings spoken by bodhisattvas, and thus may also be included in the Abhidharma Piṭaka. In addition, this sūtra contains some material concerning precepts, and thus may also be included in the Vinaya Piṭaka.

To which of the twelve divisions does the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra belong? It contains nearly all of the twelve divisions described above, and thus may be said to “include all twelve divisions.” Here, “include” means to possess in full, while “embrace” means to encompass or contain. On the other hand, the principle of this sūtra transcends what is expressed in words and is in truth free from written language; thus it may also be said to be “not encompassed by the twelve divisions.”

In brief, the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra is included in the Sūtra Piṭaka among the three piṭakas and contains all twelve divisions.

III. Distinctions in Exoteric Buddhism

“Xian” means to reveal, bring to light, disclose, or show; that is, to expound. “Differences in teachings” means differences in doctrine, or doctrines that differ from one another. Thus, “revealing differences in teachings” asks which kind of doctrine the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra expounds among the various differing doctrines. But how did Buddhist doctrine come to differ in this way? What different doctrines are there? To answer this, we must begin with the formation of Buddhist schools.

After the Buddhadharma was transmitted into the land of China, different schools gradually took shape because the great masters relied on different sūtras and treatises. What schools were there? Broadly speaking, they may be divided into four major categories:

1. The School of Characteristics.

2. The School of No Characteristics.

3. The Dharma Characteristics School.

4. The School of True Characteristics.

What differences are there among the doctrines taught by these four categories of schools? They will be introduced below from six perspectives:

1. In terms of dharma categories. What are “dharma categories”? They include the five aggregates, six sense bases, twelve sense fields, eighteen dhātu realms, and so forth. The School of Characteristics establishes seventy-five dharmas and holds that dharmas can be apprehended. Even “unconditioned dharmas” are grasped as truly existent. It is generally known as the Hīnayāna. The School of No Characteristics demolishes the aforementioned dharma characteristics: both person and dharmas are empty, returning to empty quiescence, where nothing whatsoever exists.

The Dharma Characteristics School establishes one hundred dharmas, including the three natures, the three non-natures, conditioned and unconditioned dharmas, form, and mind. All are established in dependence on consciousness and mental factors, and it proclaims that all phenomena are consciousness-only. The School of True Characteristics holds that the various dharma categories mentioned above all manifest through the dependent arising of the tathāgatagarbha: emptiness does not obstruct presence, presence does not obstruct emptiness; it is emptiness and presence, and presence and emptiness.

2. In terms of mind and consciousness. The School of Characteristics speaks only of the six consciousnesses. The School of No Characteristics dissolves the six consciousnesses into emptiness. The Dharma Characteristics School establishes eight consciousnesses. The School of True Characteristics holds that all eight consciousnesses are manifestations of the tathāgatagarbha in accordance with conditions: they manifest both arising and ceasing, and non-arising and non-ceasing; nature and characteristics thoroughly interpenetrate, harmoniously and without obstruction.

3. From the perspective of dependent arising. The School of Characteristics says that dependent arising truly exists. The School of No Characteristics says that dependent arising is fundamentally empty. The Dharma Characteristics School says that it is both empty and existent. The School of True Characteristics says that it is neither existent nor empty: because all characteristics are exhausted, it is not existent; because nature does not obstruct conditions, it is not empty.

4. From the perspective of turning from the lesser to the greater. The School of Characteristics holds that the highest fruition can only be that of an arhat or a pratyekabuddha; that is, śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas—the two vehicles—can never become Buddhas. The School of No Characteristics holds that only the two vehicles of fixed nature cannot become Buddhas. If those of the two vehicles with indeterminate nature turn away from the aspiration of the lesser vehicle and arouse the aspiration of the Great Vehicle, they can enter the bodhisattva path.

The Dharma Characteristics School holds that practitioners of the two vehicles with indeterminate nature can ultimately become Buddhas by turning from the lesser to the greater. The School of True Characteristics holds that both those of fixed and indeterminate nature will inevitably turn from the lesser to the greater: those of the two vehicles with fixed nature turn only after entering nirvāṇa, whereas those with indeterminate nature turn in this very body.

5. From the perspective of the three vehicles and the one vehicle. The three vehicles are the śrāvaka vehicle, the pratyekabuddha vehicle, and the bodhisattva vehicle; the one vehicle is the Buddha vehicle. The School of Characteristics has only the

three vehicles, not the one vehicle. The School of No Characteristics has both the three vehicles and the one vehicle. The Dharma Characteristics School holds that the three vehicles are explicitly taught, whereas the one vehicle is taught secretly. The School of True Characteristics holds that there is only the one Buddha vehicle, with neither a second nor a third; all sentient beings ultimately become Buddhas.

6. From the perspective of treatise masters. The School of Characteristics includes Dharmatrāta and others. The School of No Characteristics includes Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, and others. The Dharma Characteristics School includes Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and others. The School of True Characteristics includes such great bodhisattvas as Aśvaghoṣa and Sāramati.

The foregoing classifies the schools into four major categories from six perspectives. In terms of specific Chinese Buddhist schools: the School of Characteristics includes the Abhidharma-kośa school; the School of No Characteristics includes the Satyasiddhi school; the Dharma Characteristics School includes the Consciousness-Only school; and the School of True Characteristics includes such schools as Chan, Tiantai, and Huayan.

Then which of the foregoing doctrines does the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra expound? It expounds the doctrine of the School of True Characteristics, while also encompassing the first three schools.

IV. Doctrinal Analysis

What is meant by “systematically classifying doctrinal principles”? Did we not just say that the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra expounds the teachings of the school of true reality? Yes, it expounds the teachings of the school of true reality, but that is a general statement. The doctrinal principles of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra are vast and still need to be discussed in greater detail by categories. This is what is meant by “systematically classifying doctrinal principles.” Below is a brief account of the doctrines of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra from ten perspectives, also called the Ten Gates:

I. The Gate of Dependent Arising, Emptiness, and Existence

II. The Gate of the Root and Branches of the Eight Consciousnesses

III. The Gate of the True and Deluded Nature of Consciousness

IV. The Gate of Seeds in the Root Consciousness

V. The Gate of the Universality of Buddha-Nature

VI. The Gate of the Two Vehicles’ Turning of the Mind

VII. The Gate of the Unfolding and Contraction of Practice and Stages

VIII. The Gate of the Nonobstruction of Obstructions and Their Remedies

IX. The Gate of Freedom in Contrariety and Accord

X. The Gate of the Permanence of Buddhahood

These ten gates are briefly explained below:

I. The Gate of Dependent Arising, Emptiness, and Existence

In ancient times, treatise masters in the Western Regions—including Bhāviveka, Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Dharmapāla, Deva, and Vasubandhu—successively composed treatises. (To compose a treatise is to write a scholarly work.) These various treatises differ in their principal points of exposition, which is entirely understandable.

Even when the Buddha taught during his lifetime, he taught according to the differing capacities of those present; thus, each sūtra has a different emphasis. After the Buddhadharma was transmitted to China, different schools arose because they relied on different sūtras and treatises. This too is entirely understandable.

It is only that later students have had inferior capacities and shallow wisdom. On hearing the Mahāyāna teaching of emptiness, they deny cause and effect; on hearing the Mahāyāna teaching of existence, they deny true emptiness. In fact, true emptiness does not obstruct dependent arising, nor does dependent arising obstruct true emptiness. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra refutes existence that contradicts emptiness and reveals existence that is itself empty, so that cause and effect are not lost; it refutes emptiness that annihilates existence and reveals emptiness that is itself existent, so that empty nature is unobstructed.

II. The Gate of the Root and Branches of the Eight Consciousnesses

The “eight consciousnesses” are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mental, manas, and ālaya consciousnesses. The first seven consciousnesses all arise in dependence on the eighth consciousness. Yet some hold that, although the first seven depend on the eighth, each arises separately and is not itself the eighth. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches that the eighth consciousness is like water, while the first seven consciousnesses are like waves arising on water. Waves do not have a substance different from water. The eighth consciousness is the root substance, and the first seven consciousnesses are its branches.

III. The Gate of the True and Deluded Nature of Consciousness

The “nature of consciousness” refers to the root substance mentioned above—namely, the eighth consciousness. “The true and deluded nature of consciousness” concerns whether the eighth consciousness is said to be true or deluded. Those who regard the eighth consciousness as true say that it is the tathāgatagarbha as it accords with conditions, just as a gold ring is made of gold: the entire ring is gold, and therefore the eighth consciousness is, in its very substance, suchness.

Those who regard the eighth consciousness as deluded say that it arises from seeds such as karma; it is a consciousness of karmic maturation, conditioned and subject to arising and ceasing, and in truth unobtainable. In its very substance, it is deluded. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches that gold symbolizes the fundamental substance of suchness, while the ring symbolizes the branch aspects of delusion. If root and branches both remain, dharmas have never stood as two; if nature and appearances both fall away, this still does not hinder their simultaneous presence. If one understands with an open mind, every formulation is valid; if one clings to words, every encounter becomes an obstruction.

IV. The Gate of Seeds in the Root Consciousness

The “root consciousness” refers to the eighth consciousness, and “seeds” means seeds such as wholesome and unwholesome seeds. One view holds that wholesome and unwholesome seeds truly exist and are stored in the eighth consciousness; the seeds and the eighth consciousness are distinct, while the eighth consciousness itself is neither wholesome nor unwholesome. Another view holds that seeds are merely illusory appearances and that no separate entities exist within the fundamental substance of the eighth consciousness.

Still another view holds that the many seeds constitute the eighth consciousness: their substance is the same, but their functions differ. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches that the many seeds are the many functions of the eighth consciousness and have no separate substance. It is like waves arising on the great ocean because of wind: the ocean itself has no other substance, but because the winds differ, the waves differ. Wholesome and unwholesome waves arise in accordance with wholesome and unwholesome winds. Though these many wholesome and unwholesome waves never leave the great ocean, they can manifest the distinctions of cause and effect.

V. The Gate of the Universality of Buddha-Nature

Here, “Buddha-nature” refers to the capacity to become a Buddha. Can all sentient beings become Buddhas? Opinions on this question are diverse. One representative view is that icchantikas cannot become Buddhas. The widely known story of “Shenggong teaching the Dharma, and even stubborn stones nodding their heads” was precisely meant to refute the view that icchantikas cannot become Buddhas.

Nevertheless, the assertion that “icchantikas cannot become Buddhas” also has scriptural support. One must understand that the Tathāgata's teachings include both definitive and provisional meanings. Why teach provisional doctrines? Provisional doctrines are taught for beings of limited wisdom. Since such beings cannot understand definitive teachings, provisional teachings are first given to them; after their wisdom has opened, definitive teachings are then taught to them.

“Icchantikas cannot become Buddhas” is a provisional teaching, whereas “all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature and can become Buddhas” is a definitive teaching. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches that Buddha-nature is universal: all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, and all sentient beings can become Buddhas.

VI. The Gate of the Two Vehicles’ Turning of the Mind

The “two vehicles” refers to śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, while “turning of the mind” refers to turning from the lesser toward the greater. This has already been mentioned above. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches that all followers of the two vehicles will turn their minds. Some do so earlier and others later, but whether their disposition is fixed or unfixed, all ultimately turn back.

VII. The Gate of the Unfolding and Contraction of Practice and Stages

Here, “practice” refers to bodhisattva practices, such as the six perfections and myriad practices. “Stages” refers to bodhisattva stages, including the ten faiths, ten abodes, ten practices, ten dedications, and ten bhūmis. “Unfolding and contraction” may be expressed in five statements: first, unfolding; second, contraction; third, both together; fourth, both dissolved; fifth, perfect completion. These five statements apply to practice, and they also apply to stages.

We shall now give only a brief introduction to the “five statements concerning stages.” “First, unfolding” means that one proceeds from the ten faiths, ten abodes, ten practices, ten dedications, and ten bhūmis, advancing from shallow to deep and accomplishing them in sequence before reaching ultimate completion. “Second, contraction” means that when the ten faiths are fully accomplished, the subsequent four stages are already complete; when the ten abodes are fully accomplished, the subsequent three stages are already complete; and so on. “Third, both together” means that contraction and unfolding do not depart from one another:

unfolding is always contraction, and contraction is ever unfolding; they are free and unobstructed, mutually interpenetrating and simultaneously manifest. “Fourth, both dissolved” means that, in accord with the true, both are exhausted. The “stages” are truly unobtainable, like the tracks of birds in the sky, until nothing whatsoever remains. “Fifth, perfect completion” means that the preceding four meanings do not depart from one another but manifest simultaneously without obstruction: stages

are not stages, and non-stages are stages; contraction is unfolding, and unfolding is contraction—perfectly luminous and unobstructed. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches the Dharma in which contraction and unfolding are unobstructed and simultaneously manifest in perfect luminosity.

VIII. The Gate of the Nonobstruction of Obstructions and Their Remedies

“Obstructions and their remedies” can likewise be expressed in five statements: first, obstruction; second, remedy; third, both together; fourth, both dissolved; fifth, perfect completion. “Obstruction” refers to hindrances that cover suchness, while “remedy” refers to the wisdom that uncovers suchness. Each of these can again be expressed in five statements. For example, the five statements concerning “remedy” are: first, illumination; second, quiescence; third, both together; fourth, both dissolved; fifth, perfect completion. Such exposition continues layer upon layer without end, perfectly interpenetrating and unobstructed. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches that obstructions and remedies are unobstructed, truth and delusion are alike, wisdom's illumination is not illumination, the cutting off of delusion is not cutting off, the nature of craving is originally empty, and afflictions are themselves bodhi.

IX. The Gate of Freedom in Contrariety and Accord

Here, “contrariety” means opposition; naturally, “accord” means nonopposition. Let us briefly explain “words in accord but meaning contrary” through Devadatta's five wrong practices.

Devadatta is Tiaoda. The five wrong practices of Devadatta are: (1) not eating salt; (2) not consuming ghee or milk; (3) not eating fish or meat; (4) living on alms but not accepting invitations from others; and (5) sitting in the open air during the eight months of spring and summer, while dwelling in a grass hut during the four months of winter. Judging from the wording alone, these five practices do not appear evil. Why, then, are they called the “five wrong practices”? This is what is meant by “words in accord but meaning contrary.”

The precepts established by the Buddha also contain similar provisions. Yet every rule of the Buddha's precepts includes observance, violation, exceptions, and prohibitions, with adaptations made according to the actual circumstances of time and place. For example, alms-gathering was taught by the Buddha, but refusing invitations from others would make it impossible for the saṅgha to function.

There are many such examples in the Buddhist scriptures: the Buddha led the saṅgha in accepting meal invitations and then taught the Dharma. How could accepting invitations from others be a violation of the precepts? Devadatta's five wrong practices cannot be called precepts; they can only be called attachment to

rules and observances. Such attachment is a wrong view, and this is why these five provisions are called Devadatta's five wrong practices. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches that what is contrary is ever in accord, what is in accord is ever contrary, accord is not accord, and contrariety is not contrariety. There is freedom in contrariety and accord, while principle never departs.

X. The Gate of the Permanence of Buddhahood

Here, “Buddhahood” refers to the three bodies: the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya. There are four meanings—that is, four views concerning these three bodies: (1) all three bodies are permanent, holding that the dharmakāya remains unmoving while the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya continue without interruption.

(2) All three bodies are impermanent, holding that the dharmakāya does not depart from the arising and ceasing of the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya. (3) The dharmakāya is permanent, while the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are impermanent. (4) The dharmakāya and sambhogakāya are permanent, while the nirmāṇakāya is impermanent. In truth, these four meanings are only rough descriptions from the standpoint of appearances. If one clings to a single view and refuses to yield to the others, this is no different from blind people feeling an elephant.

The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches that the four meanings are mutually interpenetrating: whichever one is stated encompasses them all. Permanence does not obstruct arising and ceasing, nor do arising and ceasing obstruct permanence. It is both permanent and impermanent, neither permanent nor impermanent. In terms of principle, every formulation is valid; in terms of emotional attachment, every grasping misses the mark.

As when a monk asked Dasui, “When the kalpic fire burns fiercely and the great thousandfold world is altogether destroyed, is this destroyed as well, or not?”

Dasui said, “Destroyed.”

The monk said, “Then it goes along with that.”

Dasui said, “Let him go.”

Chan Master Dasui acted in accord with principle, so whatever he said was apt; hence, “Dasui’s words spread to the ends of the earth.” This monk acted according to emotion, and so whatever he took up was mistaken; hence, “He travels alone, laboring in vain over ten thousand miles, going and returning.”

V. The Intended Recipients and Their Capacities

Let us first discuss the differences among the five dispositions of sentient beings:

1. The bodhisattva disposition.

2. The pratyekabuddha disposition.

3. The śrāvaka disposition.

4. The indeterminate disposition.

5. The disposition lacking the three vehicles.

“The capacities to be addressed” refers to this: which dispositions of sentient beings are suited to the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra?

Next, regarding the capacities of sentient beings, they may be divided into “Dharma vessels” and “non-vessels.”

There are five kinds of “Dharma vessels”:

1. Vessels of realization. After hearing the Dharma, they immediately realize and enter it.

2. Vessels of practice. After hearing the Dharma, they immediately put it into practice. Only after practicing for a long time can they realize and enter it.

3. Vessels of understanding. They first correctly understand Buddhist principles and establish right view. Then, relying on right view, they begin practice in the hope of realization.

4. Vessels of faith. They can give rise to pure faith in the Buddhadharma, arouse bodhicitta, and seek neither fame nor profit. Upon hearing the Buddha teach profound Dharma, sentient beings who are vessels of faith say, “Only the Buddha knows this; it is beyond my sphere.”

5. All-capable vessels. These are in fact capacities of indeterminate disposition: they may be sharp or dull and encompass the preceding four kinds.

There are also five kinds of “non-vessels”:

1. Those without faith. They commit extensive evil karma and do not even believe in cause and effect. How could they believe in bodhi and nirvāṇa?

2. Those attached to appearances. They know that cause and effect exists, do not commit evil, cultivate all wholesome practices, and gladly seek blessings and karmic rewards. Yet they do not seek liberation and do not accord with signlessness.

3. Those who seek wrongly. Although they seek liberation, they regard the heterodox views of non-Buddhist paths as liberation itself. Clinging to their views, they refuse to turn back.

4. Those who seek the lesser. Although they abandon non-Buddhist paths, they seek the two vehicles.

5. Those who seek mistakenly. Although they study the Mahāyāna, they do not understand true emptiness. Some grasp at annihilationist, inert emptiness; others cling to dependent arising as truly existent. They refuse to accept the Dharma of perfect interpenetration and nonobstruction, and thus become non-vessels.

“The capacities to be addressed” refers to this: what kinds of capacities are suited to studying the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra?

All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature. The five classes of disposition will all attain great bodhi, and thus all may be suited to the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra. One must not cling rigidly to classifications of capacity; they are in fact simply different habitual tendencies. Not only can all five kinds of Dharma vessels benefit from the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra; even the five kinds of non-vessels can benefit from it, provided they are willing to study it.

VI. The Teaching-Body That Can Expound

“Quan” means to expound, explain, or express. “The vehicle that can articulate the teaching” refers to a vehicle capable of expressing doctrinal meaning. It may be broadly divided into ten gates:

1. The Gate of Names and Sentences as That Which Articulates. Names and sentences are written words. To take written words as “the vehicle that can articulate the teaching” is to use lines of text as a vehicle for expressing doctrine.

2. The Gate of Speech and Sound as Expression. This refers to “using sound as Buddha-work”—that is, expressing doctrine through such sounds as speech.

3. The Gate of the Joint Articulation of Sound and Names. This includes both sound and written words. For example, in a recorded teaching accompanied by subtitles, the “vehicle that can articulate the teaching” is the “joint articulation of sound and names.”

4. The Gate in Which Both Sound and Names Are Absent. Sound and written words are empty in their very appearance. Because there is nothing whatsoever, one may teach the Dharma all day long and yet never have taught it. “How wondrous, how wondrous! It is inconceivable that the insentient expound the Dharma!”

5. The Gate That Comprehensively Includes What Is Articulated. That which articulates is words; that which is articulated is doctrinal meaning. Meaning becomes manifest through words. Although that which articulates is empty in nature and illusory, it can nonetheless comprehensively include what is articulated.

6. The Gate Encompassing All Dharmas. Not only speech and written words, but even form, scent, taste, touch, silence, and so forth are all “vehicles that can articulate the teaching.” An example is Vimalakīrti’s “silence.”

7. The Gate of Dependent Arising as Mind-Only. All the vehicles of teaching discussed above arise in response to conditions and are manifestations of mind alone; therefore, they all take consciousness as their basis.

8. The Gate of Returning from the Illusory to the Real. “Returning from the illusory to the real” means “returning from appearances to nature.” Illusory appearances are never exhausted, and true nature is never not manifest; therefore, appearances are precisely nature. “Mountains, rivers, and the great earth are the Tathāgata.”

9. The Gate of Nonobstruction Between Nature and Appearance. Conditioned, provisional appearances do not obstruct suchness. Unconditioned true nature does not hinder wondrous functioning. Appearance is nature, and nature is appearance; appearance does not destroy nature, and nature does not alter appearance. Nature and appearance are nonobstructive.

10. The Gate of Perfect Luminosity Endowed with Virtues. True nature is equal, while illusory appearances differ. It remains unchanged while according with conditions, and accords with conditions while remaining unchanged. The true is not other than the conventional, and the conventional is not other than the true. At this point, “the vehicle that can articulate the teaching” is perfectly luminous and unobstructed, endowed with every merit and virtue.

So, as we explore the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra today, which of these gates does its “vehicle that can articulate the teaching” possess? The sūtra text consists of written words, so it already encompasses the first gate. Here we use speech to express it, so it also encompasses the second gate. Examining it gate by gate in this way, the conclusion is that all ten gates are comprehensively included.

VII. The Doctrine Expounded and Its Essential Purport

What are “principle and purport”? What is expressed in words is called the “principle”; that to which the principle returns is called the “purport.” The “principle and purport that are expounded” are the ultimate orientation of the teachings set forth in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra. This sūtra has ten aspects of principle and purport:

1. Returning to no tenet.

2. Bringing deluded thoughts to rest.

3. The noble wisdom of self-realization.

4. Exhausting the one mind.

5. The two truths, ultimate and conventional.

6. The meaning of the three unequaled aspects.

7. The principles of the fourfold gateway.

8. The five paired correspondences.

9. Unobstructed establishment and refutation.

10. Mastery of the exoteric and esoteric.

Below is a brief explanation of the ten gateways of principle and purport in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra:

1. Returning to no tenet.

All dharmas are empty and quiescent; their nature and characteristics are serene and clear. The way of words is cut off, and the path of mental activity is extinguished. No dharma can be established; therefore, this is called no tenet. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra takes no tenet as its principle and non-reception as its purport.

2. Bringing deluded thoughts to rest.

The World-Honored One teaches the Dharma in response to illness and prescribes medicine accordingly. The “illness” is the deluded thoughts of sentient beings. Deluded thoughts are false thoughts: sentient beings cling to what is false and mistake delusion for truth, and thus become ill. The “medicine” is the Buddha’s instruction. The Buddha tells sentient beings that all the various views they give rise

to—views of existence, nonexistence, and so forth—are false and unreal and should be relinquished. When sentient beings hear the Buddha's teaching, they leave behind these deluded thoughts. This is a single course of medicine treating an illness. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra takes the cessation of delusion as its principle and the exhaustion of delusion as its purport.

3. The noble wisdom of self-realization.

"Noble wisdom" means that all dharmas are one's own mind and that all dharmas are wholly equal. "The noble wisdom of self-realization" refers to the wisdom of the Tathāgata; it is also called the wisdom of the nature and essence of the dharma realm, or unmastered wisdom. It is the realization that there is no dharma outside the mind and that the myriad dharmas are suchness without distinction. Moreover, one realizes that the intrinsic nature of this "realization" is itself, in accordance with principle, of one flavor; thus one is free from the realizing subject and from the object realized. Therefore, the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra takes self-realization as its principle and the dissolution of realization as its purport.

4. Exhausting the one mind.

Habitual tendencies disturb within; the wind of deluded objects rises; waves swell upon the ocean of mind, their billows surging—all these are manifestations of the one mind. Yet objects are not objects in themselves; they are objects because of mind. Mind is not mind in itself; it is mind because of objects. Not only are objects false; this very mind is also false. Therefore, the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra takes the one mind as its principle and the exhaustion of mind as its purport.

5. The two truths, ultimate and conventional.

To hold that mental characteristics differ, that defilement and purity arise dependently, and that ordinary beings and sages are distinct is called the "conventional truth." To hold that the essence of mind is equal, without defilement or purity, and of one flavor without duality is called the "ultimate truth." The ultimate and conventional truths stand in relation to one another in five senses, briefly explained as follows. 1. The meaning of mutual opposition: conventional truth involves arising and ceasing, whereas ultimate truth opposes arising and ceasing; ultimate truth is originally suchness as one, whereas conventional truth opposes this oneness.

It is like still water and moving waves: stillness and movement are mutually opposed. This is called the gateway of "not one." The two truths, ultimate and conventional, are two rather than one; "not one" is what is meant by "not one." 2. The meaning of mutual negation: not only do the two principles oppose one another, but each deprives the other of its very basis.

The conventional truth must be exhausted before the ultimate truth can be revealed; the ultimate truth must be concealed before the conventional truth can be established. It is like speaking of water: there must be no waves at all; when speaking of waves, one must forget the water.

This is called the gateway of “not one in non-difference.” “Difference” means distinctness; “non-difference” means “not distinct.” Why are they not distinct? Because the two cannot exist simultaneously, so there is no way to compare them as the same or different. 3. The meaning of mutual accord.

Since ultimate truth is not annihilationist, inert emptiness, the ultimate truth that exhausts the conventional does not hinder the establishment of the conventional. Since conventional truth is illusory and unreal in its very nature, the conventional that conceals the ultimate does not hinder the manifestation of the ultimate. It is like water without waves, which does not hinder waves from arising; and surging billows, which do not conceal the nature of water. This is called the gateway of “non-difference in not-one.” 4. The meaning of mutual completion.

Not only do they accord rather than conflict; each can be established only when the two are wholly united. Ultimate truth is the essence of reality: it necessarily accords with conditions and, as it is concealed in itself, becomes the conventional. Conventional truth is the illusory appearance of phenomena: it necessarily does not depart from principle and, as its characteristics are exhausted in themselves, reveals the ultimate. It is like water forming waves: without the arising of waves, it would not be water; waves arise from the body of water. Without water, waves cannot exist.

This is called the gateway of “non-difference.” 5. The meaning of nonobstruction: taken together, the preceding four gateways constitute a single unobstructed dharma realm. They are at once ultimate and conventional, opposed and accordant, established and undone; all appear simultaneously, perfectly interpenetrating and free. Therefore, the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra takes the two truths as its principle and nonobstruction as its purport.

6. The meaning of the three unequaled aspects.

1. The unequaled object: the unobstructed object contemplated in the preceding discussion of the two truths. 2. Unequaled practice: on the basis of the contemplated object, one gives rise to such practices as great compassion and great wisdom. 3. Unequaled fruition: when practice is perfected to its ultimate completion, there is neither wisdom nor attainment; alternatively, this is called attainment of the fruition of wisdom and cessation. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra takes the unequaled as its principle and wisdom and cessation as its purport.

7. The principles of the fourfold gateway.

1. The five dharmas: name, appearance, deluded thought, right wisdom, and suchness. 2. The three natures: the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment, the nature of dependence on others, and the nature of absolute reality and perfection. 3. The eight consciousnesses: eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, consciousness, manas consciousness, and ālaya consciousness. 4. The twofold emptiness: the emptiness of self and the emptiness of phenomena. Or, in other words, no self of persons and no self of dharmas.

The minds and objects of ordinary beings and sages, according to conditions, become the five dharmas. Yet the five dharmas do not depart from the three natures; that upon which the three natures depend is the eight consciousnesses; only when the meaning of the eight consciousnesses is exhausted does the twofold emptiness become manifest. Or one may say: on the basis of the twofold emptiness, the eight consciousnesses are established; the eight consciousnesses are gathered into the three natures; and the three natures are set forth expansively as the five dharmas. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra takes these four meanings as its principle and the exhaustion of their meanings as its purport.

8. The five paired correspondences.

1. Teaching and meaning: establishing the teaching is the principle, and meaning is the purport; by seeking through the teaching, one obtains its meaning. 2. Principle and phenomena: through the principles of the teaching, one gives rise to phenomena in accordance with conditions, thereby enabling entry into true nature. 3. Object and practice: one clearly distinguishes the two objects, ultimate and conventional, intending thereby to bring about the right practice of nonduality. 4. Practice and realization: practices before the bhūmis are extensively explained within practice, with the intention of ascending the bhūmis and deeply realizing. 5. Cause and fruition: bodhisattvas on the bhūmis accord with and practice the myriad practices, intending to attain the bodhi of Buddhahood. These are ten matters in five pairs. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra takes the first five as its principle and the latter five as its purport.

9. Unobstructed establishment and refutation.

The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra refutes three things: 1. Non-Buddhist paths of erroneous views. 2. The two vehicles' attachment to dharmas. 3. Bodhisattvas' mistaken understanding. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra likewise establishes three things: 1. All phenomena are mind-only, which comprehensively remedies these three illnesses. 2. The one true nature, the Tathāgata's noble wisdom of self-realization. 3. On the basis of the immutable true nature, all dharmas are established. Or, one may say: 1.

Phenomena are dissolved and returned to principle; principle appears, while phenomena are not destroyed.

2. Principle is gathered to form phenomena; phenomena are established, while principle is not concealed. 3. Principle and phenomena are perfectly interpenetrating: nondual, yet two. When this Dharma is established, all delusions are refuted; thus, in establishing there is nothing not refuted. When all obscurations are exhausted, true nature reveals itself; thus, in refuting there is nothing not established. Establishment itself is refutation, yet this refutation is not refutation; refutation itself is establishment, yet this establishment is not establishment. The forms of establishment and refutation are taken away, and both are dissolved, leaving nothing to rest upon. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra takes establishment and refutation as its principle and having nothing to rest upon as its purport.

10. Mastery of the exoteric and esoteric.

Teachings differ as exoteric and esoteric, but principle has no distinction of hidden or manifest. Whether exoteric or esoteric, even the eighty-four thousand dharma gates can be subsumed within one hundred and eight statements; further, the one hundred and eight statements are only the one mind. Suchness returns to the one mind without obstructing the evident distinctions among the one hundred and eight statements; even the eighty-four thousand distinctions do not lose the equality of the one mind. Root and branch are nondual, perfectly penetrating and unobstructed. Therefore, the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra takes the exoteric and esoteric as its principle and the dissolution of duality as its purport.

If the principle and purport of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra were expounded in depth, there would be many more than these ten gateways. Here, ten gateways have been cited briefly. Although they do not reveal the whole leopard, they may offer a glimpse of one spot.

VIII. Classifications and Translations

Let us first discuss the recensions. It is said that in the Western Regions there were three versions of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra: a large recension, a middle recension, and a small recension.

I. The large recension. The Kaihuang Record of the Three Jewels states that in the mountains of the kingdom of Zhejuban, south of Khotan, there were ten great sūtras, including the Laṅkāvatāra, each containing one hundred thousand verses. In other words, the large recension of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra was a great sūtra containing one hundred thousand verses.

II. The middle recension. There was also a Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra of thirty-six thousand verses. In this sūtra, the Buddha gives detailed answers to one hundred and eight questions. There was a Tripiṭaka master from Tokharistan named Mituoshan, who received and upheld this version of the sūtra in India. It is said that in the Western Regions there was an exegetical treatise composed by Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva that explains this sūtra.

III. The small recension. The small recension of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra contains more than one thousand verses and is called "Laṅkā-hṛdaya," meaning "the Heart of Laṅkā," or, in other words, "the central thought of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra." The four-fascicle Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra that we are discussing today is a further abridgment of this small recension. It may be called "the heart within the heart." The work we call Exploring the Profound Meaning of the Heart of the Laṅkāvatāra investigates the profound meaning of this four-fascicle Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra.

Next, let us discuss its translations. Today, we can find three Chinese translations of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra.

I. The four-fascicle Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra of the Precious Teaching of Descent into Laṅkā. This is the Chinese translation of the "heart within the heart" version just mentioned. During the Yuanjia era (424–453) of the Liu-Song dynasty in the Southern Dynasties, the Tripiṭaka master Guṇabhadra, who came from central India, translated it at Qiyuan Temple in Danyang, China. The monk Baoyun rendered it orally into Chinese for Huiguan, who committed it to writing.

II. The seven-fascicle Mahāyāna Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra. In the first year of the Shengli era of the Great Zhou, the Tripiṭaka master Śikṣānanda, who came from Khotan, began translating the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra at Foshouji Temple in the Divine Capital after completing the translation of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra. He later moved to Qingchan Temple. Just after completing the first draft of the translation, Śikṣānanda was ordered to return to Khotan.

In the second year of the Chang'an era, the Tripiṭaka master Mituoshan arrived from Tokharistan. He had studied in India for twenty-five years, mastering the entire Tripiṭaka and especially excelling in the Laṅkāvatāra. Śikṣānanda's first draft was then examined and finalized by Mituoshan. After several monks, including Fuli and Fazang, further revised the Chinese, the translation of the seven-fascicle Mahāyāna Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra was completed.

III. The ten-fascicle Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra. During the Later Wei dynasty, it was translated at Yongning Temple in Luoyang by the Tripiṭaka master Bodhiruci, who came from India.

On the basis of the three translations listed above, and considering the dates of their translation, we find that Patriarch Bodhidharma crossed the sea and came west during the Putong era (520–526) of the Liang dynasty. By that time, a Chinese translation of the four-fascicle Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra of the Precious Teaching of Descent into Laṅkā was already available in China. The four-fascicle Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra that Patriarch Bodhidharma transmitted to Huike, the Second Patriarch, was precisely this version, the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra of the Precious Teaching of Descent into Laṅkā, which we are discussing today.

IX. A General Explanation of the Sūtra Title

The “sūtra title” is the title of a sūtra—that is, the name of this sūtra. “Explaining the sūtra title” means explaining the name of the sūtra. How is it explained? There are also ten approaches:

1. Translating the name.

2. Distinguishing the circumstances.

3. Revealing its function.

4. Revealing its virtues.

5. Indicating the Dharma.

6. Distinguishing the practice.

7. Indicating the profound meaning.

8. Analyzing and explaining.

9. Explaining them together.

10. Explaining the chapter.

Below is a brief explanation of these ten approaches:

1. Translating the name.

“Translating the name” means translating the name of this sūtra. Its title is the Laṅkāvatāra Jewel Sūtra. “Laṅkā” is a transliteration; in meaning, it may be translated as “difficult to enter.” It also carries the meanings “perilous,” “fearsome,” and “adorned.”

“Avatāra” is likewise a transliteration; in meaning, it means “entering from above,” or entering downward from above. “Laṅkāvatāra” conveys the meaning of “being able

to enter what is difficult to enter." Do we not all know the phrase, "What is difficult to practice can be practiced; what is difficult to endure can be endured"? This is bodhisattva practice. "Jewel" means "precious." Is not being able to enter what is difficult to enter something precious? "Laṅkāvatāra Jewel" means "the jewel of being able to enter what is difficult to enter." The Laṅkāvatāra Jewel Sūtra is a sūtra that expounds this jewel of being able to enter what is difficult to enter.

2. Distinguishing the circumstances.

Mount Laṅkā lies in the Southern Sea. It is sheer and precipitous, and thus is called "perilous." There is a city on its summit, but it has no gates; thus it is called "difficult to enter." Not only is there no path up the mountain, but there is also no gate into the city. Only by flying through the air with spiritual powers and entering from above can one enter Laṅkā City; hence it is called "difficult to enter." Man-eating rākṣasas dwell in the city, and so it is called "fearsome." The city is adorned with many treasures, and so it is called "adorned."

3. Revealing its function.

This city is very difficult to enter, yet the Buddha can enter it from above. The rākṣasas are obstinate and difficult to transform, yet the Buddha can teach and transform them by making the profound easy to understand. Therefore, this sūtra is called "the jewel of being able to enter what is difficult to enter."

4. Revealing its virtues.

The principle of "one mind and true nature" transcends the four propositions and cuts off a hundred negations; thus it is called "difficult to enter." The Buddha possesses skillful means: he can speak words where the path of language is cut off, enabling people to awaken and enter where the activity of mind ceases. Thus it is called "being able to enter." This is relying on meaning rather than words: when words are exhausted, the meaning becomes manifest.

5. Indicating the Dharma.

The mountain city's difficulty of entry signifies the subtle profundity of the principle; the rākṣasas' difficulty of transformation signifies the gravity of karmic obstacles; and the World-Honored One's ability to enter signifies the accomplishment of practice. Leaving behind the rākṣasas' obstructions and realizing the city that is difficult to enter signifies the accomplishment of practice. That is, the place where the Dharma is taught is used to indicate the meaning of the Dharma.

6. Distinguishing the practice.

“Practice” refers to cultivation. Opening prajñā wisdom and realizing the essential principle of suchness is cultivation. True principle is perfectly interfused and precludes conceptual measurement; the sages’ wisdom is subtle and wondrous, and through awakening one can realize and enter it. Once prajñā wisdom is opened, one can realize and enter the essential principle of suchness. Hence, “being able to enter what is difficult to enter.”

7. Indicating the profound meaning.

“Profound” refers to the profound meaning, namely “self-realized noble wisdom.” Self-realized noble wisdom is wholly true; there is no other wisdom that can realize this truth. Thus it is called “difficult to enter.” Using this wisdom that is itself truth to realize this truth that is itself wisdom is like a jewel emitting light that in turn illumines the jewel itself. This is “no entering,” and it is also “being able to enter.” To be able to enter, there must necessarily be no entering; only where there is no entering can there be being able to enter. This is the true meaning of “being able to enter what is difficult to enter.”

8. Analyzing and explaining.

“Analyzing and explaining” means explaining separately. The Laṅkāvatāra Jewel Sūtra is divided into “six meanings and three pairs.” The meanings of “general” and “particular” form the first pair. The Laṅkāvatāra Jewel Sūtra is the general title of this sūtra, while The Chapter on the Heart of the Speech of All Buddhas is the particular title of this text.

The meanings of “that which explains” and “that which is explained” form the second pair. The Laṅkāvatāra Jewel and the Heart of the Speech of All Buddhas are the principles being explained, while “sūtra” and “chapter” are the vehicles that explain the foregoing principles. The meanings of “object” and “wisdom” form the third pair. “Laṅkā” is the object to be entered, while “Avatāra” is the wisdom able to enter.

9. Explaining them together.

“Explaining them together” means discussing them in combination. First, regarding the third pair, “object” and “wisdom”: through the object, wisdom is revealed, and object and wisdom are thereby combined to form the “that which is explained” of the second pair, “that which explains” and “that which is explained.” Next, regarding the second pair: through that which explains, that which is explained is revealed, and the two are thereby combined to form the first pair, “general” and “particular.”

Finally, regarding the first pair, “general” and “particular”: the particular title, The Chapter on the Heart of the Speech of All Buddhas, means that this chapter is the “heart” of the speech of all Buddhas; “heart” means the “core” or “center.” Through

the particular, the general is revealed, and general and particular are thereby combined. Taken together, this sūtra expounds the core of the speech of all Buddhas.

10. Explaining the chapter.

“Explaining the chapter” means explaining the chapter title, which is The Chapter on the Heart of the Speech of All Buddhas. “All Buddhas” refers to all Buddhas throughout the ten directions and three periods of time. “The speech of all Buddhas” refers to all the words spoken by all Buddhas. “The Heart of the Speech of All Buddhas” is the core of all Buddhas’ speech. As for the word “chapter,” a chapter is a section of a sūtra.

When a sūtra is divided into several sections, it is said to have several chapters; sections are also sometimes called divisions. It should be noted that each of the four fascicles of the Laṅkāvatāra Jewel Sūtra is titled The Chapter on the Heart of the Speech of All Buddhas, as though the entire sūtra were divided into only one section. It should also be noted that, although Buddhist sūtras have three divisions, this sūtra seems not to have a third division.

What are the “three divisions of a Buddhist sūtra”? Nearly all Buddhist sūtras can be divided into an introductory division, a main exposition, and a circulation division. The circulation division is the conclusion of a sūtra. Most sūtras conclude with words such as: “Having heard what the Buddha taught, all were greatly delighted, faithfully accepted it, put it into practice, paid homage, and departed.”

Yet the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra has no such conclusion. It appears as though the sūtra has not finished and that further text should follow. Considered in connection with this, perhaps the situation is as follows: the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra originally had more than one chapter, but the version we now see translated only the first chapter, The Chapter on the Heart of the Speech of All Buddhas.

Nevertheless, since this chapter is the “core of all Buddhas’ speech,” and one can see the whole leopard from a single spot, it is complete even without reading the subsequent text. Since it is complete, it should have a third division. Therefore, some ancient sūtra scholars regarded the final passage of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, which discusses not eating meat, as its circulation division.

X. Detailed Explanation of the Text and Its Meaning

“Distinguishing” means making distinctions, and “explaining the meaning of the text” means explaining the principles expressed in the sūtra text. Thus, “distinguishing and explaining the meaning of the text” means explaining the principles of the sūtra text word by word and sentence by sentence. This begins the exposition of the sūtra text with “Thus have I heard.” The first nine sections provide a general exposition of the main purport; the tenth section explains the sūtra text in detail.

To make it easy to distinguish the sūtra text from the explanations, we enclose the sūtra text in [square brackets] for ease of reading. We shall now divide the entire sūtra broadly into several sections (an outline) according to its meaning and principles. These sections are listed below:

I. General Discussion of the One Hundred and Eight Statements

1. One Hundred and Eight Questions

2. One Hundred and Eight Responses

3. One Hundred and Eight Statements

II. Detailed Explanation in Forty Sections

1. The Arising and Ceasing of the Various Consciousnesses

02. The Realm of the Storehouse Consciousness

03. Deluded Conceptions of Existence and Nonexistence

04. Sudden and Gradual Purification of the Stream

05. The Eternal and the Inconceivable

06. Establishment and Slander

07. Emptiness, Non-Arising, and Intrinsic Nature

08. The Nature of the Tathāgata-garbha

09. Cultivation Through the Four Great Elements

10. Causes and Conditions of All Dharmas

11. Verbal Expression and Discrimination

12. Freedom from the Four Propositions

13. Mahāparinirvāṇa

14. Discerning Dependent Arising
15. Eternal Sound and Reliance on Illusion
16. Distinctions Among the Four Fruits
17. Noble Wisdom and the One Vehicle
18. Characteristics of the Mind-Born Body
19. The Five Actions of Immediate Retribution
20. The Essential Nature of All Buddhas
21. The Four Equalities and Hidden Intent
22. Relying on the Two Esoteric Teachings
23. Dharmas Beyond Existence and Nonexistence
24. Tenet, Purport, and Verbal Expression
25. Deluded Discrimination
26. Skill in Language and Meaning
27. Delusion, Attachment, and Liberation
28. Wisdom Does Not Apprehend Objects
29. Do Not Study Worldly Doctrines
30. Distinctions in Nirvāṇa
31. The Tathāgata’s Nature of Awakening
32. Neither Arising nor Ceasing
33. Distinguishing Impermanence
34. Present Realization Upon Entering Cessation
35. The Meaning of Permanence and Impermanence
36. The Arising and Ceasing of the Aggregates and Sense Bases
37. Distinctions Among the Four Dharmas
38. Buddhas as Numerous as Ganges Sands

39. The Momentariness of All Dharmas

40. Transformations of the Tathāgata

Section on Circulation: Prohibiting Alcohol, Meat, and Pungent Foods

General Introduction Section

Six Kinds of Accomplishment That Establish Faith

[Thus]

The two words “thus” may be simply understood as meaning “just so.” They indicate that, having heard the Buddha speak this sūtra, it was indeed spoken by the Buddha in this way. The words “thus” constitute the “accomplishment of faith.”

[Have I Heard]

Here, “I” refers to Venerable Ānanda. Ānanda informed the assembly that he had personally heard the Buddha speak this sūtra. Ānanda was the Buddha’s attendant and possessed an especially powerful memory. He was present whenever the Buddha expounded the sūtras and taught the Dharma. Not long after the Buddha entered parinirvāṇa, the assembly compiled the sūtras spoken by the Buddha, and Ānanda recited them. The others had likewise heard the Buddha speak them, and after hearing Ānanda’s recitation, they confirmed that it was correct and recorded it in writing. Thus, Buddhist sūtras came to exist in the world. The words “have I heard” constitute the “accomplishment of hearing.”

[At One Time]

This refers to the time when the Buddha taught this Dharma: the auspicious gathering of the Teacher and his disciples. The words “at one time” constitute the “accomplishment of time.”

[Buddha]

Buddha means “the Awakened One.” After our fundamental teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha, awakened and became a Buddha, he expounded the Dharma in accordance with the capacities of his listeners and widely liberated sentient beings. He was the one who taught the Dharma. “Buddha” is the “accomplishment of the teacher.”

[Dwelling on the summit of Laṅkā Mountain by the Southern Sea, adorned with various jeweled flowers.]

This describes the place where the Dharma was taught. “Adorned with jeweled flowers” indicates that this place was especially sublime. This is the “accomplishment of place.”

[Together with a great assembly of bhikshus and great bodhisattvas, who had come from various other Buddha lands. These bodhisattva-mahāsattvas possessed immeasurable samādhis, powers of mastery, and playfully exercised spiritual powers. Mahāmati Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva was their foremost leader. All Buddhas anointed his crown with their hands. They understood that all realms appear from one’s own mind and were skilled in comprehending its meaning. For the various kinds of sentient beings, with their various mental dispositions and forms, they universally manifested immeasurable gates of liberation according to each type. They thoroughly penetrated the five dharmas, self-nature, consciousness, and the twofold selflessness.]

This passage is the “accomplishment of the assembly.”

“Together with a great assembly of bhikshus and great bodhisattvas” lists the assembly that heard the Dharma together.

“Who had come from various other Buddha lands” means that they came from many different worlds in other directions. Those from afar were able to come, and those nearby could all the more readily come. By mentioning the distant, the text indicates the near; this demonstrates the multitude of the assembly.

“These bodhisattva-mahāsattvas possessed immeasurable samādhis, powers of mastery, and playfully exercised spiritual powers” praises the virtues of the many bodhisattvas present at the gathering.

“Mahāmati Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva was their foremost leader” especially praises the virtues of Mahāmati Bodhisattva. The sūtra passages that follow specifically praise Mahāmati Bodhisattva.

“All Buddhas anointed his crown with their hands” means that Mahāmati Bodhisattva occupied the stage of equal enlightenment and was to receive Buddhahood; therefore, he received empowerment.

“All realms appear from one’s own mind” means that all realms manifest from one’s own mind.

“They were skilled in comprehending its meaning” means that Mahāmati Bodhisattva thoroughly understood the meaning of “all realms appear from one’s own mind” and possessed outstanding wisdom.

“For the various kinds of sentient beings, with their various mental dispositions and forms, they universally manifested immeasurable gates of liberation according to each type” means that, although the five aggregates of all sentient beings differ in countless ways, Mahāmati Bodhisattva is able to liberate them universally through immeasurable gates of liberation. His Dharma gates are profound and vast.

“They thoroughly penetrated the five dharmas, self-nature, consciousness, and the twofold selflessness.” The five dharmas are name, appearance, deluded thought, correct wisdom, and suchness. “Self-nature” refers to the three natures: the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment, the nature of dependence on others, and the nature of absolute reality and perfection. “Consciousness” refers to the eight consciousnesses: eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, mental consciousness, manas consciousness, and ālaya consciousness.

“The twofold selflessness” refers to the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of dharmas. “Thoroughly penetrated” means that Mahāmati Bodhisattva thoroughly penetrated all the dharmas mentioned above, including the five dharmas, three self-natures, eight consciousnesses, and twofold selflessness. Mahāmati Bodhisattva was the one who initiated this sūtra; therefore, he is especially praised at its very beginning.

Prefatory Section

Dahui Recites a Verse in Praise of the Buddha

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva, together with Moti Bodhisattva, traveled through the lands of all Buddhas. Supported by the Buddha’s spiritual power, he rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground, joined his palms reverently, and praised the Buddha in verse.]

“Moti Bodhisattva” was a companion of Mahāmati Bodhisattva. “Together with Moti Bodhisattva” refers to Moti Bodhisattva and many other great bodhisattvas.

“Traveled through the lands of all Buddhas” means that Mahāmati and many great bodhisattvas from other worlds had visited many Buddha lands, traveling and studying there.

“Supported by the Buddha’s spiritual power, he rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground, and joined his palms reverently” describes a ceremonial expression of respect in the western regions of India.

“Praised the Buddha in verse” means that Mahāmati Bodhisattva spoke verses in praise of the Buddha. The verses are as follows:

[The world is free from arising and ceasing, like flowers in empty space. Wisdom cannot apprehend existence or nonexistence, yet it gives rise to great compassion.]

“World” refers to the three periods of time—past, present, and future—that is, time. “Between” refers to the ten directions—east, west, south, north, southeast, northeast, southwest, northwest, above, and below—that is, space. “The world” thus means “time and space,” namely, the universe.

“The world is free from arising and ceasing” means that the universe is apart from arising and ceasing. In other words, the universe is ultimately true emptiness; like seeing flowers when one presses on one’s eyes, it is not truly existent. Originally, there is no arising or ceasing. This is speaking on the broadest scale. Narrowing the scope to the birth and death of sentient beings, it means that birth and death are originally nonexistent.

But why do we always feel that there is arising and ceasing, birth and death? When we see flowers bloom and wither, is that not arising and ceasing? When we see sentient beings emerge and disappear, is that not birth and death? If these are not arising and ceasing or birth and death, then what are they? The next line of the sūtra answers this question: “like flowers in empty space.”

This is an analogy. Empty space originally has no flowers. When one presses on one’s eyes, one’s vision becomes distorted, and one then sees flowers in empty space. That is a false appearance, not reality; in truth, there are no flowers in empty space. This analogy explains that arising and ceasing are illusory appearances of the world, not reality. The reality is that “the world is free from arising and ceasing.”

Even the notions that there is arising and ceasing or that there is no arising and ceasing are distortions. Distortion is consciousness; freedom from distortion is wisdom. To speak of existence or nonexistence is distortion. Wisdom is free from distortion: “existence” is unobtainable, and “nonexistence” is likewise unobtainable. This includes all discriminatory conceptions of dualities such as going and coming, sameness and difference, defilement and purity, increase and decrease. This is “wisdom cannot apprehend existence or nonexistence.”

“Yet it gives rise to great compassion” means that the Buddha, whose wisdom is already complete, gives rise to great compassion, wishing to enable all sentient beings to “open, reveal, awaken to, and enter” the Buddha’s knowledge and vision. These preceding four lines of verse sweep away the view of “arising and ceasing” and elucidate permanence, one of the four virtues of the dharmakāya.

[All dharmas are like illusions, apart from mind and consciousness. Wisdom cannot apprehend existence or nonexistence, yet it gives rise to great compassion.]

“All dharmas are like illusions, apart from mind and consciousness.” “All dharmas are like illusions” means that dharmas such as the world’s arising and ceasing are all like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows and cannot be grasped. “All dharmas” are the object, that which mind-consciousness cognizes. Mind-consciousness is the subject, that which is able to cognize all dharmas.

Dharmas such as arising and ceasing are suffering. Mind-consciousness receives these sufferings, takes suffering to be real, and finds it unbearable. The Buddha gives rise to great compassion and explains to sentient beings that these sufferings —all dharmas—are unreal, like illusions. Not only are all dharmas like illusions; this very mind-consciousness is also unobtainable and cannot be clung to as truly existent. It too must be left behind. To leave suffering behind is bliss. These preceding four lines of verse sweep away the view of “mind and dharmas” and elucidate bliss, one of the four virtues of the dharmakāya.

[Apart from annihilationism and eternalism, the world is ever like a dream. Wisdom cannot apprehend existence or nonexistence, yet it gives rise to great compassion.]

All sentient beings in the world turn their backs on awakening and unite with sense objects. They wander through birth and death, give rise to deluded mind-consciousness, and further conceive the two views of annihilationism and eternalism. The world’s annihilationist view arises from mistaking the physical body for “self.” The physical body decays, and so this “self” is annihilated. This is the world’s annihilationist view.

The world’s eternalist view arises from mistaking the eighth consciousness for “self.” Although the physical body decays, the eighth consciousness may enter a womb and take another physical body. One supposes that it is “I” who enters the womb and that this “I” is eternal. This is the world’s eternalist view.

In fact, the eighth consciousness is originally without self. It consists only of seeds that undergo karmic retribution in accordance with karma. Not only is the “person” who receives retribution an illusory appearance produced as these seeds manifest according to karma; the “dharmas” received—that is, the environment in which one dwells—are likewise illusory appearances produced as these seeds manifest according to karma. None of these is a true self. This is “no self of persons and no self of dharmas.”

The Buddha observes with wondrous wisdom and understands that views such as annihilationism and eternalism are false like dreams and illusions. Originally there is no self, yet sentient beings take the false for true and mistakenly conceive a self. The

Buddha therefore gives rise to great compassion and vows to liberate sentient beings. He points out that the fundamental Buddha-nature neither ceases nor is identical with the “eternal” imagined by worldly delusion, enabling sentient beings to leave behind the worldly views of annihilationism and eternalism and realize the suchness Buddha-nature—the true self—without beginning or end. These preceding four lines of verse sweep away the world’s views of annihilationism and eternalism and elucidate self, one of the four virtues of the dharmakāya.

[Knowing that persons and dharmas are without self, afflictions and eryan are ever pure and without marks, yet it gives rise to great compassion.]

“Afflictions” means the affliction obscurations, which are obscurations of phenomena. “Eryan” is a transliteration of a Sanskrit term and means “that which is known.” If one becomes attached to what is known, it becomes a knowledge obscuration. Knowledge obscurations are obscurations of principle.

Wisdom is originally what eliminates delusion, and delusion consists of the two attachments to persons and dharmas. When the affliction obscurations are completely eliminated, one realizes the emptiness of persons—no self of persons. When the knowledge obscurations are completely eliminated, one realizes the emptiness of dharmas—no self of dharmas. “No self of persons and dharmas” means that these two attachments are absent. But if attachment arises toward “wisdom,” it again becomes an obstruction.

The Tathāgata knows that personal self, dharma-self, delusion, and wisdom are all unobtainable, while the formless dharmakāya is “ever pure and without marks.” Seeing sentient beings falsely undergo the cycle of suffering amid delusion, he gives rise to compassion and rescues them. These preceding four lines of verse sweep away sentient beings’ false knowledge and false views and elucidate purity, one of the four virtues of the dharmakāya.

The term “eryan” is a transliteration and may mean what is known, what ought to be known, realm, mother of wisdom, object of wisdom, or obstruction to wisdom. In ancient translations of the scriptures, polysemous terms were often not translated but rendered phonetically. If the term “eryan” came into frequent use, it would become a Chinese word. Terms such as “Buddha” and “saṅgha” are likewise transliterations that have already become Chinese vocabulary.

The term “eryan” will appear again later in the sūtra. When it does, we may consider the entire passage together and determine which meaning should be adopted: what is known, what ought to be known, realm, mother of wisdom, object of wisdom, or obstruction to wisdom. Everyone is welcome to consider it together then.

The four preceding four-line verses praise the four virtues of the dharmakāya—permanence, bliss, self, and purity. They praise the dharmakāya, among the Buddha's three bodies—the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya—namely, Vairocana Buddha.

[There is no nirvāṇa in all things; there is no Buddha of nirvāṇa, nor is there a Buddha entering nirvāṇa. Apart from awakening and that which is awakened, existence and nonexistence—both are completely abandoned.]

"All things" includes Buddhas and sentient beings. "Nirvāṇa" is the principle-substance of suchness, which neither arises nor ceases. Its intrinsic nature is originally empty and quiescent, without arising. Since there is no arising, there is no ceasing. Thus there is no need to seek quiescence further; otherwise, one is putting a head on top of one's head. All dharmas, in their very nature, are nirvāṇic quiescence.

Both Buddhas and sentient beings possess this principle-substance of suchness. Originally, there is no birth and death to transcend, so how could there be nirvāṇa to realize? Therefore it is said, "There is no nirvāṇa in all things." That is, Buddhas and sentient beings are originally in nirvāṇa. There is no distinction between "a Buddha in nirvāṇa" and "a Buddha not in nirvāṇa," nor between "a Buddha entering nirvāṇa" and "sentient beings not entering nirvāṇa."

If there were a Buddha who realized nirvāṇa, that Buddha would have a realizing subject and an object realized, and thus could not be called a Buddha. Since a Buddha has already departed from all marks, the Diamond Sūtra says: "To be free from all marks is to be called all Buddhas." When all marks have been left behind, how much more so the marks of realizing subject and realized object. Therefore, one cannot say that there is a Buddha who realizes nirvāṇa. Hence, "there is no Buddha of nirvāṇa, nor is there a Buddha entering nirvāṇa."

"Awakening" means Buddha, and "that which is awakened" means nirvāṇa. Persons and dharmas both fall away; the one who awakens and that which is awakened are both left behind. Therefore it is said, "Apart from awakening and that which is awakened." Yet when persons and dharmas both fall away, only "existence" has been dismantled; "nonexistence" has not yet been dismantled. But "nonexistence" must also be dismantled. Therefore it is said, "Existence and nonexistence—both are completely abandoned."

At this point, the distinctions between Buddhas and sentient beings, between the one who awakens and that which is awakened, and between existence and nonexistence have all been left behind. What state of mind is this? Put simply, it is "the non-discriminating light of mind in a single thought."

Chan Master Linji said: “If you wish to be no different from the Buddhas and patriarchs, simply do not seek outside yourselves. The pure light in your mind in a single thought is the dharmakāya Buddha within your own house; the non-discriminating light in your mind in a single thought is the sambhogakāya Buddha within your own house; and the non-differentiating light in your mind in a single thought is the nirmāṇakāya Buddha within your own house.”

These six lines of verse speak precisely of “the non-discriminating light of mind in a single thought.” They praise the sambhogakāya, among the Buddha’s three bodies—the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya—namely, Locana Buddha.

[The Muni’s quiescent contemplation is thus apart from arising. This is called non-grasping; the present life and future lives are pure.]

“Muni” is a transliteration of a Sanskrit term. It can mean quiescent silence, benevolence, civilization, holiness, or preciousness, and it is a name of the Buddha. Here the praise reaches the nirmāṇakāya among the Buddha’s three bodies—the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya—namely, Śākyamuni Buddha.

“Tranquil Contemplation”: “tranquil” means that the essence of suchness is thusness, unmoving; “contemplation” means contemplative awareness. From tranquility arises illumination, and that illumination in turn illumines the tranquil essence. This is “tranquility illumining, illumination illuminating tranquility,” like a jewel emitting light that shines back upon the jewel itself. The Buddha has already transcended all marks of subject and object; therefore, his mind is ultimately tranquil and free of thoughts, without any deliberate mentation, vast and open like empty space. To contemplate all dharmas in this way is pure, effortless practice. The Buddha contemplates all dharmas as ever possessing the mark of tranquil cessation. This is “Muni’s Tranquil Contemplation.”

“Thus one is far removed from birth” means that one thereby becomes removed from birth and death. What undergoes birth and death is the illusory physical body; the essential nature is tranquil, neither arising nor ceasing. That is to say, if one does not grasp at the physical body, or even at a physical body as splendid as that of a transformation-body Buddha, one can realize the essence of suchness, which is unborn and undying. Therefore it is said, “This is called non-grasping; the present life and future lives are pure.” Both the present life and future lives are pure, without distinction. This is the non-differentiating light of mind in a single thought.

[I am named Mahāmati, versed in the Mahāyāna. I now respectfully inquire of the Most Honored One concerning the one hundred and eight meanings.]

After Mahāmati Bodhisattva had praised the Buddha, he stated his own name: “I am named Mahāmati, versed in the Mahāyāna.” Since Mahāmati Bodhisattva had

already mastered the Mahāyāna Buddhadharma, how could he still have one hundred and eight questions that he did not understand? In fact, Mahāmati Bodhisattva was asking on behalf of sentient beings, and on behalf of those with the capacities for the Mahāyāna. “I now respectfully inquire of the Most Honored One concerning the one hundred and eight meanings”: I have one hundred and eight questions to ask the revered Buddha.

[The Knower of the World, having heard those verses, observed all the assembly and said to the Buddha-children: “All of you Buddha-children, now ask whatever you wish. I shall explain to you the realm of self-realization.”]

The Buddha has ten honorific titles: Tathāgata, Worthy of Offerings, Perfectly Enlightened One, Perfect in Knowledge and Conduct, Well-Gone One, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed One, Tamer of Men, Teacher of Gods and Humans, Buddha, and World-Honored One. “Knower of the World” refers to the Knower of the World and Unsurpassed One, one of the Buddha’s ten honorific titles.

“The Knower of the World, having heard those verses, observed all the assembly and said to the Buddha-children”: Having heard the verses spoken by Mahāmati Bodhisattva, the Buddha observed that everyone in the assembly possessed the capacities for the Mahāyāna. He therefore said to them: “All of you Buddha-children, now ask whatever you wish. I shall explain to you the realm of self-realization.” Today you wish to ask me one hundred and eight questions. Through these one hundred and eight questions, I shall explain to you the realm of my own realization.

Because these one hundred and eight questions all concern dharmas personally realized by the Tathāgata, they are called “the realm of self-realization.”

Having received the Buddha’s permission, Mahāmati Bodhisattva began to ask his questions.

Main Section

I. General Explanation in Eight Hundred Sentences

I. One Hundred and Eight Questions

[At that time, the Mahāsattva Bodhisattva Mahāmati, having received the Buddha’s permission, bowed at the Buddha’s feet. With palms joined reverently, he asked in

verse:]

“Having received the Buddha’s permission” means that he had been granted the Buddha’s approval. Mahāmati Bodhisattva then respectfully presented 108 questions in verse.

The 108 questions are now divided into nine sections, with twelve questions in each section.

Section One: How Is the Mind Stilled?

001. [How are one’s thoughts purified?] How can deluded thoughts be eliminated and right mindfulness arise?

002. [How does mindfulness increase?] How can right mindfulness be increased?

003. [How are delusion and confusion perceived?] The preceding questions concerned right and wrong thoughts; this one concerns right and wrong views, wisdom and ignorance, understanding and delusion.

004. [How does delusion increase?] How can wrong views, ignorance, and delusion be eliminated? How can right view, wisdom, and understanding increase?

005. [Why does he manifest forms in Buddha lands, and [teach] appearances and the various non-Buddhist paths?] Why does the Tathāgata manifest bodily forms in Buddha lands, teaching sentient beings and the many followers of non-Buddhist paths? “Buddha-Dharma is within the world; awakening is not apart from the world.”

006. [How is there no reception?] What is meant by “no reception”?

007. [Why is it called no reception?] Why is it called “no reception”?

008. [Why are they called Buddha’s children?] Why are bodhisattvas called “Buddha’s children”?

009. [Where does liberation lead?] After practitioners attain liberation, where do they go?

010. [Who is bound, and who is liberated?] In delusion, who is bound? In awakening, who is liberated?

011. [What are the states of dhyāna?] What states of meditative absorption are there?

012. [Why are there three vehicles? I earnestly beseech you to explain.] Why are there the three vehicles of the śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas? We

respectfully ask you to explain.

Section Two: How Is Meditative Stability Cultivated?

013. [From where does dependent arising arise, and how are deeds performed?] How do wholesome and unwholesome causes and conditions arise? Who creates karma, and what is the karma that is created?

014. [How are there teachings of sameness and difference?] What other teachings concerning the foregoing doctrine of dependent arising are the same, and what are different?

015. [How do they increase?] Why do those teachings of sameness and difference proliferate?

016. [What are the formless absorptions, cessation attainment, and the cessation of perception?] This asks about the nine successive absorptions: the four dhyānas of the form realm, the four formless attainments, and the attainment of the cessation of feeling and perception.

017. [For what reason does one arise from meditative stability?] What is the reason that awareness arises again after meditative stability?

018. [How do what is done arise, entering and leaving, and sustaining the body?] Here, “what is done” refers to the meditative stability just discussed. “Entering and leaving” means entering meditative stability and emerging from it. The question asks: Why do various wondrous phenomena arise through cultivating meditation—for example, entering and emerging from meditative stability, and maintaining the body motionless for a long time?

019. [How do manifest discriminations arise?] Why does a discriminating mind arise? Or how does the discriminating mind manifest?

020. [How do the various planes arise?] The various planes refer to the nine planes of the three realms. How do the many kinds of bodies in these nine planes arise?

021. [Who destroys the three modes of existence? Where is the body, and what is it like?] Who can eliminate the three modes of existence—existence in the desire, form, and formless realms—and leave the three realms of desire, form, and formlessness? After leaving them, where is one’s body, and what constitutes that body?

022. [Where does rebirth lead?] After destroying the three modes of existence, where is one reborn?

023. [How does the supreme child attain spiritual powers and samādhi mastery?] Some practitioners attain the five spiritual powers, while others attain samādhi mastery. What is the reason for this? Which of these two kinds of practitioners is supreme?

024. [What is the mind of samādhi? Please explain what is supreme for me.] What is the mind of samādhi? Is the mind of samādhi the most supreme? Please explain it for us.

Section Three: What Are the Characteristics of Mind?

025. [What is called the store?] What is the store consciousness?

026. [What are mind and consciousness?] What is mind? What is consciousness?

027. [How do arising and ceasing occur?] How do the various consciousnesses arise and cease?

028. [How does manifestation return?] In ancient usage, “seeing” and “manifestation” were interchangeable; “manifestation” refers to the present course of birth and death. This asks: How does one transcend birth and death? How does one realize cessation and return? (Cessation and return means nirvāṇa.)

029. [What are spiritual capacities, lack of spiritual capacity, and mind-capacity?] What are the spiritual capacities of the three vehicles, the lack of spiritual capacity of non-Buddhist paths, indeterminate spiritual capacity, and mind-capacity?

030. [How are characteristics established, and what is meant by non-self?] How are bodily characteristics established? What does it mean to mistake what is not self for self?

031. [How are there no sentient beings?] Why is it said that, in reality, there are no sentient beings who attain liberation?

032. [How is it spoken of conventionally?] With regard to “no sentient beings,” how is this explained in conventional terms?

033. [How do annihilationism and eternalism not arise?] How can the two views of annihilationism and eternalism be prevented from arising?

034. [How are the Buddha and non-Buddhist paths not at variance in their characteristics?] “All dharmas are Buddha-Dharma.” Why can Buddha-Dharma encompass non-Buddhist paths?

035. [How will the various different schools arise in the future?] Why did the Buddha’s disciples establish so many schools after the Buddha’s parinirvāṇa?

036. [What is emptiness, and for what reason?] What does it mean to say that all phenomena are empty? Why is it said that all phenomena are empty?

Section Four: How Is Consciousness Transformed?

037. [How does each instant perish?] Why does every instant perish, thought after thought?

038. [How does birth from the womb-store occur?] Why does one enter a womb and take birth?

039. [How is the world unmoving?] Why is the ceaseless flux of worldly appearances said to be suchness, unmoving?

040. [For what reason are they like illusion and dreams, a city of gandharvas, heat haze in the world, and the moon's reflection in water?] Illusion, dreams, a city of gandharvas (a mirage), heat haze, and the moon in water are five metaphors for unreality. Why is the ceaseless flux of worldly appearances unreal?

041. [For what reason are the factors of awakening and the factors of bodhi taught?] Why are dharmas such as the seven factors of awakening taught? (The seven factors of awakening are also called the seven factors of bodhi: investigation of dharmas, diligence, joy, ease, equanimity, meditative stability, and mindfulness.)

042. [How does disorder arise in lands?] Why do the lands upon which beings depend arise and perish in disorder?

043. [How does the view of existence arise?] "Existence" refers to the three modes of existence: existence in the desire, form, and formless realms. Why does the view of these three modes of existence arise?

044. [How are there neither arising nor ceasing, while the world is like flowers in empty space?] Why are worldly appearances said to be insubstantial, like flowers in empty space? Why are they also said to be neither arising nor ceasing?

045. [How does one awaken to the world?] How does one awaken through worldly dharmas?

046. [Why speak of the word "leaving"?] Why is "leaving" or "departure" spoken of?

047. [Who departs from deluded thoughts?] Who is it that leaves behind deluded thoughts?

048. [Why use the metaphor of empty space?] Why is empty space used as a metaphor?

Section Five: How Is Wisdom Accomplished?

049. [How many kinds of suchness are there?] This asks how many kinds of suchness there are.

050. [How many pāramitā minds are there?] This asks about the six perfections: generosity, moral discipline, forbearance, diligence, meditative stability, and prajñā.

051. [For what reason does one transcend the various bhūmis, and who reaches non-reception?] How can one transcend the ten bhūmis and reach the Buddha-bhūmi? Who can reach the Buddha's state of "non-reception"?

052. [What are the two kinds of non-self?] What are the "two kinds of non-self"?

053. [How is the obstruction of knowledge purified?] How can the obstruction of knowledge be completely eliminated?

054. [How many kinds of wisdom are there?] How many kinds of wisdom are there?

055. [How many precepts accord with the nature of sentient beings?] How many kinds of precepts should sentient beings uphold?

056. [Who produces the various precious substances, such as maṇi and pearls?] How do the many precious things, such as maṇi jewels and pearls, arise?

057. [Who produces the various languages and the diverse natures of sentient beings?] How do the diverse differences among sentient beings' languages arise?

058. [Who has revealed the fields of knowledge and the arts?] Who devised disciplines such as the five fields of knowledge? The five fields are inner knowledge (Buddha-Dharma) and four forms of outer knowledge: logic, phonetics and music, medicine, and crafts and natural sciences.

059. [How Many Kinds of Gāthā Are There—Long Verses and Short Lines?] Gāthā refers to the "independently arising" verses mentioned earlier; there are also long verses and short lines. These are all forms of poetry. How many kinds of poetry are there?

060. [How Many Kinds of Accomplishment Are There, and Why Are They Called Treatises?] To accomplish what one undertakes is to form a systematic theory. How many kinds of such theories are there? Why are these theories called "treatises"?

Section Six: What Is the World?

061. [How Do the Desires for Food and for the Various Sensual Pleasures Arise?] Why does the desire to eat arise? Why do the many desires of love and sensual

pleasure arise?

062. [What Is Called a King, a Wheel-Turning King, and a Lesser King, and How Do They Protect Their Countries?] What are kings, wheel-turning kings, and lesser kings? How do they protect their lands?

063. [How Many Kinds of Heavens Are There, and Why Are They Called Grounds?] How many levels of heaven are there? Why are they named “grounds”?

064. [Constellations, the Sun, and the Moon] What are the constellations? What are the sun and moon?

065. [How Many Kinds of Practitioners of Liberation Are There?] How many kinds of people practice the path of liberation?

066. [How Many Kinds of Disciples Are There?] How many kinds of students are there?

067. [What Is an Ācārya?] How many kinds of teachers are there?

068. [How Many Kinds of Buddhas Are There?] How many kinds of Buddhas are there?

069. [How Many Kinds of Sentient Beings Are There?] How many kinds of sentient beings are there?

070. [Māras and the Various Non-Buddhist Teachers: How Many Kinds Are There?] Among the various māras and non-Buddhist paths, how many kinds of practices does each have?

071. [How Many Kinds of Intrinsic Nature and Mind Are There?] Among such designations as intrinsic nature and mind, how many kinds are there?

072. [How Is Mind-Capacity Established? May the Supreme One Explain.] How can one's mind-capacity become vast? May the Buddha, supreme in mind-capacity, explain this for us.

Section Seven: How Are Distinctions Made?

073. [What Are Empty Space, Wind, and Clouds?] What are empty space, wind, and clouds?

074. [How Do Thought and Intelligence Arise?] Why do sentient beings' thoughts possess intelligence and ability?

075. [What Are Forests and Trees, and What Are Vines and Grasses?] Why are there forests, trees, vines, and weeds?

076. [What Are Elephants, Horses, and Deer, and Why Are They Captured?] Why are there animals such as elephants, horses, and deer? Why are they captured and killed?

077. [What Are Lowliness and Ugliness, and What Causes Them?] What is lowliness? What is ugliness? What causes people to be lowly and ugly?

078. [Why Are There Six Seasons?] Why is the year divided into six seasons? (In the western regions, two months constitute one season.)

079. [What Is an Icchantika?] Why are there icchantikas?

080. [How Do Men, Women, and Those Who Are Neither Male nor Female Come into Being?] In the world there are men, women, and those who are neither male nor female. How do all these come into being?

081. [Why Does Practice Regress, and Why Does the Resolve to Practice Arise?] Why does the resolve to practice regress and decline? Why does the resolve to practice arise in people?

082. [By What Dharma Does a Chan Master Guide People, and What Kinds of People Can It Enable to Realize the Way?] What methods does a Chan Master use to instruct people? What kinds of people can they enable to realize the Way?

083. [When Sentient Beings Are Born into the Various Destinies, What Forms and Types Do They Take?] What forms and categories characterize sentient beings in the cycle of rebirth through the six realms?

084. [What Is Wealth, and What Causes One to Obtain It?] What is wealth? How does one obtain wealth?

Section Eight: How Is Attainment Accomplished?

085. [What Is the Śākya Clan, What Causes There to Be a Śākya Clan, and What Is the Sugarcane Clan? May the Supreme One Explain.] How was the lineage of the Śākya clan transmitted? What is the sugarcane clan?

086. [What Is a Long-Lived Ascetic Sage, and from Whom Does He Receive Instruction?] From whom do ascetic sages seeking longevity receive instruction?

087. [How Does the Tathāgata Manifest in Every Time and Land, in Various Forms, Surrounded by the Supreme One's Children?] The Buddha manifests in forms suited

to different kinds of beings at all times and in all places. Though these bodies differ in many ways, each is surrounded by an assembly. Why is this so?

088. [Why Does One Not Eat Meat, Why Is Meat-Eating Prohibited, What Kinds of Beings Eat Meat, and Why Do They Eat It?] Why should one not eat meat? Why were precepts prohibiting meat-eating established? What causes those kinds of beings that eat meat to do so?

089. [Why Do the Sun and Moon, Mount Sumeru, Lotuses, Lion-Superior Lands, Sideways Lands, Overturned Lands, Worlds Like Indra's Net, or Worlds Entirely Adorned with Precious Treasures, Lutes, Hourglass Drums, and Various Flowers, or Worlds Without the Light of Sun and Moon, Exist in Such Countless Forms?] “Sumeru” means “Wonderfully High Mountain.”

The lion world is the most excellent among worlds. There are also sideways worlds, overturned worlds, upright worlds, horizontal worlds, and others. “Lotus” refers to the Lotus Treasury World. “Indra's Net” is the celestial emperor's precious net, which has a thousand jewels. Among these many kinds of worlds, some are surrounded by the sun and moon, while others have no sun or moon; some are shaped like lutes, some like hourglass drums, and some like flowers. These worlds are like Indra's Net: the light of the jewels reflects one upon another in endless layers. What causes this?

090. [What Is a Transformation Buddha?] What is a nirmāṇakāya Buddha? (A nirmāṇakāya Buddha is also called a responsive manifestation body. Countless transformation bodies are forms assumed in response to different sentient beings.)

091. [What Is a Buddha Born of Recompense?] What is a Buddha born of recompense? (Such a Buddha is also called an other-enjoyment body. In accordance with a person's affinities, it is seen by that person.)

092. [What Is a Suchness Buddha?] What is a Suchness Buddha? (A Suchness Buddha is a dharmakāya Buddha: thusness is unmoving, neither one nor different.)

093. [What Is a Wisdom Buddha?] What is a Wisdom Buddha? (A Wisdom Buddha is also called a self-enjoyment body. Through cultivating the cause oneself, one realizes the result; the wisdom of initial awakening accords with original awakening.)

094. [Why Is Perfect Awakening Not Attained in the Desire Realm, but Bodhi Attained Free of Desire in the Highest Form Heaven?] This refers to the sambhogakāya Buddha Vairocana. Why does he not attain Buddhahood in the desire realm, but attain Buddhahood in the Highest Form Heaven?

095. [When the Sugata Enters Parinirvāṇa, Who Will Uphold the True Dharma?] After the Buddha's passing, who will transmit and uphold the Buddha's true Dharma?

096. [How Long Does the Teacher of Humans and Devas Remain, and How Long Does the True Dharma Remain?] How long does the Buddha remain in the world? After the Buddha's passing, how long does the true Dharma remain in the world? (“Teacher of Humans and Devas” is one of the Buddha's honorific titles.)

Section Nine: How Are Sentient Beings Liberated?

097. [How Many Kinds of Siddhānta and Views Are There?] How many kinds of siddhānta and views are there? (“Siddhānta” means “universal giving.” There are four kinds of siddhānta: first, worldly siddhānta. Here, “worldly” means the boundaries of time, with “time” referring to temporal sequence. Worldly siddhānta thus means “order and sequence.”

By teaching and hearing the Dharma in proper sequence, one gains the benefit of joy. Second, remedial siddhānta means that through hearing the Dharma and practicing, one counteracts and removes past obstacles and gains the benefit of eliminating evil. Third, siddhānta for individuals means that, through hearing the Dharma, one gains the benefit of giving rise to goodness. Fourth, siddhānta of the highest meaning means that, through hearing the Dharma, one gains the benefit of awakening to principle.)

098. [What Is the Discipline for Bhikshus, and for What Reasons Is It Established?] “Vinaya” means monastic discipline. Why are disciplinary precepts established? Why must bhikshus uphold the precepts?

099. [Why Do Those Supreme Children, Pratyekabuddhas, and Śrāvakas Undergo Transformational Birth and Death, and Why Do They Not Receive Further Existence?] Why have the two vehicles of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas not yet ended transformational birth and death? Why do they not receive further existence? (“Not receiving further existence” means entering nirvāṇa without remainder and not receiving another existence.)

100. [What Are Worldly Supernormal Powers?] What are the five worldly supernormal powers?

101. [What Is the Supramundane?] What is the sixth supramundane supernormal power?

102. [What Is the Seventh Bhūmi? May You Explain It.] Please explain to us what the seventh bhūmi is.

103. [How Many Kinds of Saṅgha Are There?] How many types of saṅgha are there?

104. [What Is a Monastic Who Has Broken the Precepts?] What are monastics who have broken the precepts?

105. [What Are Medical Treatises, and for What Reasons Are They Taught?] For whom are medical treatises and other such treatises taught?

106. [Why Did the Great Sage Declare Such Words: “Kāśyapa, Krakucchanda, and Kanakamuni Are Me”?] You are Śākyamuni Buddha. Why do you say that the past Buddhas Kāśyapa, Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and others are all you?

107. [Why Teach Annihilation and Eternalism, Self and No-Self, Rather Than at All Times Expounding the True Meaning, and Why Teach Differently According to Sentient Beings' Mind-Capacities?] Why do you sometimes also teach such dharmas as “annihilation and eternalism” and “self and no-self”? Why not expound the true meaning at all times? Why do you teach various expedient methods in accordance with sentient beings' mind-capacities?

108. [What Causes the Forest of Men and Women, Harītakī, Āmalaka, Kīra, Iron-Enclosure Mountains, Vajra Mountains, and Other Mountains Adorned with Countless Treasures and Filled with Gandharvas?] The Forest of Men and Women, harītakī, āmalaka, and kīra are names of trees, flowers, and fruits. Iron-Enclosure and Vajra are names of mountains. Within the many jeweled mountains, including Iron-Enclosure and Vajra Mountains, are abundant precious adornments, filled with sages and celestial musicians. Why is this so? (Gandharvas are the celestial emperor's musician deities.)

II. The One Hundred and Eight Responses

[The Unsurpassed Knower of the World heard the verse he had spoken.]

“The Unsurpassed Knower of the World” means the Buddha. “Heard the verse he had spoken” means that the Buddha heard the verses in which Mahāmati Bodhisattva posed the 108 questions.

[Among the Mahāyāna gateways of liberation, the mind of the Buddhas is foremost.]

Before posing the 108 questions, Mahāmati Bodhisattva said, “My name is Mahāmati; I am well versed in the Mahāyāna. I now respectfully ask the Supreme One about these 108 meanings.” Thus, these 108 questions concern Mahāyāna teachings.

“Among the Mahāyāna gateways of liberation, the mind of the Buddhas is foremost” means that, among the many Mahāyāna Dharma gates for liberating sentient beings, the mind Dharma of the Buddhas is the supreme gate. The mind Dharma is subtle and wondrous: it is not identical with language, yet it is not apart from language. In answering these 108 questions, Śākyamuni Buddha will directly accord with the source of mind. This is the “supreme Dharma gate of the subtle and

wondrous mind of the Buddhas in the Mahāyāna.” Perhaps this is also why Patriarch Bodhidharma entrusted the Second Patriarch, Huike, with the four fascicles of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra to seal his mind.

[Excellent, excellent question! Mahāmati, listen carefully. I shall now answer in sequence, according to what you have asked.]

“Shan” means “good,” and “shanzai” means “excellent!” The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “Excellent! Excellent! Your questions are very good. Listen carefully. I shall now answer each of your questions in order.”

“In sequence” means according to an order. Although we have divided the preceding 108 questions into nine sections of twelve questions each, the wording still seems disconnected from the subject at hand. As stated earlier, Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked on behalf of sentient beings, whose minds are disordered. The Buddha's answers must therefore put them in order. Thus, the order in which the Buddha answers does not begin with the first question, “How can one purify one's thoughts?” Rather, his answers are organized by summary, gathering together questions of similar meaning.

001. [Arising and non-arising; nirvāṇa, emptiness, moments; the destinies, and lack of self-nature.] This answers Mahāmati Bodhisattva's questions concerning arising and ceasing, non-arising and non-ceasing, nirvāṇa, empty space, moments, time, the six destinies, and so forth, as listed below:

Concerning arising and ceasing: “027. How do arising and ceasing occur?” and “043. How does one form the view of existence?”

Concerning non-arising and non-ceasing: “044. How can there be neither arising nor ceasing, while the world is like flowers in empty space?”

Concerning nirvāṇa: “095. When the Sugata enters parinirvāṇa, who will uphold the True Dharma?” and “096. How long will the Teacher of devas abide, and how long will the True Dharma remain?”

Concerning empty space: “048. How is empty space used as an analogy?” and “073. What are empty space, wind, and clouds?”

Concerning moments and time: “037. How do moments perish?” and “078. How are the six divisions encompassed?”

Concerning the six destinies: “083. When sentient beings are born into the various destinies, what forms and appearances do they have?”

In answering such questions, the Buddha uses only three words: “without self-nature.” All these are unreal. Like someone with an eye disorder who sees flowers in empty space, they have no self-nature to be found.

002. [The Buddha's various pāramitās; sons of the Buddha and śrāvakas; pratyekabuddhas and the various non-Buddhist paths; and the practices of the formless realm—such are these various matters.] This answers Mahāmati Bodhisattva's questions concerning pāramitās, sons of the Buddha, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, the various non-Buddhist paths, and such practices as the practices of the formless realm, as listed below:

Concerning the Buddha and Buddhadharma: “087. How does the Tathāgata appear in all times and lands, surrounded by the most excellent disciples of various names and forms?” and “035. In future ages, how will the various different schools arise?”

Concerning the pāramitās: “049. How many kinds of reality are there?” and “050. How many pāramitās are there in mind?”

Concerning sons of the Buddha, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas: “008. Why are they called sons of the Buddha?” “045. How does one awaken to the world?” “046. How is separation from letters taught?” “047. Who is free from deluded thoughts?” and “101. How does one transcend the world?”

Concerning the various non-Buddhist paths: “034. How can the characteristics of the Buddha and non-Buddhist paths be mutually noncontradictory?”

Concerning practices of the formless realm: “016. What are formless samādhi and cessation absorption?”

The Buddha answers all these various matters with only two words: “just so.” That is, they are dharmas naturally thus; they are originally so. To open the Buddha's wisdom, leave behind deluded thoughts, awaken to the world, and transcend saṃsāra are the proper tasks of a son of the Buddha.

The Tathāgata appears throughout all times and lands, with the most outstanding practitioners gathered around the Buddha. Even after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, the Buddha's disciples establish many schools. All these are wondrous functions arising from “the Buddha's various pāramitās”—the many great wisdoms of Buddhadharma. As for those who cultivate formless samādhi and take meditative states to be nirvāṇa, they naturally belong to the various non-Buddhist paths because their views are not correct.

003. [Mount Sumeru, the great ocean, mountains, continents and islets, lands and Buddha-fields.] This responds to “039. How is the world unmoving?” and “042. How are lands in disorder?”

004. [The constellations, sun, and moon.] This responds to “064. The constellations, sun, and moon.”

The preceding two answers respond to Mahāmati Bodhisattva's questions concerning the names and characteristics of insentient things. Why do the lands on which beings depend arise and perish in disorder? Why is the flux of worldly appearances said to be suchness, unmoving? The Buddha's answer is: “Mount Sumeru, the great ocean, mountains, continents and islets, lands and Buddha-fields.” At the outset, when Mahāmati Bodhisattva praised the Buddha in verse, he said, “The world is free from arising and ceasing, like flowers in empty space.”

“Wisdom does not grasp existence or nonexistence, yet gives rise to great compassion.” “The world is free from arising and ceasing” means that “the world is unmoving,” while “like flowers in empty space” refers to the disorderly arising and ceasing of the lands on which beings depend. Mahāmati Bodhisattva already understood this meaning. The Buddha's answer in fact extends from “continents and islets, lands and Buddha-fields” to “Mount Sumeru, the great ocean, mountains,” and further to “the constellations, sun, and moon.”

“Continents and islets, lands and Buddha-fields” may be understood as planets. “Mount Sumeru, the great ocean, mountains” refers to Mount Sumeru and the fragrant-water ocean. Mount Sumeru may be understood as a gravitational field, while the fragrant-water ocean may correspond to what modern astronomy calls “ether,” namely the boundless expanse of cosmic space.

In “the constellations, sun, and moon,” “sun” may correspond to what astronomy calls fixed stars, and “moon” to what it calls planets. The Buddha's answer moves from “lands” to “constellations,” revealing a vast world. All these are “like flowers in empty space” and are “free from arising and ceasing.”

005. [Non-Buddhist paths, devas, and asuras.] This responds to “063. How many kinds of devas are there, and why are they called grounds?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, “How many levels of heavens are there, and why are they called ‘grounds’?” Here, “grounds” refers to the nine grounds of the three realms. The three realms are the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm. The heavens of the desire realm have six levels. From lowest to highest, they are the Heaven of the Four Great Kings, Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, Yāma Heaven, Tuṣita Heaven, Nirmāṇarati Heaven, and Paranirmitavaśavartin Heaven.

The heavens of the form realm have eighteen levels: three in the first dhyāna, three in the second dhyāna, three in the third dhyāna, and nine in the fourth dhyāna. The heavens of the formless realm have four levels: the Sphere of Infinite Space, the

Sphere of Infinite Consciousness, the Sphere of Nothingness, and the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception. The nine grounds are listed below:

One ground of the desire realm: the ground of mixed dwelling of the five destinies.

Four grounds of the form realm: first dhyāna, the ground of joy and bliss born of separation.

Second dhyāna: the ground of joy and bliss born of samādhi.

Third dhyāna: the ground of wondrous bliss free from joy.

Fourth dhyāna: the ground of purity through equanimity and mindfulness.

Four grounds of the formless realm: the ground of the Sphere of Infinite Space.

The ground of the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness.

The ground of the Sphere of Nothingness.

The ground of the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception.

The three realms and nine grounds are broad classifications. On a narrower scale, there are many more names, such as the heavens of non-Buddhist paths and asura heavens.

006. [Liberation, mastery, supernormal powers, strength, dhyāna, and samādhi.] This responds to “023. How do the most excellent disciples obtain spiritual powers and samādhi of mastery?”

“Samādhi of mastery,” also called “samādhi of freedom,” means freedom from the bondage of afflictions and the attainment of a state of ease and freedom. It is not one of the five spiritual powers. From the perspective of spiritual powers, it is called the power of the exhaustion of outflows, or the power of mastery.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks why some practitioners obtain the five spiritual powers of the divine eye, divine ear, spiritual travel, knowledge of former lives, and knowledge of others' minds, while others attain samādhi of mastery. Which of the two is most excellent?

The Buddha answers, “Liberation, mastery, supernormal powers, strength, dhyāna, and samādhi.” Those who seek liberation can attain samādhi of mastery—naturally this is the most excellent, and so it is mentioned first. Those who diligently cultivate dhyāna and samādhi may attain the five spiritual powers. Samādhi is samādhi; it is one-pointedness of mind.

By cultivating dhyāna and samādhi until one-pointedness of mind is attained, the five spiritual powers may appear. Yet both the human and deva vehicle and the path of liberation cultivate dhyāna and samādhi. Therefore, dhyāna and samādhi are called a teaching shared by the five vehicles: the human vehicle, deva vehicle, śrāvaka vehicle, pratyekabuddha vehicle, and bodhisattva vehicle all cultivate dhyāna and samādhi.

The Compendium of Abhidhamma states: “When the mind is concentrated on its object and one has practiced at an inferior level, one then realizes supernormal dhyāna with respect to such objects as material form, in their respective order. As for supernormal powers, a verse says: ‘Psychic transformation, the divine ear, knowledge of others' minds, former lives, and the divine eye—these are called the five kinds.’”

007. [Cessation and the bases of miraculous power.] This responds to “006. How is there no subsequent receiving?” “007. Why is it called non-receiving?” and “051. By what cause does one cross the various grounds, and who reaches non-receiving?”

Cessation is quiescent extinction; it is the “absence of feeling,” also called “nirvāṇa.” Quiescent extinction is closely related to the “bases of spiritual power,” as well as to the “factors of awakening” and “path factors” discussed below. The thirty-seven factors conducive to awakening are the cause; quiescent extinction is the fruition.

008. [Factors of Awakening and Path Factors] In response to “041. Why are the factors of awakening and the factors of bodhi taught?”

Bodhi means awakening, and the “seven factors of bodhi” are the “seven factors of awakening.” Why are the “seven factors of awakening” and the other “thirty-seven factors conducive to awakening” taught? They are taught in order to realize quiescent extinction. The “path” in “path factors” has the sense of “being able to lead through,” for it can lead to nirvāṇa; “factors” has the sense of categories or kinds. By cultivating according to these thirty-seven methods of practice, one may realize nirvāṇa. The thirty-seven factors conducive to awakening are listed below:

(I) The four foundations of mindfulness, also called the four establishments of mindfulness:

(1) Mindfulness of the body: contemplate the body as impure. That is, contemplate this physical body as profoundly impure.

(2) Mindfulness of feelings: contemplate feelings as suffering. Contemplate all feelings, whether painful, pleasant, or otherwise, as suffering.

(3) Mindfulness of mind: contemplate the mind as impermanent. Contemplate this conscious mind as arising and ceasing with every thought, without any enduring

nature.

(4) Mindfulness of dharmas: contemplate dharmas as without self. Contemplate all worldly dharmas as arising from causes and conditions, without any autonomous and independent “self.”

(II) The four right efforts, also called the four right abandonments:

(1) Cause evil that has already arisen to cease forever. This means that, if any evil dharma has already arisen, one should diligently cause it to be eradicated forever.

(2) Prevent unarisen evil from arising. This means that, when any evil dharma has not yet arisen, one should diligently restrain it so that it never begins to arise.

(3) Cause unarisen wholesome dharmas to arise. This means that, when any wholesome dharma has not yet arisen, one should diligently cause it to arise.

(4) Cause wholesome dharmas that have already arisen to increase. This means that, if any wholesome dharma has already arisen, one should diligently cultivate it with one-pointed mind and cause it to increase.

(III) The four bases of spiritual power, also called the four spiritual powers. This means that the dharma one cultivates is brought to fulfillment as one wishes.

(1) The base of spiritual power of desire: ardently aspire for the dharma one cultivates to be fulfilled as one wishes.

(2) The base of spiritual power of diligence: focus single-mindedly on the dharma one cultivates, without interruption or admixture, so that it may be fulfilled as one wishes.

(3) The base of spiritual power of mindfulness: retain the dharma one cultivates in memory without forgetting it, so that it may be fulfilled as one wishes.

(4) The base of spiritual power of contemplation: keep the dharma one cultivates in mind and do not let it be forgotten, so that it may be fulfilled as one wishes.

(IV) The five faculties. “Faculty” has the sense of that which can give rise to something. These five faculties can give rise to all wholesome dharmas.

(1) The faculty of faith: by firmly believing in the true path and the dharmas that assist the path, one can give rise to all undefiled dhyānas and liberation.

(2) The faculty of diligence: cultivate the true Dharma without interruption or admixture.

(3) The faculty of mindfulness: cultivate the true Dharma, retaining it in memory without forgetting it.

(4) The faculty of samādhi: gather the mind without allowing it to scatter, abiding in one-pointed meditative stillness.

(5) The faculty of wisdom: clearly contemplate and discern all dharmas.

(V) The five powers. “Power” means efficacy; it can overcome evil and accomplish good.

(1) The power of faith: when the faculty of faith increases, it overcomes all doubts and delusions.

(2) The power of diligence: when the faculty of diligence increases, it overcomes the body’s and mind’s laziness and accomplishes supramundane matters.

(3) The power of mindfulness: when the faculty of mindfulness increases, it overcomes all wrong thoughts and fulfills the merit and virtue of supramundane right mindfulness.

(4) The power of samādhi: when the faculty of samādhi increases, it overcomes all confused thoughts and gives rise to the various dhyānas.

(5) The power of wisdom: when the faculty of wisdom increases, it restrains the delusions of views and thought in the three realms and accomplishes supramundane matters. (Simply put, discrimination is the delusion of views, while craving and attachment are the delusion of thought.)

(VI) The seven factors of awakening, also called the seven awakening factors or the seven mental factors of awakening. Awakening means awakening and understanding; factor means branch. This means that each of these seven aspects has its own particular scope.

(1) The awakening factor of investigation of dharmas: it can distinguish the true from the false among all dharmas.

(2) The awakening factor of diligence: cultivate all path dharmas without interruption or admixture.

(3) The awakening factor of joy: upon realizing the true Dharma, the mind becomes joyful.

(4) The awakening factor of removal: it can eliminate the afflictions of all views.

(5) The awakening factor of equanimity: it can relinquish the objects to which one clings through what one sees and thinks.

(6) The awakening factor of samādhi: it can awaken to and understand the dhyānas that arise.

(7) The awakening factor of mindfulness: it can contemplate the path dharmas one cultivates.

(VII) The Noble Eightfold Path, also called the eight noble paths or the eight truths of the path. “Right” means not deviant; “path” means that which can lead through.

(1) Right view: the ability to see the truth.

(2) Right thought: the mind is free from wrong thoughts.

(3) Right speech: one’s words are free from falsehood.

(4) Right action: abide in pure wholesome karma.

(5) Right livelihood: sustain one’s life by seeking alms in accordance with the Dharma.

(6) Right diligence: cultivate all practices of the path without interruption or admixture.

(7) Right mindfulness: the ability to recollect wholesome dharmas with focused attention.

(8) Right samādhi: body and mind are tranquil, abiding in the principle of true emptiness.

009. [The Immeasurable Variety of Dhyānas] In response to “011. What kinds of states of dhyāna are there?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: What states of dhyāna are there? The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that there are immeasurably many kinds of greater and lesser dhyānas, both worldly and supramundane. Even so, none of these states should be grasped. In Answer 65 below, the Buddha removes the mind that grasps at states of dhyāna.

010. [The Coming and Going of the Bodies of the Aggregates] In response to “020. How do the various stages arise?”

The body of the aggregates is the body subject to birth and death in the cycle of rebirth through the six realms; the bodies of the aggregates are the many kinds of

bodies subject to birth and death. Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: How do the many kinds of bodies composed of the five aggregates in the three realms and nine grounds arise? The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “The bodies of the aggregates come and go.” Coming and going means rebirth in the cycle of saṃsāra. The many bodies of the aggregates in the three realms and nine grounds are all products of the cycle of cause and effect. Where there is birth, there is death; thus they emerge and sink, coming and going through the six realms. All are impermanent!

011. [The Samādhi of Cessation of Perception and Feeling] In response to “018. How do arising activity, entering and departing, and sustaining the body occur?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: When one cultivates dhyāna, phenomena such as entering samādhi, emerging from samādhi, and sustaining the body without movement occur. Why is this so?

The Buddha replied: “The samādhi of cessation of perception and feeling.” Right absorption is samādhi, also called sanmoti or sanmodi; it means being free from all deviant distraction and gathering the mind without allowing it to scatter. Phenomena such as entering samādhi, emerging from samādhi, and sustaining the body without movement are right absorption produced through cultivating dhyāna.

The samādhi of cessation, also called the samādhi of cessation of feeling and perception, is such that, for one who realizes it, feeling, perception, and mental activity cease; that is, there are no feelings and no thoughts. Yet this is not annihilation. Those who accomplish the samādhi of cessation can not only sustain their bodies without movement, but can also exercise mastery over their bodies. From the perspective of this mastery, “entering and departing” may be explained as follows: relinquishing that body and taking up this one is called “entering”; relinquishing this one and taking up that one is called “departing.” In other words, one may relinquish this physical body and enter another physical body.

012. [Teaching Dharma Through a Mind Arisen from Samādhi] In response to “024. Please explain to me what is supreme in the mind of samādhi.”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked whether the mind of samādhi is supreme. In the preceding answer, the Buddha had just spoken of “the samādhi of cessation of perception and feeling”; by personally realizing this samādhi, one may exercise mastery over one’s body. Yet is this supreme? Clearly it is not; if it were, this present question and answer would not arise.

Then what is supreme? The Buddha replied: “Teaching Dharma through a mind arisen from samādhi.” To arise from samādhi and employ the mind to teach the Dharma is what is supreme; this removes the deluded attachment to the samādhi of

cessation of perception and feeling. Moreover, in Answers 75 and 84 below, the Buddha uses two rhetorical questions to remove “arising” and “samādhi” as well.

013. [Mind, Manas, and Consciousness] In response to “025. What is called the storehouse?” and “026. What are manas and consciousness?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: What is “storehouse consciousness”? What is manas? What is consciousness? The Buddha replied: “Mind, manas, and consciousness.” That which gathers and arises is called mind; that which can give rise to [thought] is called manas; that which discriminates is called consciousness. That which gathers and arises as mind means that when the six sense faculties encounter the six sense objects, a thought of grasping arises, gathering impressions and forming karma. “Mind” refers to the first six consciousnesses; “manas” refers to the seventh consciousness—the mind faculty; and “consciousness” refers to the eighth consciousness—the storehouse consciousness. “Mind, manas, and consciousness” refers to the eight consciousnesses. The answer immediately following discusses the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena, the five dharmas, and the three natures.

014. [The Five Dharmas and No Self] In response to “052. What are the two kinds of no-self?”

What Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked about was the “two kinds of no-self.” In this sentence, the Buddha not only answers the question of the “two kinds of no-self,” but also speaks of the “five dharmas.”

“No self” means the two kinds of no-self: no self of persons and no self of dharmas.

“The dharmas are five” means the five dharmas of name, appearance, deluded thought, right wisdom, and suchness.

015. [The Imagined Nature and Its Objects] In response to “071. How many kinds are there of natures, mind, and so forth?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: How many kinds are there of such terms as natures and mind? In fact, this is a question about the five dharmas, the three natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of no-self.

In the preceding two answers, the Buddha had already discussed the five dharmas, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of non-self. In this sentence, “self-nature” refers to the three self-natures: the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment, the nature of dependence on others, and the nature of absolute reality and perfection.

This sentence sums up the preceding two answers in speaking of “thought and that which is thought.” The five dharmas, the three self-natures, the eight

consciousnesses, and the two kinds of non-self cover an extremely broad range of content, yet the Buddha's answer is very concise: either "thought" or "that which is thought." That is, either the mind that thinks or the things thought of. The vast ocean of doctrines and their systematic expositions, even if they bring about flowers raining down from heaven and golden lotuses springing from the earth, are no more than "thought" or "that which is thought."

016. [And the Two Present Views] Responds to "033. How may annihilationist and eternalist views fail to arise?"

"And with" is a transitional expression that links what precedes with what follows. Above, "the self-nature of thought and that which is thought" means that the five dharmas, the three self-natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of non-self all return to "thought" and "that which is thought." The "and the two present views" spoken of here continues the preceding point: not only do the five dharmas, the three self-natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of non-self all return to "thought" and "that which is thought"; eternalism and annihilationism likewise return to "thought" and "that which is thought," as do the items below, from "017. Vehicles and the various dispositions" through

"031. The various arts and fields of knowledge." They too all return to "thought" and "that which is thought."

017. [Vehicles and the Various Dispositions] Responds to "012. Why are there three vehicles? I pray that you will explain."

The "vehicles" spoken of by the Buddha are the three vehicles about which Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked. The three vehicles are the śrāvaka vehicle, the pratyekabuddha vehicle, and the bodhisattva vehicle. Because practitioners differ in the resolves they arouse, the Buddha teaches the three vehicles according to their capacities; thus, the three-vehicle Buddhadharma exists in the world. This does not depart from "thought" and "that which is thought," because it is conditioned by the arousal of resolve.

018. [Gold, Silver, Maṇi Jewels, and So Forth] Responds to "056. Who gives rise to the nature of various treasures, such as maṇi jewels and pearls?" and "084. What is wealth, and what causes wealth to arise?"

A maṇi is a wish-fulfilling jewel said to come from the dragon palace beneath the sea; it is worth a fortune. Gold, silver, maṇi jewels, pearls, and other riches are extremely precious and are called treasures.

Do they themselves possess the nature of treasure? Take gold, for example: it conducts electricity less well than copper and is less hard than iron, so why is it so

precious? How does its “nature of treasure” arise? In fact, people regard it as precious; the minds of the many regard it as precious. This does not depart from “thought” and “that which is thought.”

If one says that things are precious because they are scarce, and that gold is precious because it is comparatively rare, then is not the one who regards rarity as precious still the human mind? It still does not depart from “thought” and “that which is thought.”

019. [Icchantikas and the Great Elements] Responds to “079. What is an icchantika?”

Icchantika means “utterly evil” and denotes one without the faculty of faith. There are three kinds of icchantika: icchantikas who have cut off roots of goodness, icchantikas of great compassion, and icchantikas without the nature for Buddhahood.

Even an icchantika without the faculty of faith, an utterly evil person, likewise does not depart from “thought” and “that which is thought.”

020. [Chaos and One Buddha] Responds to “042. Why are lands in disorder?” and “106. Why does the Great Sage declare: ‘Kāśyapa, Krakucchanda, and Kanakamuni are all myself’?”

“Lands” refers to the places inhabited by sentient beings; in modern language, they are planets. Taking a broader view and a shorter span of time, these planets arise and perish in chaotic fashion. This is what Mahāmati Bodhisattva calls “the disorder of lands” and what the World-Honored One calls “chaos.” This “disorder” is viewed in a broad sense. If we consider each particular change, even every minute change, none is accidental; all follow discernible laws. This law is worldly cause and effect.

Among the thousand Buddhas of the Fortunate Aeon, Śākyamuni Buddha is the fourth. The preceding three are Krakucchanda Buddha, Kanakamuni Buddha, and Kāśyapa Buddha. This is from the perspective of sentient beings attached to appearances. From the Buddha’s perspective, however, there are no appearances, yet all dharmas are complete; there is no self, yet there is a vast response to all conditions. In responding to sentient beings, what prevents one from teaching at different times? The various transformation bodies may also be connected in a single lineage. Thus, three Buddhas are one Buddha, and Śākyamuni, the World-Honored One, says that the preceding three Buddhas are also himself.

Planets that arise and perish in chaos, and the Buddhas who manifest in response to conditions, are all within the minds of sentient beings and do not depart from “thought” and “that which is thought.”

021. [Wisdom, the Objects of Knowledge, and Their Direction] Responds to “053. How are the objects of knowledge purified?”

As stated above, “the objects of knowledge” are knowledge-obstructions, also called obstructions of what is known. Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, “How are the objects of knowledge purified?”—how can the obstructions of what is known be completely removed? The Buddha answers, “Wisdom and the objects of knowledge each have their direction”—wisdom and knowledge-obstructions each tend in their own direction. These are, of course, directions of the mind, and thus they too do not depart from “thought” and “that which is thought.”

022. [Sentient Beings, Existence, and Nonexistence] Responds to “036. What is emptiness, and what is its cause?”

From the perspective of sentient beings, the two concepts of “existence” and “nonexistence” are opposites and cannot coexist: where there is existence, there is not nonexistence; where there is nonexistence, there is not existence. From the Buddha’s perspective, however, existence and nonexistence do not conflict but complement each other: existence exists because of nonexistence, and nonexistence is absent because of existence.

Neither “existence” nor “nonexistence” is fixed and unchanging; neither has any real meaning that can be obtained. Or, put differently, each is empty in its very substance. Thus, the Inscription on Faith in Mind says: “Existence is precisely nonexistence; nonexistence is precisely existence. If it is not so, there is surely no need to guard it.”

023. [Elephants, Horses, and Other Birds and Beasts: How Are They Captured?] Responds to “076. How are elephants, horses, and deer captured?”

It was just stated that the concepts of “existence” and “nonexistence” are empty in their very substance and have no real meaning. The Buddha then draws on Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question, “How are elephants, horses, and deer captured?” to further explain the principle that existence and nonexistence are empty in their very substance.

Are there elephants, horses, and other birds and beasts in the forest? Or are there none? If one says they exist, they may be captured and taken away; once they have been taken away, where is the real meaning of that “existence”? If one says they do not exist, how can they be captured if they do not exist? Or one might say that they exist before being captured and do not exist after being captured.

Thus, the “existence” before capture is made manifest only in contrast to the “nonexistence” after capture, and the “nonexistence” after capture is made manifest

only in contrast to the “existence” before capture. They complement one another. Is this not “existence is precisely nonexistence; nonexistence is precisely existence”? These too do not depart from “thought” and “that which is thought.” Since this is so, why capture them at all?—“How are they captured?” Here, “how” adds emphasis.

024. [Example, Reason, and Siddhānta] Responds to “097. How many kinds are there of siddhānta and views?”

Pi means analogy, and siddhānta has the sense of a doctrinal proposition. “Example, reason, and siddhānta” carries the meaning of the three parts of Buddhist logic: proposition, reason, and example. “Example” and “reason” establish the “proposition”—that is, reasons and examples are used to explain the proposition. This is even more clearly a matter of “thought” and “that which is thought.”

025. [And Acting and What Is Done] Responds to “013. From what does dependent origination arise? What are acting and what is done?”

Acting and what is done are, respectively, “that which acts” and “that which is done.” Earlier, in 016, [And the Two Present Views], it was said that “and with” is a transitional expression, continuing from the preceding “self-nature of thought and that which is thought” and introducing the point that what follows likewise returns to “thought” and “that which is thought.” Its reappearance here in “and acting and what is done” again takes up the preceding “self-nature of thought and that which is thought.” Neither that which acts nor that which is done has an independently existing entity that can be obtained; both return to “thought” and “that which is thought.”

026. [The Tangled Forest of Delusion and Penetration] Responds to “003. How is delusion perceived?” and “004. How does delusion increase?”

Here, “tangled forest” describes something intricate and complex, crisscrossing like the branches, leaves, and vines of a dense forest. “The delusion and penetration” means being deluded by afflictions and by penetration. Before practice, one is deluded by afflictions; after beginning practice, one is deluded by penetration. This is in fact a very common phenomenon. That is, the comprehension pursued in ordinary life is actually a tangled and complex delusion, like a forest.

027. [The Mind-Capacity Does Not Manifest Existence] Responds to “029. What are dispositions, non-dispositions, and mind-capacity?”

When mind-capacity is vast, like the sea receiving a hundred rivers, accommodating all things without finding a single dharma to be obtained, that is true penetration.

028. [The Various Bhūmis Do Not Necessarily Follow One Another] Responds to “102. What is the seventh bhūmi?”

Here, “the various bhūmis do not necessarily follow one another” means that the stages of the bodhisattva bhūmis do not necessarily proceed in a sequence such as from the first through the tenth bhūmi. Because capacities differ, those of high aptitude may even suddenly awaken and become Buddhas. “Do not follow one another” means that there is no fixed sequence among the various stages. The final answer, “108. There are seven mind-grounds,” means that the stages likewise need not always be divided according to the first through tenth bhūmis.

029. [A Hundred Transformations and a Hundred Non-Receptions] Responds to “099. Why do those most excellent sons, pratyekabuddhas and śrāvakas, undergo a hundred transformations and a hundred non-receptions?”

Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas still have some transformational birth and death unresolved; hence it is said, “many transformations.” Yet their segmented birth and death has already ceased, and they do not undergo further existence; hence it is said, “many do not receive further existence.” Why do they not undergo further existence? It is because of their strong resolve for liberation. Why do they still undergo transformation? This is precisely their opportunity to turn from the Lesser to the Great. They will inevitably turn from the Lesser to the Great; it is only a matter of time.

030. [On Medicine and Skilled Arts] Responding to “105. For what reason is there the treatise on medicine?”

Pathology, pharmacology, and the like belong to the “knowledge of medicine.” Science, engineering, handicrafts, and the like belong to the “knowledge of skilled arts.”

031. [Various Fields of Knowledge and Technical Arts] Responding to “058. By whom are fields of knowledge and technical arts displayed?”

Not only technical fields such as the knowledge of medicine and the knowledge of skilled arts, but all kinds of “knowledge” do not depart from “thought” and “what is thought.” Such fields of knowledge are generally divided into five major categories, called the “five sciences”: inner knowledge, logic, phonetics, medicine, and skilled arts. Put simply, inner knowledge refers to methods of cultivating the mind; logic is the study of reasoning; phonetics is the study of music; and medicine and skilled arts have just been discussed.

As mentioned earlier in “016. And the Two Views of the Present,” everything up to “Various Fields of Knowledge and Technical Arts” belongs to “thought” and “what is thought.” Even the “five dharmas, three natures, eight consciousnesses, and twofold non-self” all belong to “thought” and “what is thought.”

From below, beginning with “032. The Various Mountains, Mount Sumeru, the Earth, the Great Ocean, and the Measures of the Sun and Moon” and continuing to “056. How Many Pores and Eyebrows,” are matters that Mahāmati Bodhisattva did not ask about; the Buddha then begins to question Mahāmati in return. It should be noted that, after this counter-questioning begins, the Buddha’s replies frequently use “how.” Before this, it appears only in item 023,

“How are elephants, horses, birds, and beasts captured?” The two characters yunhe, “how,” in “how are they captured?” add emphasis and may also be regarded as a counter-question. Nevertheless, counter-questioning sentence after sentence begins here. The Buddha not only questions Mahāmati about matters he did not ask, but even begins to use a counter-questioning tone regarding matters Mahāmati did ask about.

Counter-questioning means asking in return. The sūtra passages below contain two kinds of rhetorical question: those concerning matters Mahāmati Bodhisattva did not ask about, and those concerning matters he had already asked about. For example, “052.

“Śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, Buddhas, and the Supreme Ones’ sons—of how many particles is each body composed? Why do you not ask this?” That is a matter Mahāmati Bodhisattva did not ask about. Another example is, “065. What is the realm of dhyāna?”—what is this talk of realms or no realms? That is a matter Mahāmati Bodhisattva had already asked about.

Looking back over the preceding sūtra passages, the Buddha’s answers first expound many doctrines and then conclude by returning to “thought” and “what is thought.” Immediately afterward come the following passages, in which the Buddha begins to question Mahāmati Bodhisattva in return. Why does the Buddha do so here? We may begin by discussing “self-realization” and “verbal exposition.” Later passages in this sūtra speak of “self-realization” and “verbal exposition.” Let us bring those later passages here; the text reads as follows:

The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The Tathāgatas of the three times have two kinds of penetration into the Dharma: verbal exposition and self-realization. Verbal exposition means teaching in various ways according to what accords with the minds of sentient beings; the many sūtras accordingly contain such teachings. This is called verbal exposition.”

“Self-realization means that practitioners leave behind the various deluded thoughts manifested by their own minds; they do not fall into the categories of ‘one’ and ‘different,’ or ‘both’ and ‘not both’; they transcend all mind, mentation, and consciousness, directly realize the state of the noble ones, and are free from views based on causes, production, and appearances. This is what all non-Buddhist paths,

śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas who fall into the two extremes cannot know. I call this the Dharma of 'self-realization.'"

"Mahāmati, these are the characteristics of 'self-realization' and 'verbal exposition.' You and the other bodhisattva mahāsattvas should cultivate and learn them." At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses: "I speak of two kinds of penetration: self-realization and verbal exposition. Verbal exposition instructs beginners; self-realization is for practitioners."

The meaning of this passage is as follows: "The Buddhas of the three times have two kinds of penetration into the Dharma: verbal exposition and self-realization. Verbal exposition means that, in accordance with the various capacities of sentient beings and prescribing medicine according to their illnesses, they explain various meanings to them. The various sūtras contain many such teachings; this is verbal exposition."

"Self-realization means that actual practitioners leave behind the various deluded thoughts manifested by their own minds. They are no longer troubled by views such as 'one' and 'different,' or 'both' and 'not both'; they transcend all consciousness, leave behind views based on such oppositions as cause and effect, and directly realize the realm of noble wisdom. All non-Buddhist paths, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas who fall into the two extremes cannot know the realm of noble wisdom."

"This is what I call 'self-realization.' Mahāmati, this is self-realization and verbal exposition. You and the other great bodhisattvas should cultivate and learn them." Having said this, the Buddha composed a verse that concisely summarizes self-realization and verbal exposition: "I speak of two kinds of penetration: self-realization and verbal exposition. Verbal exposition instructs beginners; self-realization is for practitioners."

This verse clearly states, "Verbal exposition instructs beginners; self-realization is for practitioners." That is, "verbal exposition" is only introductory knowledge, whereas "self-realization" is what practitioners need. For this reason, after answering many doctrinal questions, the Buddha, fearing that students might become trapped in these doctrines, adopts a counter-questioning tone to clear away their entanglement in doctrine and guide them onto the proper path of practice.

032. [The Various Mountains, Mount Sumeru, the Earth, the Great Ocean, and the Measures of the Sun and Moon]

How are the many mountains, rivers, lands, and great oceans—even the sun, moon, and Mount Sumeru—to be measured? Why do you not ask questions such as these?

033. [The Lower, Middle, and Higher Classes of Sentient Beings: How Many Particles Compose Each Body?]

How many particles compose the bodies of sentient beings of the lower, middle, and higher classes? Why do you not ask questions such as these?

034. [How Many Particles Are There in Each Buddha-Land?]

Kṣetra means a Buddha-land. One great chiliocosm is one Buddha-land. How large is a Buddha-land? This must be explained beginning with a “small world.” A world having a sun and moon is one small world, roughly equivalent to a solar system.

One thousand small worlds make one minor chiliocosm; one thousand minor chiliocosms make one middling chiliocosm; and one thousand middling chiliocosms make one great chiliocosm. Thus, a great chiliocosm is also called a “trichiliocosm”—one thousand cubed. This is one Buddha-land, perhaps equivalent in size to what modern astronomy calls a galaxy.

“How many particles are there in each Buddha-land?” means: How many particles compose each galaxy-like system? Why do you not ask questions such as these?

035. [How Many Bows Are There in Each Bow?]

The “bow,” as well as the “cubit” mentioned below, are ancient Indian units of length. Two feet make one cubit, and four cubits make one bow.

036. [Cubits, Paces, and Krośas]

Five hundred bows make one krośa.

037. [Half a Yojana and a Yojana]

Ten krośas make one yojana. Yojana is sometimes translated as youxun.

038. [Rabbit Hair, Window Dust, and Lice]

“Rabbit hair” is sometimes translated as “rabbit-hair-tip dust.” Seven motes make one “window-dust particle,” and seven window-dust particles make one rabbit-hair-tip dust particle.

039. [Wool, Barley, and Dust]

Seven rabbit-hair-tip particles make one “sheep-hair-tip particle”; seven sheep-hair-tip particles make one “ox-hair-tip particle”; seven ox-hair-tip particles make one nit; seven nits make one louse; seven lice make one mustard seed; and seven mustard seeds make one [- +]. [- +] means barley.

040. [Bota Ji Barley]

041. [Alo Barley Ji]

A pātra is half a dou, and an āra is one dou. The counter-question in these two lines means: Why do you not ask in this way: How many barley grains are there in half a dou? How many barley grains are there in one dou?

042. [One Du-luṅga and One Nākhārī]

One hu is one du-luṅga; ten du-luṅgas make one nākhārī.

043. [Lakṣa and Koṭi]

044. [Up to Bimbara: How Many of Each Are There?]

Lakṣa means one hundred thousand, koṭi means one hundred million, and bimbara means one trillion. “How many of each are there?” means: What are their respective numerical values?

045. [How Many Aṇus Are Called One Mustard Seed?]

Aṇu means a minute particle, and śarṣapa means a mustard seed. How many minute particles make one mustard seed?

046. [How Many Mustard Seeds Are Called One Ratti?]

Ratti means ratti-māṣa—a grass seed. How many mustard seeds make one grass seed?

047. [How Many Ratti-Māṣas?] Ratti-māṣa means a grass seed.

048. [How Many Māṣa-Dhānas?] Māṣa-dhāna means a bean.

049. [How Many Dhānaras Make One Karṣa?] Dhānara means a zhu, and karṣa means a tael.

050. [How many karṣas make one pala?] “Pala” means a catty.

051. [How many palas of these accumulated forms make a Mount Sumeru? These are the matters that should be asked; why ask about anything else?]

“Milu” means Mount Sumeru. “How many palas of these accumulated forms make a Mount Sumeru?”—how many catties of minute particles must accumulate to form Mount Sumeru? These are the sorts of questions that should be asked. They would use up all the time, leaving no need to ask about anything else.

052. [How many particles constitute the bodies of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, Buddhas, and the Supreme One's sons? Why do you not ask this?]

The bodies of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, Buddhas, and bodhisattvas are each composed of how many minute particles? Why do you not ask this question?

053. [How many minute particles are in a flame?]

Into how many minute particles can a flame be divided?

054. [And how many minute particles are in wind?]

Into how many minute particles can wind be divided?

055. [How many minute particles are in each faculty?]

Into how many minute particles can each of the six faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—be divided?

056. [How many are in pores and eyebrows?]

Into how many minute particles can pores and eyebrows each be divided?

Why do you not ask all these questions?

From "032. The Mountains, Mount Sumeru, and the Earth" above to this point are matters that Mahāmati Bodhisattva did not ask about. What follows consists again of matters that Mahāmati Bodhisattva did ask about.

057. [Treasury-Protecting Kings, Sovereign Kings, Wheel-Turning Sage Kings, and Imperial Kings—how do kings protect?] This responds to "062. What is meant by a king, a wheel-turning king, and a lesser king? How do they protect their kingdoms?"

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked what is meant by kings, wheel-turning kings, and lesser kings, and how they protect their kingdoms.

Śākyamuni Buddha did not answer along this line of thought. Instead, he told him that there are many kinds of kings: treasury-protecting kings, sovereign kings, wheel-turning kings, sage kings, imperial kings, and so forth. In past lives, they performed various good deeds; these became the causes, and in this life, when conditions are encountered, they mature as the good results. Good deeds bring good recompense: the direct recompense is becoming a king, and the dependent recompense is possessing a kingdom. This is due to cause and effect. What need is there to speak of kings protecting their kingdoms—"how do kings protect?"

058. [What is liberation?] This responds to “065. How many kinds of practitioners cultivating liberation are there?”

During the Kaihuang era of the Sui dynasty, there was a novice monk named Daoxin. At the age of fourteen, he came to pay homage to Chan Master Sengcan, the Third Patriarch. He said to the Third Patriarch, “May the Venerable One be compassionate and grant me the Dharma gate of liberation.” The Third Patriarch asked Daoxin, “Who binds you?” Daoxin replied, “No one binds me.” The Third Patriarch said, “Why, then, do you seek liberation?” At these words, Daoxin attained great awakening. He later became the Fourth Patriarch. This exchange between the Third and Fourth Patriarchs conveys the same purport as the exchange in this sūtra between the Buddha and Mahāmati Bodhisattva.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked, “How many kinds of practitioners cultivating liberation are there?”—that is, how many kinds of people arouse the resolve to cultivate the path of liberation? This question is generally answered: “There are three kinds: śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas.” Although this answer is correct, it is neither direct nor ultimate. See how the Buddha answers: “What is liberation?”—what liberation or nonliberation is there!

059. [Extensive exposition and concise exposition, as you have asked.] This responds to “059. How many kinds of gāthā are there—long verses and short stanzas?”

Gāthā means verse. Buddhist sūtras contain many verses. Some verses are very long, extending to dozens or even hundreds of lines. Others are very short, consisting of only a few lines.

The “long verses” mentioned by Mahāmati Bodhisattva are simply very long verses, while “short stanzas” are very short verses, such as four-line verses.

The “extensive exposition” spoken of by Śākyamuni Buddha may correspond to long verses, and “concise exposition” may correspond to short stanzas.

Since Mahāmati Bodhisattva had already divided gāthā into the two kinds of “long verses and short stanzas,” why did he still ask, “How many kinds of gāthā are there?” This must be explained in terms of the Tripiṭaka’s twelve divisions.

As was already explained in the earlier “Ten Gates of Mysterious Discourse,” the “twelve divisions” are prose discourses, reiterative verses, independent verses, causes and conditions, former deeds, former births, marvels, parables, discussions, self-spoken teachings, extensive teachings, and prophecies. Among these, reiterative verses and independent verses are both verse forms.

After something has first been explained in prose, restating what has already been said in verse is called “reiterative verse.” If it is not first explained in prose but is

presented only in verse, it is called “independent verse.” What Mahāmati Bodhisattva meant by asking, “How many kinds of gāthā are there—long verses and short stanzas?” is actually this: How many categories of gāthā are there, such as long verses and short stanzas? Clearly, in answering this question, one could at least name two categories: reiterative verses and independent verses.

Yet the Buddha did not answer in this way. He replied, “Extensive exposition and concise exposition, as you have asked”—just as you yourself said in your question, there are extensive expositions, that is, long verses, and concise expositions, that is, short stanzas. This too is a counterquestion: you have already stated “long verses and short stanzas,” so is there any need to ask again how many kinds there are?

060. [Sentient beings have various desires.] This responds to “061. Why does the desire for food arise, and why do the various desires of attachment arise?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: Why does the desire to eat arise? Why do the many desires of attachment arise? The Buddha answered: “Sentient beings have various desires”—because they are sentient beings, they have all manner of desires. The Buddha gives an even more direct answer to the question, “Why does the desire for food arise, and why do the various desires of attachment arise?” in his ninetieth response below.

Why, then, did the Buddha not answer in that way here? Because he is about to answer, “What kinds of meat-eaters are there, and for what reason do they eat meat?” Thus, he first highlights the concept of “sentient beings” here, linking it to the following answer, “the various kinds of food.” “Various desires” are the desires of sentient beings, and “the various kinds of food” are the foods of sentient beings.

061. [The various kinds of food.] This responds to “088. Why not eat meat? Why establish precepts prohibiting meat? What kinds of meat-eaters are there, and for what reason do they eat meat?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: Why advocate not eating meat? Why establish precepts prohibiting meat? There are many kinds of sentient beings who eat meat; why do they eat it? Here, the Buddha does not elaborate on many grand principles, but simply counters: “The various kinds of food!”—there are many things that can be eaten, so why must one eat meat?

062. [Why the Male-and-Female Grove and the adamantine solid mountains? Why are things like illusions and dreams, like a thirsty wild deer? Why are mountains adorned with heavenly immortals and gandharvas?] This responds to “040. For what reason are things like illusions and dreams, gandharva cities, heat-haze in the world, and moonlight reflected in water?” and “108. For what reason are there the Male-and-Female Grove, harītakī, āmalaka, petals, and the Iron Enclosure and adamantine

mountains, adorned with innumerable treasures and filled with immortals and gandharvas?”

The Male-and-Female Grove, also called the charnel grove, is known in Sanskrit as Śītavana. Śīta means cold, and vana means grove. The Male-and-Female Grove is thus the “Cold Grove.” The fruits borne by the trees of the Cold Grove resemble male and female forms. When ripe, they are brightly colored and beautiful; before long they fall to the ground, resembling corpses and becoming foul and putrid. Local people use the Cold Grove as a place to abandon corpses.

Now let us consider Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s 108th question: “For what reason are there the Male-and-Female Grove, harītakī, āmalaka, petals, and the Iron Enclosure and adamantine mountains, adorned with innumerable treasures and filled with immortals and gandharvas?” Here, harītakī and āmalaka are two kinds of fruit, while jīra means “petals.”

The first half of this question asks: among such flowers and fruits as the Male-and-Female Grove, harītakī, āmalaka, and petals, why are only the fruits of the Male-and-Female Grove shaped like male and female forms? The latter half asks about the Iron Enclosure, the adamantine mountains, and other such mountains. This corresponds to the first “why” in the Buddha’s response here: “Why the Male-and-Female Grove and the adamantine solid mountains?”

Now consider the latter half of the 108th question. Iron Enclosure and Adamantine are both names of mountains. “Xiantapo” can be divided into “heavenly immortals” and “gandharvas”; gandharvas, also written qiandapo, are the musical deities of the heavenly lord. This latter half asks why the Iron Enclosure, the adamantine mountains, and many other jeweled mountains are adorned with numerous treasures and filled with immortals and musical deities. This corresponds to the third “why” in the Buddha’s response here: “Why are mountains adorned with heavenly immortals and gandharvas?”

We have discussed the first and third “why”; there remains the second: “Why are things like illusions and dreams, like a thirsty wild deer?” This responds to Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s fortieth question: “For what reason are things like illusions and dreams, gandharva cities, heat-haze in the world, and moonlight reflected in water?” Here, “the simile of a thirsty wild deer” corresponds to “heat-haze in the world.”

The heat-haze of the world is a mirage. On a summer plain, sunlight reflects from floating dust and scatters in all directions; viewed from afar, it closely resembles water, and is called a mirage. A thirsty wild deer sees the mirage and takes it for water, running after it in pursuit, yet can never reach it.

“The simile of a thirsty wild deer” uses this as an analogy to explain that all conditioned dharmas are like illusions, dreams, mirages, and moonlight reflected in water—utterly unobtainable. A gandharva city is a mirage. Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question, “For what reason are things like illusions and dreams, gandharva cities, heat-haze in the world, and moonlight reflected in water?” asks why everything is thus utterly unobtainable.

It should be noted that what Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks is “what cause,” whereas Śākyamuni Buddha answers, “how.” The Buddha counters Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “What talk is this of men, women, groves, and Vajra Mountains? What talk is this of dreams and shimmering heat? What talk is this of celestial immortals, music-making deities, and adornments?” All of these are mere conceptual elaborations.

063. [Where Does Liberation Lead?] Responds to “009. Where Does Liberation Lead?”

064. [Who Is Bound, and Who Is Liberated?] Responds to “010. Who Is Bound, and Who Is Liberated?”

In these two questions, the Buddha’s replies appear to be identical to Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s questions, but their import differs. Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s words are questions; the Buddha’s words are counter-questions.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, “Where does liberation lead?”—after liberation, where does one go? Yet if there is still somewhere to go, how can this be called liberation? Thus, the Buddha answers him, “Where does liberation lead?”—if one is liberated, is there any place one must go? Is there any place one cannot go?

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, “Who is bound? Who is liberated?”—which beings are bound in the sea of suffering, and which have been liberated from it? Anyone with even a little Buddhist knowledge knows the answer: sentient beings are bound, and Buddhas are liberated. Yet this is merely common knowledge for sentient beings studying Buddhism, in which ordinary beings and sages stand plainly opposed; it is not the definitive meaning. The Buddha would not answer Mahāmati Bodhisattva with conventional concepts. Here, the Buddha’s reply, “Who is bound, and who is liberated?” is a counter-question: Who has ever been bound? Who has ever been liberated?

065. [What Are the Realms of Chan?] Responds to “011. What Kinds of Chan Realms Are There?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks: What realms are there in meditative absorption? In the ninth answer above, the Buddha has already told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that there are immeasurably many kinds of worldly and supramundane meditation, great and

small. Here, he simply sweeps away the mind that clings to meditative realms with a counter-question: “What realms of Chan?”—what talk is this of realms or no realms?

066. [Transformations and Non-Buddhist Paths] Responds to “005. Why Are Buddha Lands Transformed, as Are Appearances and the Various Non-Buddhist Paths?”

The answer “Transformations and Non-Buddhist Paths” immediately follows the preceding answer, “What realms of Chan?” Together they read: “What realms of Chan, transformations, and non-Buddhist paths?” That is, “What transformations?” and “What non-Buddhist paths?” By this, the Buddha counters Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question, “Why are Buddha Lands transformed, as are appearances and the various non-Buddhist paths?”

067. [How Can There Be Action Without a Cause?]

068. [How Can There Be Action with a Cause?]

069. [Action with or Without a Cause]

070. [And Neither with nor Without a Cause]

The above four lines respond to “014. How Are the Various Views Different?” and “015. What Views Are Increased?”

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra repeatedly speaks of “not the nature of causes and conditions, nor the nature of spontaneity.” What, then, are the nature of causes and conditions and the nature of spontaneity? The nature of causes and conditions is the view that real causes produce real results. This is a heterodox view of a non-Buddhist path, also called the theory of causation. The nature of spontaneity is the view that all things arise naturally, without cause or condition, and naturally perish. This is another heterodox view of a non-Buddhist path, also called the theory of no cause. Some non-Buddhist paths also maintain that there are both causes and no causes. Others maintain that there are neither causes nor no causes.

Buddhadharma holds that “dharmas arising from causes and conditions, I say, are emptiness.” “Dharmas arising from causes and conditions” refutes the theory of no cause; “I say, are emptiness” refutes the theory of causation. Buddhadharma holds that to assert existence, nonexistence, or even “both existent and nonexistent” or “neither existent nor nonexistent,” is all to slander the Dharma. To assert existence is the error of exaggeration; to assert nonexistence is the error of diminution; to assert both existence and nonexistence is the error of contradiction; and to assert neither existence nor nonexistence is the error of conceptual elaboration.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, “How are the various views different, and what views are increased?”—what different kinds of assertions are there, and which heterodox

views are thereby increased? The Buddha answers: they are no more than the four kinds described above.

This applies not only to “existence” and “nonexistence.” So long as one clings to any relative concepts, the four propositions arise. For example, from the concepts of annihilationism and eternalism come “annihilationism,” “eternalism,” “both annihilationism and eternalism,” and “neither annihilationism nor eternalism.” The four propositions answered by the Buddha here are meant in a broad sense; they do not refer only to “with a cause,” “without a cause,” “both with and without a cause,” and “neither with nor without a cause.” One should transcend the four propositions and cut off the hundred negations. Only the “four propositions” are discussed here; as for the “hundred negations,” explaining them would be excessively lengthy, so they will not be discussed.

071. [How Can Manifestation Already Cease?] Responds to “028. How Can Manifestation Return?”

In ancient times, and were used interchangeably. Thus, in the line “The sky is vast and blue, the plains are boundless; when the wind blows and the grass bends low, cattle and sheep appear,” means .

Creating karma and undergoing the result of birth and death is called cyclic flow; it is also called “manifest activity” or “arising in manifestation.” Cultivating the path and realizing nirvāṇa is called “returning cessation.” Thus, “manifestation already ceases” or “manifestation has returned” means “birth and death have ended, and nirvāṇa has been realized.”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, “How can manifestation return?”—how does one transcend birth and death? How does one realize returning cessation? This can be explained through the four noble truths: suffering, origination, cessation, and the path. The four noble truths comprise two sets of cause and effect—the cause and effect of the worldly and the supramundane—that is, worldly cause and effect and supramundane cause and effect.

“Suffering” and “origination” are worldly cause and effect: suffering is the worldly result, and origination the worldly cause. “Cessation” and “the path” are supramundane cause and effect: cessation is the supramundane result, and the path the supramundane cause. “Cessation” is “returning cessation,” namely nirvāṇa. “The path” means cultivating the path, the so-called eighty-four thousand dharma gates.

How does one transcend birth and death and realize nirvāṇa? One should select, from among the many dharma gates, one suited to one’s capacities—whether Buddha-recitation, Chan investigation, or Esoteric practice—and then put it into

practice, abandon intellectual understanding, arouse an enduring resolve, persevere without relenting, and penetrate deeply into a single gate. In this way, one can transcend birth and death and realize nirvāṇa.

Yet birth and death are originally nonexistent; through deluded attachment, they manifest as illusory existence. Returning cessation is originally empty; nirvāṇa is provisionally named in contrast to birth and death. As it is said: One aims to transcend birth and death, but when it is transcended, there is no birth and death at all; one seeks to realize nirvāṇa, but upon realization, how could there be any nirvāṇa?

Therefore, the Buddha here answers Mahāmati Bodhisattva sharply and directly in a counter-question: "How can manifestation already cease?"—what talk is this of manifestation arising? What talk is this of returning cessation?

072. [How Are the Various Knowings Purified?] Responds to "001. How Are One's Thoughts Purified?"

The "knowing" spoken of here means awareness. "The various knowings" means the many kinds of awareness. What kinds of awareness are there? Let us briefly list four:

1. Beginners who have just entered the gate of practice are aware when a previous thought gives rise to evil, and can stop the subsequent thought so that the evil does not arise. Although this too is awareness, it can discern only good and evil, not the source of mind. This should be called "non-awakening."

2. Śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and beginning bodhisattvas are aware that wholesome and unwholesome thoughts are both thoughts, and that thoughts have no distinctive marks. They can abandon coarse deluded thoughts and attachments. This is called "similar awakening."

3. Bodhisattvas before the first bhūmi are aware that the previous thought has ceased and the subsequent thought has not yet arisen; or, in other words, they are aware of the abiding of thought. They further realize that thought has no mark of abiding and can thereby leave behind coarse discriminating mind. This is called "partial awakening." Discrimination is consciousness; nondiscrimination is wisdom. The consciousness-mind consists of deluded thoughts, while the wisdom-mind consists of right mindfulness. Mahāmati Bodhisattva's first question, "How are one's thoughts purified?"—that is, "How can deluded thoughts be eliminated and right mindfulness arise?"—is asked on behalf of bodhisattvas before the first bhūmi.

4. Bodhisattvas on the bhūmis, whose vision is equal to that of all Buddhas, awaken to the mind at its first arising and further realize that the mind has no mark of first

arising. They can thereby be free of subtle discriminating mind, see the nature of mind, and attain what is called “ultimate awakening.”

Yet, from the beginner’s “non-awakening” to the “ultimate awakening” after seeing one’s nature, ultimately not a single dharma can be obtained, nor a single dharma relinquished. As the Diamond Sūtra says: “If anyone says that the Tathāgata has attained unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening, Subhūti, in truth there is no dharma by which the Buddha attains unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening. Subhūti, in the unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening attained by the Tathāgata, there is neither reality nor unreality.” Here, “no reality” means that not a single dharma can be obtained, while “no unreality” means that not a single dharma can be relinquished.

By now, it should not be difficult to see that the Buddha’s reply, “How are the various knowings purified?” is likewise a counter-question.

073. [How Do the Various Knowings Turn, and How Do They Turn into the Various Activities?] Responds to “002. How Do Thoughts Increase?”

We have just spoken of “the various knowings,” and immediately afterward we speak of their transformation. Into what do they transform? They transform into “the various activities.” What activities are there? There are very many, too numerous to count; even if classified and listed, they can be classified in various ways. For example, the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra lists eight broad categories of “activities,” such as “cessation as support” and “transformation as support.” Here, we may simply understand “the various activities” as actions and “the various knowings” as thoughts.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, “How do thoughts increase?”—how can right mindfulness increase? Here, the “increase of thoughts” is also the increase of the various knowings.

When thoughts increase, they turn into activities, and there is action. Taking such action as a cause, one evokes karmic results, which are called “possessions.” Yet from the various knowings to the various activities, and from the various activities to the various possessions, all are conditioned dharmas. They are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, dew, and lightning—utterly unobtainable.

Just as the Buddha Speaks of the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life says, “There is also nothing done, and nothing possessed,” Master Huiyuan’s Commentary on the Meaning of the Buddha Speaks of the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life explains: “There is also nothing done means that there is no cause by which anything can be done; there is also nothing possessed means that there is no result that can be possessed.” By prefixing “how” to “all awakenings” and “all that is done,” the Buddha

counters Mahāmati Bodhisattva's question with a rhetorical question. This counter-question is the best answer.

074. [How Are All Thoughts Cut Off?] In response to "017. What is the cessation of thought, and what causes awakening from samādhi?"

"Thought" means apprehending distinguishing characteristics in an object of cognition. As the common saying goes, "a thousand differences and ten thousand distinctions"; that is, there can be very many kinds of thought. These are "all thoughts." Through seated meditation and cultivation, one cuts off all thoughts—the cessation of thought—and enters samādhi. Yet where there is "entering," there is also "emerging": one may emerge from samādhi, or awaken from samādhi. Such samādhi, involving both entering and emerging, is in fact the mind abiding in a single object without scattering. Once one emerges from this samādhi, one again apprehends distinguishing characteristics in objects of cognition. Thus, this kind of samādhi is not ultimate.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, "What is the cessation of thought, and what causes awakening from samādhi?" That is: How does one cut off all thoughts and thereby enter samādhi? Why does one then awaken from samādhi?

Because this samādhi of entering and emerging is not ultimate, the Buddha answers Mahāmati Bodhisattva with the counter-question, "How are all thoughts cut off?" thereby sweeping away his attachment to this kind of samādhi.

075. [How Does One Arise from Samādhi?] In response to "024. What is the mind of samādhi? Please explain its supreme form for me."

In response to Mahāmati Bodhisattva's question, "What is the mind of samādhi? Please explain its supreme form for me," the twelfth answer above, "The Discourse on Arising Mind from Samādhi," swept away the deluded attachment to the samādhi of cessation and taught that one must not abide in meditative appearances. To arise from samādhi and direct the mind to teach the Dharma is the most supreme. Yet this does not exhaust the meaning.

Here, the answer, "How does one arise from samādhi?" also sweeps away "arising from samādhi and directing the mind to teach the Dharma." Nor does it stop there: in the eighty-fourth answer below, the Buddha simply sweeps away the entire question concerning the "mind of samādhi."

076. [Who Breaks Through the Three Modes of Existence? What Body Is There, and Where?] In response to "021. Who breaks through the three modes of existence? What is the body, and where is it?" and "022. Where does rebirth lead?"

077. [How Can There Be No Sentient Beings, Yet a Self Is Said to Exist?] In response to “031. How can there be no sentient beings?”

078. [How Is It Spoken of Conventionally?] In response to “032. How is it spoken of conventionally?”

Just as with answers 63 and 64 above, the Buddha’s replies in answers 76, 77, and 78 closely resemble Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s questions, but their import differs. Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s words are questions; the Buddha’s words are counter-questions.

Let us first consider answer 76. Besides “Who breaks through the three modes of existence?” the question also contains “What is the body, and where is it?” and “Where does rebirth lead?” The answer additionally contains “What body is there, and where?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, “Who breaks through the three modes of existence? What is the body, and where is it?” That is: What kind of person can break through the three modes of existence—existence in the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm—and leave the three realms? After leaving them, where is that person’s body, and what constitutes that body? This question naturally calls to mind rebirth in the Pure Land, so Mahāmati Bodhisattva next asks about rebirth:

“Where does it lead?” After leaving the three realms, where does one take rebirth? In fact, coming and going, birth and death—speaking of such rebirth is merely an expedient teaching that “accords with the minds of sentient beings and responds in accordance with what they can understand”; it is not the ultimate meaning.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “Know that empty space arises within your own mind like a small cloud speckling the vast clear sky; how much more so are all worlds within empty space! When any one of you realizes the true and returns to the source, all the empty space in the ten directions entirely vanishes. The perfectly bright and pure mind manifests transformations within it, like a precious moon contained within clear lapis lazuli. Perfect bodhi returns to no attainment.”

From this, we can see: does so-called “rebirth” mean that this mind is born into the Pure Land, or that the Pure Land manifests within this mind? Clearly, the Pure Land manifests within the mind. Going a step further, can the mind itself be obtained? “Perfect bodhi returns to no attainment”; clearly, the mind too cannot be obtained. Therefore the ancient masters said, “Birth is precisely no birth; no birth is precisely birth,” and also, “Birth is certainly birth, yet going is not truly going.” Thus, the Buddha’s answer, “Who breaks through the three modes of existence? What body is there, and where?” can be understood as a counter-question.

Now consider answer 77, which also includes the words, “yet a self is said to exist.” Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, “How can there be no sentient beings?” That is: Why is it said that “in truth, there are no sentient beings who are liberated”? The Diamond Sūtra says: “I cause all sentient beings to enter nirvāṇa without remainder and thereby liberate them. Yet although immeasurable, countless, boundless sentient beings are thus liberated, in truth there are no sentient beings who are liberated.”

Who liberates sentient beings? I liberate sentient beings. I am the one who liberates, and sentient beings are those liberated. Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks about those who are liberated, but the Buddha’s counter-question not only sweeps away attachment to those who are liberated; it also sweeps away the one who liberates.

Answer 78, “How is it spoken of conventionally?” is easy to understand. Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks it immediately after the preceding sentence: “How is it spoken of conventionally?” That is: regarding the meaning of “no sentient beings,” how is it expressed in conventional terms? The Buddha answers with a counter-question: “How is it spoken of conventionally?” If there are no sentient beings, what is there to say about “conventional expression”?

079. [I Only Wish You Would Distinguish Broadly] In response to “019. How does discrimination manifest?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks: “How does discrimination manifest?” That is: How does the discriminating mind arise and manifest?

The aggregate of perception among the five aggregates, and the six consciousnesses among the eight consciousnesses, ponder and discern all phenomena and principles. They form deluded attachments to phenomena and principles, and discrimination consequently arises and manifests. “Discrimination is consciousness; non-discrimination is wisdom. Relying on consciousness, one is defiled; relying on wisdom, one is pure. Defilement entails birth and death; purity admits no Buddhas.”

Yet non-discrimination does not mean failing to understand phenomena and principles, or being muddle-headed and unable to distinguish red from green or black from white. Rather, it means clearly understanding that all phenomena and principles are illusory, unobtainable, and not to be clung to. Because there is no deluded attachment, one sees all phenomena and principles even more clearly. As it is said, “One can skillfully distinguish the characteristics of all dharmas, yet remain unmoved in the highest truth.”

The Buddha answers, “I only wish you would distinguish broadly.” This is precisely “skillfully distinguishing the characteristics of all dharmas, yet remaining unmoved in the highest truth.”

080. [What Is the Characteristic Asked About, and What Is the Non-Self Asked About?] In response to “030. How are characteristics established, and what is meant by non-self?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks: “How are characteristics established, and what is meant by non-self?” That is: How is the characteristic appearance of the body established? What does it mean to mistake what is not self for self?

The body is a provisional combination of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—and originally contains no self. If one of these elements were the self, the other three should not be self. If all four elements were self, there should be multiple selves; ultimately, which one would be the self? We thus know that the so-called self is truly unobtainable. Ordinary beings do not understand phenomena and principles. They forcibly posit a controlling agent within their own bodies and deludedly conceive it as “self.” This is what is meant by mistaking what is not self for self.

The Buddha counters Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “What is the characteristic you ask about? And what is the non-self you ask about?” That is: What is the bodily characteristic you ask about? Is it not precisely “non-self”? And what is the “non-self” you ask about? Is it not precisely the bodily characteristic?

081. [What Is the Womb Treasury?] In response to “038. How does birth in the womb treasury occur?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question, “How does birth in the womb treasury occur?” appears between “037. How does a momentary destruction occur?” and “039. How is the world unmoving?” Clearly, it expresses perplexity about the phenomena of birth and death, which are set in contrast to the “unmoving world.” But is the world truly unmoving? At the very beginning of this sūtra, when Mahāmati Bodhisattva praises the Buddha in verse, he says: “The world is free from arising and ceasing, like flowers in empty space. Wisdom does not apprehend existence or nonexistence, yet gives rise to great compassion.”

“The world is free from arising and ceasing” is the “unmoving world,” while “like flowers in empty space” is the chaotic arising-and-ceasing appearance of the lands on which beings rely. Arising and ceasing are precisely nonmovement; nonmovement is precisely arising and ceasing. Birth is precisely no birth; no birth is precisely birth. Mahāmati Bodhisattva already knew this meaning. Thus, it is not that he truly had this perplexity; rather, he asked on behalf of sentient beings. Mahāmati Bodhisattva had long known that birth and death are originally nonexistent.

The Buddha’s answer, “What is the womb treasury?” means: Since birth and death are originally nonexistent, what do you call a womb treasury? With a single counter-

question, he thoroughly sweeps away the question, “How does birth in the womb treasury occur?”

082. [And the Various Different Bodies] In response to “069. How many kinds of birth are there?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question, “How many kinds of birth are there?” follows “068. How many kinds of Buddhas are there?” Its meaning is: How many kinds of Buddhas are there? How many kinds of sentient beings are there?

There are dharmakāya Buddhas, sambhogakāya Buddhas, and nirmāṇakāya Buddhas. Sentient beings are born from wombs, eggs, moisture, and transformation. Yet this is elementary knowledge for those beginning Buddhist study; it is not profound teaching. According to the ultimate meaning of the noble truth, there are no Buddhas and no sentient beings.

The Buddha’s answer, “And the various different bodies,” immediately follows “What is the womb treasury?” Its meaning is clear: What do you call a womb treasury? What do you call the various different bodies, such as those born from eggs, moisture, and transformation?

083. [How Are Annihilationist and Eternalist Views Cut Off?] In response to “107. Why speak of annihilationism and eternalism, and of self and non-self? Why not at all times expound the true meaning, but instead distinguish mind-capacity for sentient beings?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: “Why do you speak of annihilation and eternalism, and of self and no-self? Why do you not always expound the true meaning, but instead distinguish teachings according to the capacities of sentient beings?”—Why do you sometimes also speak of such dharmas as “annihilation,” “eternalism,” “self,” and “no-self”? Why not expound the true meaning at all times? Why must you give various expedient teachings in accordance with sentient beings’ capacities?

The chapter on the World-Honored One in The Compendium of the Five Lamps states: “As the World-Honored One was about to enter nirvāṇa, Mañjuśrī Mahāsattva asked the Buddha to turn the Dharma wheel once more. The World-Honored One rebuked him, saying, ‘Mañjuśrī! During my forty-nine years in the world, I have not spoken a single word. You ask me to turn the Dharma wheel again—have I ever turned the Dharma wheel?’”

The Buddha’s reply here, “How can there be views of annihilation or eternalism?”—what is meant by speaking of “annihilationist views” and “eternalist views”?—thus carries the meaning of “not having spoken a single word.”

084. [How Does the Mind Attain Samādhi?] In response to “024. What is the samādhi of mind? Please explain the supreme one for me.”

“The samādhi of mind” means “the mind attaining samādhi.” In the twelfth answer above, entry into samādhi was swept away; in the seventy-fifth answer, emergence from samādhi was swept away. Here, the single phrase “How does the mind attain samādhi?” sweeps away every question concerning samādhi.

085. [Speech and the Various Wisdoms] In response to “057. Who gives rise to all language and the various dispositions of sentient beings?” and “054. How many kinds of wisdom are there?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s two questions were: (1) “Who gives rise to all language and the various dispositions of sentient beings?”—How do the many differing languages of sentient beings arise? (2) “How many kinds of wisdom are there?”—How many categories of the many kinds of wisdom are there?

The Buddha’s reply immediately follows “How does the mind attain samādhi?” Its meaning is: “How can there be speech?” “How can there be the various wisdoms?” This one phrase sweeps away Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s two questions.

It also connects with the following phrase, “precepts, dispositions, and sons of the Buddha,” meaning: “How can there be precepts?” “How can there be dispositions?” “How can there be sons of the Buddha?”

086. [Precepts, Dispositions, and Sons of the Buddha] In response to “055. How many precepts and dispositions do sentient beings have?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked, “How many precepts and dispositions do sentient beings have?”—How many kinds of precepts should sentient beings uphold? This question immediately follows “How many kinds of wisdom are there?” Sentient beings with the capacity for liberation give rise to wisdom, feel the suffering of saṃsāra, and seek liberation. They therefore seek to receive the Buddha’s precepts, restraining body and mind in order to leave the sea of suffering. Such beings are beings of the “disposition for liberation.” When beings of the disposition for liberation make great vows to study the Buddha’s teaching, they become the Buddha’s disciples—sons of the Buddha.

Yet this is an expedient gateway for sentient beings who are first learning Buddhism, like the boat used to cross a great ocean. Once one has crossed the sea of suffering and reached the far shore of liberation, one must abandon the boat and go ashore. Here, the Buddha does not speak an expedient teaching, but directly points to the true meaning in a questioning tone: “Precepts, dispositions, and sons of the

Buddha”—How can there be precepts? How can there be dispositions? How can there be sons of the Buddha?

087. [How Can There Be Accomplishment and Treatises?] In response to “060. How many kinds of accomplishment are there? Why are they called treatises?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: “How many kinds of accomplishment are there? Why are they called treatises?”—When what is to be accomplished is brought to completion and systematic theories are formed, how many such theories are there? Why are these theories called “treatises”?

“Treatises” are one of the three baskets. The “three baskets” are the Sūtra Piṭaka, Vinaya Piṭaka, and Abhidharma Piṭaka. The Sūtra Piṭaka gathers the scriptures spoken by the Buddha. The Vinaya Piṭaka gathers the disciplinary regulations established by the Buddha. The Abhidharma Piṭaka consists of systematic theories formed when the Buddha’s disciples organize and summarize the Buddha’s many teachings. There are many such systematic theories, such as the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra and the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra. With excellent wisdom, the meanings of Buddhist scriptures are organized and systematized, elaborating what is concise into what is clear and detailed. Since this belongs to discursive exposition, it is called a “treatise.”

Yet to become immersed in these massive theoretical systems is no different from entering the sea to count its grains of sand. If one delays actual practice in order to study theory, one goes against the Buddha’s original intent in teaching the Dharma. Therefore, the Buddha asks in reply: “How can there be accomplishment and treatises?”—What is meant by accomplishing what is to be done? What is meant by systematic treatises?

088. [How Can There Be Teachers and Disciples?] In response to “066. How many kinds of disciples are there?” and “067. What is an ācārya?”

Ācārya is translated as “teacher of rules” and means an instructor or teacher. Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question, “How many kinds of disciples are there? What is an ācārya?” asks how many kinds of disciples and how many kinds of teachers there are.

When the World-Honored Śākyamuni first attained perfect awakening beneath the bodhi tree, he exclaimed three times, “Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful! All sentient beings alike possess the Tathāgata’s wisdom and virtuous characteristics. Yet because of deluded thoughts and attachments, they cannot realize them. If they are free of deluded thoughts, teacherless wisdom and natural wisdom will all appear.”

What is “teacherless wisdom”? Teacherless wisdom is the wisdom of awakening independently, without a teacher. The “Parable” chapter of the Lotus Sūtra says: “All-knowing wisdom, Buddha-wisdom, natural wisdom, and teacherless wisdom.” The first three kinds of wisdom are not obtained from a teacher; hence they are called “teacherless wisdom.” The realm of self-realization is one in which the speaker has no words and the observer has no seeing. It is not like an object in one’s hand that can be handed over to another; hence it is called “teacherless wisdom.”

Therefore, the Buddha asks Mahāmati Bodhisattva in reply: “How can there be teachers and disciples?”—What is meant by teachers? What is meant by disciples?

089. [The Many Kinds of Sentient Beings—How Then Do These Arise?] In response to “080. How do males, females, and those neither male nor female all come into being?”

There are five kinds of “non-males”: those non-male from birth, castrated non-males, jealous non-males, transformed non-males, and half non-males. “Transformed non-males” refers to those whose sex can change: upon encountering a male, they become female; upon encountering a female, they become male.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: “How do males, females, and those neither male nor female all come into being?”—In the world there are men, women, and others who are neither male nor female. How do all these arise?

The Buddha asks Mahāmati Bodhisattva in reply: “The many kinds of sentient beings—how then do these arise?”—It is not only males, females, and “non-males”! There are countless kinds of sentient beings. How then are all of these to be explained?

090. [What Is Food?] In response to “061. How does food arise, and how do the various desires arise?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: “How does food arise, and how do the various desires arise?” Here the Buddha replies: “What is food?”—What do you call food? Or, what food and non-food could there be? This brief sentence contains the meaning of the emptiness of the three wheels. What are the three wheels? They may be understood as subject, predicate, and object.

In the sixtieth answer above, the Buddha had already pointed out “the various desires of sentient beings,” emphasizing the concept of “sentient beings.” Sentient beings are the subject. When sentient beings eat, “eat” is the predicate and “food” is the object. In truth, there are originally no sentient beings, no eating, and no food; the three wheels are empty in themselves. The many forms of desire are all the emptiness of the three wheels.

091. [Intelligence, Māras, and Conceptual Construction] In response to “074. What is mindfulness and intelligence?” “070. How many kinds of māras and adherents of other teachings are there?” and “072. What is the measure of conceptual construction? I pray that you will explain it supremely.”

Conceptual construction means positing, establishing, or initiating; that is, propounding a theory.

The Buddha’s reply, “Intelligence, māras, and conceptual construction,” follows the preceding phrase, “What is food?” Together, they read: What is food? What is intelligence? What are māras? What is conceptual construction? Clearly, the phrase “intelligence, māras, and conceptual construction” asks in reply to Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s three questions.

092. [How Can There Be Trees and Vines?] In response to “075. What are forest trees, and what are creeping grasses?”

“Creeping” means “vines.” Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: “What are forest trees, and what are creeping grasses?”

The Buddha replied, “How can there be trees and vines?”—“What is meant by trees and vines?” Clearly, this too is a question in reply.

093. [Question of the Supreme Son: How Can There Be the Various Buddha Lands?] In response to “089. What are the forms of the sun and moon, Mount Sumeru and lotuses, Buddha lands with the supreme features of lions, worlds resting sideways or inverted, those like Indra’s net, or those entirely made of precious jewels, lutes, slender-waisted drums, and forms like various flowers; and those without the light of sun or moon, and innumerable others like these?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question is very long. In fact, it describes galaxies and celestial bodies of various shapes—a vast and magnificent scene. Yet all appearances are illusory; if one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata. In the Buddha’s single counter-question, “How can there be the various Buddha lands?” the meaning that “all appearances are non-appearances” is fully expressed.

“How can there be the various Buddha lands?” already asks Mahāmati Bodhisattva in reply, so why is there also the phrase “question of the Supreme Son”? “Supreme Son” praises Mahāmati Bodhisattva. As mentioned before, Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks questions on behalf of sentient beings.

Yet although the questions are raised by Mahāmati Bodhisattva, the object of the Buddha’s teaching is the Supreme Son—Mahāmati Bodhisattva. Thus there is no need for gradual and patient instruction at an elementary level; instead, the Buddha

directly accords with the fundamental meaning. Fundamentally, there is no meaning; where there is no meaning, there are immeasurable meanings. For beginners, selecting any one dharma from among immeasurable meanings is an expedient skillful means. Because Mahāmati Bodhisattva is the Supreme Son, the Buddha proceeds by counter-questioning throughout and goes directly to the source. As Chan Master Yongjia says in his Song of Enlightenment: “The Buddha has sealed the direct cutting-off of the source; I cannot pluck leaves and seek branches.”

In the one hundred and seventh answer below, the Buddha also responds to Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s long question. But by then the one hundred and eight questions are nearly finished, so the Buddha no longer asks in reply. At that point, he uses this long question as an example to tell Mahāmati Bodhisattva how the Dharma should be taught to beginning disciples of the Buddha.

094. [Ascetics and Prolonged Austerities] In response to “086. What are ascetics who undergo prolonged austerities, and how are they instructed?”

Following the preceding line, “How are there various buddha-lands?”, the line “How do immortals practice prolonged austerities?” means: What immortals? What longevity? What austerities?

With this line, the Buddha counters Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question: “How do immortals practice prolonged austerities? How do they give instruction?”

095. [What Is Lineage?] In response to: “085. What is the Śākya lineage? What is the cause of the Śākya lineage? What is the sugarcane lineage? May the Supreme One explain.”

The Scripture of Former Deeds says: King Mahākuśa became a royal sage and was shot by a hunter. His blood dripped onto the ground and gave rise to two sugarcane stalks. When the sun’s heat split them open, a boy and a girl emerged. The boy was named Good Birth and became the Sugarcane King. The Śākya clan descended from him.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks about the origin of the Śākya clan—the sugarcane lineage. The sugarcane clan was a very ancient lineage descended from sages. Yet this is plainly a notion of lineage.

All sentient beings can become Buddhas; Buddhahood is not confined to lineage. Therefore, the Buddha counters Mahāmati Bodhisattva by asking, “What is lineage?”

096. [From What Teacher Does One Receive Learning?] In response to: “082. By what Dharma does a Chan master establish what kind of people?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks about Chan: “By what Dharma does a Chan master establish what kind of people?” That is, by what method does a Chan master instruct people? What kind of people can he lead to realize the Way?

Chan is the original landscape: inherently pure and complete just as it is, immediately present. It is not obtained from a teacher and is not attained through learning. Therefore, the Buddha counters: “From what teacher does one receive learning?”

097. [What Is Ugliness?] In response to: “077. What is lowliness and ugliness, and what causes it?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks: “What is lowliness and ugliness, and what causes it?” That is, what is mean or lowly? What is ugly? What causes people to be lowly and ugly?

The World-Honored One replies, “What is ugliness?” What is ugly? Clearly, this counter-question is intended to show that an unattractive appearance is not necessarily true ugliness; impurity of mind is true ugliness.

098. [How Do People Practice?] In response to: “081. Why does practice regress? Why does the aspiration to practice arise?”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks: “Why does practice regress? Why does the aspiration to practice arise?” That is, why does the mind of practice decline? Why does a person give rise to the aspiration to practice?

The World-Honored One replies, “How do people practice?” What “people”? What “practice”? This counter-question fully reveals the truth of the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena.

099. [Why Is There No Awakening in the Desire Realm, but Awakening in Akaniṣṭha?] In response to: “094. Why is perfect awakening not attained in the desire realm? Why is bodhi attained, free of desire, in the Ultimate Form Realm?”

Akaniṣṭha, also rendered Akaniṣṭa, means “Ultimate Form.” Earlier, we mentioned the three realms of desire, form, and formlessness. The eighteen heavens of the form realm are now listed below:

The three heavens of the first dhyāna: Brahmā’s Retinue, Brahmā’s Ministers, and Great Brahmā.

The three heavens of the second dhyāna: Lesser Light, Immeasurable Light, and Light-Sound.

The three heavens of the third dhyāna: Lesser Purity, Immeasurable Purity, and Pervasive Purity.

The nine heavens of the fourth dhyāna: Merit-Birth, Love of Merit, Extensive Fruition, No Thought, No Affliction, No Heat, Good Seeing, Good Manifestation, and Ultimate Form Heaven (Akaniṣṭha Heaven).

Akaniṣṭha Heaven is the highest heaven in the form realm.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks: "Why is perfect awakening not attained in the desire realm? Why is bodhi attained, free of desire, in the Ultimate Form Realm?" That is, why does one not become a Buddha in the desire realm but become a Buddha in Ultimate Form Heaven? What Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks about is the sambhogakāya Buddha. (Śākyamuni, the World-Honored One who attained Buddhahood beneath the bodhi tree, is a nirmāṇakāya Buddha.)

The Record of Wanling by Chan Master Huangbo contains the following exchange:

Question: What is Buddha?

The Master said: "Mind itself is Buddha. No-mind is the Way. Simply do not give rise to thoughts and discriminations of existence and nonexistence, long and short, self and other, subject and object, and the like. Mind itself is Buddha, and Buddha itself is mind. Mind is like empty space. Thus it is said: 'The true dharmakāya of Buddha is like empty space.' There is no need to seek elsewhere; all seeking is suffering. Even if, over kalpas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, one practiced the six perfections and myriad practices and attained Buddhahood and bodhi, it would still not be ultimate. Why? Because it belongs to conditioned production through causes and conditions. When causes and conditions come to an end, it returns to impermanence. Thus it is said: 'The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who teaches the Dharma.' Simply recognize your own mind. With no self and no person, you have originally been Buddha."

To Mahāmati Bodhisattva's question, the Buddha replies: "Why is there no awakening in the desire realm, but awakening in Akaniṣṭha?" How could there be no awakening in the desire realm? What do you mean by becoming a Buddha in Ultimate Form Heaven? The Buddha's counter-question fully reveals the dharmakāya Buddha. The dharmakāya pervades all places: among sages it does not increase, and among ordinary beings it does not diminish.

100. [What Are Worldly Spiritual Powers?] In response to: "100. What are worldly spiritual powers?"

101. [What Is a Bhikṣu?] In response to: "098. What are the divisions of Vinaya bhikṣus, and on what causes and conditions do they depend?"

102. [What Is a Nirmāṇakāya Buddha?] In response to: “090. What is a nirmāṇakāya Buddha?”

103. [What Is a Sambhogakāya Buddha?] In response to: “091. What is a Buddha born of recompense?”

104. [What Is a Tathatā Buddha?] In response to: “092. What is a tathatā Buddha?”

105. [The Buddha of Equal Wisdom] In response to: “093. What is a Buddha of wisdom?” and “068. How many kinds of Buddha are there?”

106. [What Is the Community of Monks?] In response to: “103. How many kinds of saṅgha are there?” and “104. What is a corrupted saṅgha?”

In the above seven replies, the Buddha counters, one by one, questions concerning worldly spiritual powers, pure bhikṣus, nirmāṇakāya Buddhas, sambhogakāya Buddhas, tathatā Buddhas, Buddhas of equality, Buddhas of wisdom, and the many kinds of saṅgha. Here the Buddha’s counter-questions come to an end. Of the 108 replies, two remain below, and in these the Buddha no longer responds with counter-questions.

107. [When a Buddhist Disciple Asks Thus: Lutes, Waist Drums, Lotuses, and Buddha-Lands Without Light]

In response to: “089. What are the forms of the sun and moon, Mount Sumeru and lotuses? What are buddha-lands with the magnificent marks of lions, those resting sideways and covering worlds, those like Indra’s net, or those entirely made of precious treasures, lutes, slender waist drums, and flowers of various forms, or those without the light of sun and moon—such immeasurable varieties?”

The Buddha had already answered this question in the ninety-third reply, but here he answers again: “When a Buddhist disciple asks thus: lutes, waist drums, lotuses, and buddha-lands without light.”

The ninety-third reply was addressed to a “supreme disciple,” whereas here it says, “When a Buddhist disciple asks thus.” That is, if a beginning Buddhist disciple raises such questions, how should one answer? One should answer in this way: “Lutes, waist drums, lotuses, and buddha-lands without light”—one should explain in detail the causes and conditions by which a lute-shaped buddha-land comes about, the causes and conditions by which a waist-drum-shaped buddha-land is

formed, the causes and conditions by which a lotus-shaped buddha-land is formed, the causes and conditions for buddha-lands with light, and the causes and conditions for buddha-lands without light, and so forth.

To summarize the foregoing: “When a supreme disciple asks, ‘How are there various buddha-lands?’”—if a supreme disciple asks such a question, counter him by asking, “How are there various buddha-lands?”

“When a Buddhist disciple asks thus: lutes, waist drums, lotuses, and buddha-lands without light”—if a beginning Buddhist disciple asks such a question, explain to him in detail the various differing causes and conditions.

108. [There Are Seven Mind-Grounds]

In response to: “102. What are the seven grounds?” The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva that the seven grounds are mind-grounds.

The “seven grounds” spoken of here differ from the “ten bhūmis.” Or rather, they are an expanded yet abbreviated form of the ten bhūmis: the first two grounds do not yet reach the first of the ten bhūmis, while the last ground has reached Buddhahood. They are listed below:

1. The ground of lineage.

2. The ground of understanding and practice.

3. The ground of purified mind, corresponding to the first bhūmi, the Ground of Joy.

4. The ground of the traces of practice, corresponding to the second through seventh bhūmis.

5. The ground of certainty, corresponding to the eighth bhūmi, the Immovable Ground.

6. The ground of certain practice, corresponding to the ninth bhūmi.

7. The ultimate ground, also called the ground of completion, corresponding to the tenth bhūmi through Buddhahood.

[All That Has Been Asked Is in Accordance with Reality; These and Many Other Matters Are What Buddhist Disciples Should Ask.]

The 108 replies have now been fully completed. The Buddha summarizes Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s questions: “All that has been asked is in accordance with reality”—what you have asked is all in accordance with reality; these are all perplexities that sentient beings may actually have. “These and many other matters are what Buddhist disciples should ask”—there are also many matters you did not ask about, such as “the various mountains, the ground of Mount Sumeru, the measure of the great ocean, the sun, and the moon.” These too are matters that Buddhist disciples may ask about.

[Each Corresponds to Its Respective Mark. Free from the Errors of All Views, the Siddhānta Transcends Speech. I Shall Now Set Forth and Establish the Statements in Sequence.]

After summarizing Mahāmati Bodhisattva's questions, the Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva how these questions should be answered.

"Each corresponds to its respective mark." What is meant by "corresponds"? The Chan school calls it "the case and lid fitting one another." A case is a box, and a lid is the cover of a box; it is a metaphor for the precise fit of a lid over its box. "Each corresponds to its respective mark" means that every answer is precisely fitted to its respective question.

"Free from the errors of all views": here, "errors" refers to faults. "The errors of all views" means the many kinds of mistaken views. "Free from the errors of all views"—when answering questions, one should avoid the many kinds of mistaken views.

The four siddhāntas are the four kinds of teachings by which the Buddha guides sentient beings:

1. The worldly siddhānta: "World" refers to time, and "realm" to space; thus, "world" means time and space. Sentient beings in different times and places each have different capacities. In accordance with their respective characteristics, the Buddha expounds teachings to them in different stages, causing them to give rise to joyful minds. This is called the worldly siddhānta.

2. The siddhānta for individuals: When the Buddha expounds the Dharma, he first observes the greater or lesser capacities of sentient beings and the shallowness or depth of their seeds from past lives. He then teaches them according to what is suitable for their capacities, enabling them to develop right faith and increase their wholesome roots. This is called the siddhānta for individuals.

3. The therapeutic siddhānta: If sentient beings have excessive desire, the Buddha teaches them to cultivate contemplation of impurity; if they have excessive anger, he teaches them to cultivate a mind of loving-kindness and compassion; if they have excessive ignorance, he teaches them to contemplate causes and conditions. He prescribes different Dharma medicines for different illnesses of the mind, matching the medicine to the illness and dispensing it widely to sentient beings. This is called the therapeutic siddhānta.

4. The siddhānta of the supreme meaning: The supreme meaning is the principle and essence of suchness. If sentient beings' conditions for liberation have ripened, the Buddha seals mind with mind, enabling them to directly realize the noble path. This is called the siddhānta of the supreme meaning.

Here, “the siddhānta is beyond words and speech” clearly refers to the siddhānta of the supreme meaning. The supreme meaning is beyond words and speech.

The Diamond Sūtra says: “Subhūti, what do you think? Has the Tathāgata attained anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi? Does the Tathāgata expound any Dharma?” Subhūti replied, “As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha has said, there is no fixed dharma called anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi, nor is there any fixed dharma that the Tathāgata can expound. Why? The dharmas expounded by the Tathāgata can neither be grasped nor spoken of; they are neither dharmas nor non-dharmas.”

Fu Dashi’s verse says: “Bodhi is beyond words and speech; from the beginning, no one has attained it. One must rely on the principle of the twofold emptiness to realize the Dharma King’s body. Whatever involves a mind is deluded; only nonattachment is called true. If one awakens to neither dharmas nor non-dharmas, one roams freely beyond the six sense objects.”

“I shall now set forth and establish the statements in sequence.”

I shall now establish, in sequence, one hundred and eight statements and set before you the words that answer these questions.

[Children of the Buddha, listen attentively: the one hundred and eight statements set forth here are as spoken by all Buddhas.]

“The one hundred and eight statements set forth here” refers to the one hundred and eight statements explained below.

“Children of the Buddha, listen attentively: the one hundred and eight statements set forth here are as spoken by all Buddhas.”—Listen carefully! The following one hundred and eight statements are very important. When the Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time expound the Dharma, this is how they all speak.

III. One Hundred and Eight Sentences

In the seven-roll version of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, there is a passage here that reads: At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, what are the one hundred and eight statements?” The Buddha said: “Mahāmati, they are such statements as ‘the statement of arising is not the statement of arising’ . . .”

001. [The Statement of Non-Arising Is the Statement of Arising]

Here, “the statement of non-arising is the statement of arising” is also “the statement of arising is not the statement of arising.” It means that sentient beings

falsely give rise to the view of arising with regard to the unarisen realm of suchness. What is originally unborn is regarded as arising; to dismantle this view, it is called "the statement of non-arising is the statement of arising."

The woman Āṃtī asked Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva: "Although one clearly knows the principle that 'arising is non-arising,' why is one nevertheless carried along by the current of birth and death?"

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva said: "One's strength is not yet sufficient."

002. [The Statement of Permanence Is the Statement of Impermanence]

If one conceives of dharmas as arising, then there is permanence. Because there is no arising, they are called impermanent. Ordinary beings regard the "abiding" in "arising, abiding, change, and cessation" as permanent, but in fact abiding too is impermanent.

Śākyamuni, the World-Honored One, recited this verse on impermanence: "All conditioned phenomena are impermanent; they are dharmas of arising and ceasing. When arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent cessation is bliss."

003. [The Statement of Characteristics Is the Statement of Non-Characteristics]

This statement refers to the "characteristic of essence." Item 028, "the statement of characteristics is not the statement of characteristics," refers to distinguishing characteristics; item 075, "the statement of characteristics is not the statement of characteristics," refers to dharma characteristics.

Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva, the fourteenth patriarch of India, manifested on the seat a freely functioning body, like a full moon. The assembly could hear only his voice and could not see his body.

At that time Kāṇadeva, who later became the fifteenth patriarch, asked the assembly: "Do you recognize this appearance?"

The others said: "Our eyes see nothing. How could we distinguish it or recognize it?"

Deva said: "This is the Venerable One manifesting the characteristic of the essence of Buddha-nature in order to show it to us. Why is it called the characteristic of the essence of Buddha-nature? Because in the samādhi of non-characteristics, his form is like a full moon; the meaning of Buddha-nature is vast, open, empty, and luminous."

After Kāṇadeva had finished speaking, Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva concealed the lunar appearance, resumed his seat, and spoke this verse: "The body manifests the

appearance of a full moon, thereby expressing the essence of all Buddhas. In teaching the Dharma it has no form; through functioning it reveals that it is neither sound nor form."

"The body manifests the appearance of a full moon, thereby expressing the essence of all Buddhas"—this is the statement of the characteristic of essence. "In teaching the Dharma it has no form; through functioning it reveals that it is neither sound nor form"—this is the statement of no characteristic of essence.

004. [The Statement of Abiding and Change Is Not the Statement of Abiding and Change]

"Abiding and change" means "arising, abiding, change, and cessation." Because there is arising, there is abiding; because there is abiding, there is change; because there is change, there is cessation. "Abiding" means abiding in the world. "Change" means changing from youth to old age, moment by moment, until death.

Guishan asked Yangshan: "How do you understand arising, abiding, change, and cessation?"

Yangshan said: "When a single thought arises, I do not see any arising, abiding, change, or cessation."

Guishan said: "How can you reject the Dharma?" (How can you exclude the principles of the Buddhadharma?)

Yangshan said: "What did the Venerable just ask?"

Guishan said: "Arising, abiding, change, and cessation."

Yangshan said: "And you call that rejecting the Dharma." (That there is no arising, abiding, change, or cessation is precisely the principle of the Buddhadharma, yet you call it rejecting that principle.)

005. [The Statement of an Instant Is Not the Statement of an Instant]

Chan Master Fayan Wenyi gave this instruction: ". . . Not knowing the fundamental reality, one cultivates step by step: sixty kalpas over three lives, a hundred kalpas over four lives, continuing thus until the fruition is fulfilled after three asaṃkhyeya kalpas. Yet the ancients said: 'It is not equal to the non-arising of dependent origination in a single thought, which transcends the views of the provisional teachings of the three vehicles.' They also said: 'With a snap of the fingers, eighty thousand Dharma gates are perfectly accomplished; in an instant, the three asaṃkhyeya kalpas are extinguished.' This too must be thoroughly investigated. If it is so, how much effort does it require?"

Chan Master Longya Zhichai composed this verse: “With a snap of the fingers, eighty thousand Dharma gates are perfectly accomplished; in an instant, the three asaṃkhyeya kalpas are extinguished. If you can see it and put it into practice, then when strong, walk in meditation; when tired, rest. But if you cannot understand it, it is like two cormorants carrying a turtle.”

How much effort two cormorants carrying a turtle must exert!

006. [The Statement of Self-Nature Is Apart from the Statement of Self-Nature]

That is, “the statement of self-nature is not the statement of self-nature.”

The Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng, said: “The three bodies are these: the pure dharmakāya is your nature; the complete sambhogakāya is your wisdom; the countless nirmāṇakāyas are your conduct. If, apart from intrinsic nature, one speaks separately of the three bodies, this is called having bodies but no wisdom. If one realizes that the three bodies have no self-nature, this is called the bodhi of the four wisdoms. Listen to my verse: ‘Intrinsic nature contains the three bodies; when it is illumined, it becomes the four wisdoms. Without departing from the conditions of seeing and hearing, one transcends them and ascends to the Buddha-ground. I now speak this for you: believe it truly, and you will never again be deluded. Do not imitate those who chase after things, speaking of bodhi all day long.’”

007. [The Statement of Emptiness Is the Statement of Non-Emptiness]

Chan Master Jingyin Jicheng penetrated the five teachings with one shout. This is how he explained “the statement of emptiness is the statement of non-emptiness”: “The teaching of the Lesser Vehicle has the meaning of existence; the initial teaching of the Mahāyāna has the meaning of emptiness; the final teaching of the Mahāyāna has the meaning of neither existence nor emptiness; the sudden teaching of the Mahāyāna has the meaning of both existence and emptiness; the perfect teaching of the One Vehicle has the meaning of neither existence yet existence, neither emptiness yet emptiness. Such is my single shout: it can enter not only the five teachings, but also all crafts and arts and the teachings of the various philosophers.”

008. [The Statement of Cessation Is the Statement of Non-Cessation]

When Patriarch Bodhidharma first resided at Shaolin Monastery for nine years, he taught the Second Patriarch: “Externally cease all conditions; inwardly let the mind not pant. When the mind is like a wall, one may enter the Way.” The Second Patriarch, Huike, spoke in various ways of mind and intrinsic nature. Patriarch Bodhidharma merely pointed out where he was mistaken and did not explain to him the essence of the no-thought mind. Then one day Huike said, “I have ceased all conditions.” Bodhidharma asked, “Have you fallen into cessation and annihilation?”

Huike said, “I have not fallen into cessation and annihilation.” Bodhidharma said, “This is the mind-essence transmitted by all Buddhas. Do not doubt it any further.”

009. [The Statement of This Shore Is Not the Statement of This Shore]

“The statement of this shore is not the statement of this shore” means the statement of this shore and the statement of the other shore. This shore is the near shore of saṃsāra; the other shore is the far shore of liberation.

When Chan Master Gui Ren of Lingquan in Luojing first arrived at Shushan, he asked Chan Master Shushan: “‘When a withered tree blooms, only then does it accord with it.’ Is this a statement of this shore or a statement of the other shore?” Chan Master Shushan said: “It too is a statement of this shore.” Chan Master Lingquan then asked: “What is a statement of the other shore?” Chan Master Shushan said: “A stone ox breathes forth the mist of three spring months; a numinous sparrow does not perch in a forest without shadows.”

“When a withered tree blooms, only then does it accord with it” means that wondrous functioning arises from the quiescent essence. Does this express the realm of saṃsāra, or the realm of liberation? Chan Master Shushan pointed out that it still expresses the realm of saṃsāra.

Chan Master Lingquan therefore asked: “Then what would express the realm of liberation?” Chan Master Shushan told him: “A stone ox breathes forth the mist of three spring months; a numinous sparrow does not perch in a forest without shadows.” In fact, “a stone ox breathes forth the mist of three spring months” conveys the same realm as “a withered tree blooms.” The crucial phrase is “a numinous sparrow does not perch in a forest without shadows.”

On one side are “withered” and “the stone ox”; on the other are “numinous” and “the numinous sparrow.” The former statement is still said to express the realm of saṃsāra because it has not left behind the opposition of arising and ceasing. The latter statement indicates that if one is speaking of luminous Buddha-nature, it cannot be withered or deathly still: a numinous sparrow does not perch in a forest without shadows. This in fact expresses the realm in which arising and ceasing are themselves quiescent cessation, saṃsāra is itself liberation, and birth and death are themselves nirvāṇa. From their very origin, all dharmas are ever of the character of quiescent cessation; when spring arrives, a hundred flowers are fragrant, and orioles sing among the willows.

Let us give another example:

Chan Master Xingyang Qingpou fell seriously ill. His teacher, Chan Master Dayang Jingxuan, asked him: “This body is like a bubble, an illusion; within the bubble and

illusion, great affairs are accomplished. Without this bubble and illusion, great affairs cannot be accomplished. If great affairs are to be accomplished, recognize this bubble and illusion. How is this?" Xingyang said: "This is still an affair of this shore."

Chan Master Dayang then asked: "How is the affair of the other shore?" Chan Master Xingyang said: "The red wheel shines brilliantly over all the earth; flowers are not planted on the ocean floor." Chan Master Dayang smiled with satisfaction: "So awake and clear you are!" Chan Master Xingyang sang out: "You thought I had forgotten." When he had finished singing, he entered parinirvāṇa.

Xingyang Qingpou, the outstanding disciple of Chan Master Dayang Jingxuan, entered parinirvāṇa while still young. Before his parinirvāṇa, Master Dayang went to visit him and reminded him that this body is as insubstantial and unreal as a bubble, and that one merely borrows this illusory body to realize the unborn and undying intrinsic nature of suchness.

To realize suchness, one must see through this body, which is as insubstantial and unreal as a bubble. Chan Master Xingyang was one who truly had clear eyes, and he immediately pointed out: "Master, what you are saying now is still an affair of the shore of saṃsāra."

Master Dayang was delighted upon hearing this and then tested him further: "How is the affair of the other shore?" Chan Master Xingyang immediately answered: "The red wheel shines brilliantly over all the earth; flowers are not planted on the ocean floor."

Master Dayang was deeply satisfied and praised him: "So you understand this clearly!" Chan Master Xingyang sang lightly: "You thought I would forget under these circumstances." When he had finished singing, he entered parinirvāṇa. Does not Chan Master Xingyang's statement of the other shore—"The red wheel shines brilliantly over all the earth; flowers are not planted on the ocean floor"—express the same realm as "A stone ox breathes forth the mist of three spring months; a numinous sparrow does not perch in a forest without shadows"?

010. [The Statement of the Middle Is Not the Statement of the Middle]

The so-called "statement of the middle" is a statement that leaves the two sides behind. Yet if one overemphasizes leaving the two sides, one thereby forcibly establishes a middle, creating two new sides: one side is "the two sides," and the other is "the middle." In other words, by overemphasizing leaving the two sides, one is precisely unable to leave the two sides behind.

The so-called "neither-middle proposition" means that one must also leave behind these newly formed two-sided propositions. Yet if one places too much emphasis on

this new leaving behind, will it not produce still newer two-sided propositions? It will. Thus, even if one speaks at great length, or invokes the four propositions and a hundred negations, one has not left behind the two sides. Then are there no utterances that leave behind the two sides? There are. Consider the following examples:

A monk asked Chan Master Zhishong of Sanjiao, “Do not establish either of the two sides; do not posit a middle way. What is the meaning of this?” Chan Master Zhishong said, “Guangnan produces ivory.” The monk said, “I do not understand. Please point directly.” The master said, “A leather ball in a foreign land costs eight hundred.”

Chan Master Weizhao of Baofeng gave a teaching in the hall: “When neither of the two sides is established and the middle way is not posited, how is it?” Raising his staff, he said, “The embroidered mandarin ducks are for you to see; the golden needle is not handed to another.”

011. [The Proposition of Permanence Is Not the Proposition of Permanence]

The “proposition of permanence and impermanence” discussed in the second proposition above refers to ordinary beings who take the “abiding” in arising, abiding, change, and cessation to be permanent. This proposition, “the proposition of permanence is not the proposition of permanence,” refers to non-Buddhists who take the four great elements to be permanent in nature.

A non-Buddhist ascetic asked Śākyamuni Buddha, “Are all dharmas permanent?”

The World-Honored One did not reply.

He then asked, “Are all dharmas impermanent?”

Again, there was no reply.

The ascetic said, “The World-Honored One possesses all-knowing wisdom. Why do you not answer me?”

The World-Honored One said, “All that you ask is mere speculative discourse.”

012. [The Proposition of Conditions Is Not the Proposition of Conditions]

The transmission verse of Venerable Saṅghanandi, the seventeenth patriarch of India, says: “The mind-ground is originally unborn; the causal ground arises from conditions. Seeds and conditions do not obstruct one another; flowers and fruits are likewise so.”

The transmission verse of Venerable Gayāśata, the eighteenth patriarch of India, says: “Where there are seeds, there is a mind-ground; causes and conditions can bring forth sprouts. They do not obstruct one another in relation to conditions; when birth occurs, there is no birth.”

013. [The Proposition of Cause Is Not the Proposition of Cause]

The Treatise on the Middle Way, chapter “Examination of the Four Noble Truths,” says: “Whatever dharmas arise through causes and conditions, I say are emptiness. They are also provisionally named, and this is also the meaning of the middle way.”

014. [The Proposition of Afflictions Is Not the Proposition of Afflictions]

Chan Master Zhaozhou gave a teaching in the hall: “It is like a bright pearl in the palm of the hand: when a Hu person comes, a Hu person appears; when a Han person comes, a Han person appears. This old monk uses a blade of grass as a sixteen-foot golden body, and uses a sixteen-foot golden body as a blade of grass. Buddha is affliction; affliction is Buddha.”

A monk asked, “Whose affliction is Buddha?”

The master said, “The affliction of every person.”

The monk said, “How can one be free of it?”

The master said, “What use is there in seeking to be free?”

015. [The Proposition of Attachment Is Not the Proposition of Attachment]

Venerable Kumāralāta was formerly a being in the Heaven of Sovereign Freedom. Seeing a bodhisattva’s jeweled necklace, he suddenly gave rise to attachment and fell into rebirth in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three.

The Inscription on Trust in Mind says: “The supreme Way is not difficult; it only rejects choosing and rejecting. Do not hate or love, and all will be clearly understood.”

016. [The Proposition of Expedient Means Is Not the Proposition of Expedient Means]

Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang asked Chan Master Hongbian of Jianfu, “What are expedient means?” The Chan master said, “Expedient means are the skillful gateway of concealing the real and covering over appearances. In receiving those of middling and lesser capacities, one employs indirect guidance and instruction; this is called expedient means. If, in speaking to those of superior capacities, one sets aside expedient means and speaks only of the unsurpassed Way, this too is talk of

expedient means. Even the profound words of the patriarchs, which forget accomplishment and cut off conceptualization, do not go beyond the traces of expedient means."

Minister Lu asked Nanquan, "Please, Reverend, teach the Dharma to the assembly." Nanquan said, "How would you have this old monk teach it?" Lu said, "Does the Reverend not have expedient means?" Nanquan said, "Tell me, what is lacking?"

017. [The Proposition of Skill Is Not the Proposition of Skill]

"Skill" means cleverness; "not skill" means clumsiness. There was a scholar studying Chan named Zhang Zhuo. Taking the character zhuo, "clumsy," as his cue, Chan Master Shishuang spoke of the proposition of skill and not skill:

The scholar Zhang Zhuo visited Chan Master Shishuang. Shishuang asked, "What is your surname, sir?"

He said, "My surname is Zhang, and my given name is Zhuo."

Shishuang said, "Even cleverness cannot be found. From where, then, does clumsiness arise?"

At these words, the scholar Zhang Zhuo's mind opened and he understood. He then presented this verse: "Bright, quiescent illumination pervades sands as numerous as the Ganges; ordinary beings, sages, and all sentient life share my one home. When not a single thought arises, the whole essence manifests; as soon as the six sense faculties stir, clouds obscure it. To cut off afflictions only increases the illness; to seek suchness is likewise deviation. Following worldly conditions without obstruction, nirvāṇa and birth and death are equally flowers in empty space."

Now listen to Chan Master Zhenxie's proposition of skill and not skill:

Chan Master Qingliao of Zhenxie gave a teaching in the hall: "To exhaust subtleties and lose the root is to miss the essence and lose the principle. One phrase cuts off the stream, reaching the utmost depths of the abyss. Therefore, in the hidden place of the golden needle, its point is not revealed; when the jade thread passes through, it subtly displays a distinctive radiance. Even so, this is still the mutual illumination of duality. Tell me, when neither skill nor clumsiness reaches, how is one to entrust oneself?"

After a long pause, he said, "Where vines and clouds flourish, green shade joins together; among high and low cliffside trees, emerald depths lie locked."

018. [The Proposition of Purity Is Not the Proposition of Purity]

Master Hanshan dreamed that he ascended to Tuṣita, where Maitreya taught him the Dharma: “Discrimination is consciousness. Non-discrimination is wisdom. Relying on consciousness brings defilement; relying on wisdom brings purity. Defilement entails birth and death; purity has no Buddhas.”

A monk asked Yunmen, “What is the pure dharmakāya?” Yunmen said, “A flower-and-herb railing.”

While Zhaozhou was sweeping the ground, a monk asked, “Reverend, you are a great spiritual guide! Why are you sweeping the ground?” Zhaozhou said, “Dust comes from outside.” The monk said, “Since this is a pure monastery, why is there dust?” Zhaozhou said, “There is another speck, too!”

Because a monk asked, “What is the pure dharmakāya?” Chan Master Siming of Haozhou said, “Maggots in excrement, their heads appearing and disappearing.”

019. [The Proposition of Formation Is Not the Proposition of Formation]

“Formation” is opposed to “destruction”; “not formation” is destruction.

Chan Master Mazu Daoyi of Jiangxi asked Huairang, “The Way is not form or appearance; how can it be seen?” Huairang said, “The dharma eye of the mind-ground can see the Way, and formless samādhi is likewise so.” The master asked, “Is there formation and destruction?” Huairang said, “If one sees the Way in terms of formation and destruction, gathering and dispersal, one does not see the Way. Listen to my verse: ‘The mind-ground contains all seeds; encountering moisture, they all sprout. The flower of samādhi is formless—what destruction is there, and what formation?’”

Case 29 of The Blue Cliff Record relates: A monk asked Dasui, “When the kalpa fire blazes and the great thousandfold world is entirely destroyed, is this destroyed or not?” Dasui said, “Destroyed.” The monk said, “Then does it go along with that?” Dasui said, “It goes along with that.”

Later, a monk asked the head monk of Xiushan, “When the kalpa fire blazes and the great thousandfold world is entirely destroyed, is this destroyed or not?” The head monk said, “Not destroyed.” The monk said, “Why is it not destroyed?” The head monk said, “Because it is identical with the great thousandfold world.”

Yuanwu said, “Now you must not understand it as destruction, nor must you understand it as non-destruction. How, ultimately, do you understand it? Open your eyes wide and look!”

020. [The Proposition of Metaphor Is Not the Proposition of Metaphor]

The Lotus Sūtra says: “The Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, employ various causes and conditions, metaphors and verbal expressions, and expedient means to teach the Dharma.”

“Metaphors and verbal expressions” are the proposition of metaphor; “teaching the Dharma through expedient means” is the proposition of not metaphor.

021. [The Proposition of Disciples Is Not the Proposition of Disciples]

At the assembly before entering nirvāṇa, the World-Honored One stroked his chest and addressed the assembly: “You should carefully contemplate my body of burnished purple-gold color and look upon it to your full satisfaction, lest you later regret it. If you say that I enter extinction, you are not my disciples; if you say that I do not enter extinction, you are likewise not my disciples.”

022. [The Proposition of the Master Is Not the Proposition of the Master]

Yantou, together with Xuefeng and Qinshan, took leave of Deshan. Deshan asked, “Where are you going?”

They said, “We are temporarily taking leave of you, Reverend, to go down the mountain.”

Deshan said, “What will you do in the future?”

Yantou said, “I will not forget the Reverend.”

Deshan said, “On what grounds do you say this?”

Yantou said, “Have you not heard it said: ‘If one’s wisdom equals that of one’s teacher, one lacks half the teacher’s virtue; only when one’s wisdom surpasses that of one’s teacher is one fit to receive the transmission’?”

“I will not forget the Reverend”—the proposition of the master; “one’s wisdom surpasses that of one’s teacher”—the proposition of not master.

023. [The Proposition of Buddha-Nature Is Not the Proposition of Buddha-Nature]

The Essential Collection of Sūtras on the Bodhisattva Path of Mahāyāna Practice says:

At that time, the elder Vimalakīrti said to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, “You clearly understand the Tathāgata-nature. What do you think? What is called the seed?” Mañjuśrī replied, “…Good man, to speak briefly and essentially, the sixty-two views and all afflictions are the Tathāgata-nature.”

Then Vimalakīrti asked, “For what reason do you say that all afflictions are Buddha-nature?” Mañjuśrī replied, “…Good man, just as one cannot obtain a priceless jewel without entering the waters of the four great oceans, so too, good man, one cannot obtain the jewel of Buddha-nature without entering the great ocean of afflictions. Know that the seed-nature of bodhi originally comes from within afflictions.”

024. [The Proposition of the Three Vehicles Is Not the Proposition of the Three Vehicles]

The Lotus Sūtra says: “In the Buddha lands of the ten directions, there is only the Dharma of the One Vehicle; there is neither a second nor a third, except where the Buddha teaches through expedient means.” It also says, “By the power of expedient means, the Buddhas and Tathāgatas distinguish and teach three within the One Buddha Vehicle.”

Distinguishing and teaching three is the proposition of the three vehicles; neither a second nor a third is the proposition of not the three vehicles.

025. [The Proposition of All That Exists Is Not the Proposition of All That Exists]

“All that exists” means the many things that exist. The Diamond Sūtra says: “All appearances are illusory. If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata.”

“All appearances” is the proposition of all that exists; “all appearances are non-appearances” is the proposition of not all that exists.

026. [Vow Statement and Non-Vow Statement]

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch says:

The governor again asked, “I often see monastics and laypeople reciting Amitābha Buddha’s name and aspiring to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. Please tell me, Master: can they be reborn there? I ask you to dispel my doubts.”

The Master said, “… Ordinary deluded people do not understand their own nature and do not recognize the Pure Land within themselves; they make vows for the East or for the West. For awakened people, every place is the same. Therefore, the Buddha said, ‘Wherever one dwells, one is always at peace and ease.’ Governor, if your mind-ground is free of unwholesomeness, the West is not far from here. But if you harbor an unwholesome mind, it will be difficult to attain rebirth through Buddha-recitation.”

027. [Three Wheels Statement and Non-Three-Wheels Statement]

The Madhyamakāvatāra says: “Even if one dedicates [the merit] to the great bodhi of equal enlightenment, so long as the three wheels remain, it is still worldly. The Buddha said that if those are unobtainable, this is supramundane pāramitā.”

Dharma Master Fazun explained: “The three wheels are the one who endures, the object endured, and the act of forbearance. If one is attached to the three wheels, then, although one dedicates [the merit] to unsurpassed bodhi, it is still not supramundane. If the three wheels are unobtainable, then it is supramundane.”

028. [Appearance Statement and Non-Appearance Statement] 003. The appearance statement and non-appearance statement refer to “essential appearance”; here they refer to “indicative appearance”; 075. The appearance statement and non-appearance statement refer to “dharma characteristics.”

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “The teachings of the sūtras are like a finger pointing at the moon. If one sees the moon, one understands that what was indicated is, after all, not the moon.” (The teachings of the sūtras are the scriptural teachings.)

A monk asked Chan Master Xiaoyue of Letan in Hongzhou, “‘The teachings of the sūtras are like a finger pointing at the moon’—what exactly does the finger point to?”

The Master said, “Look higher.”

The monk said, “Before dawn breaks, everyone gazes expectantly; once day has dawned, it is merely ordinary.”

The Master said, “In your old age, ghosts are making sport of you.”

“The teachings of the sūtras”—an indicative-appearance statement; “after all, not the moon”—a non-indicative-appearance statement.

029. [Category Statement and Non-Category Statement]

The subtitle of this sūtra, “A Chapter on the Mind of All Buddha-Speech,” is a category statement, indicating that this sūtra has categories into which it may be divided.

Yet the entire sūtra has only one chapter, which is equivalent to having no categories into which it may be divided. Thus, “A Chapter on the Mind of All Buddha-Speech” is also a non-category statement.

A monk asked Master Wansui of Zhenzhou, “The assembly has gathered. What should be discussed?”

The Master said, “The first chapter, the introductory chapter.” (Category statement)

Guizong Rou commented separately, “Having made your bows, go on your way.” (Non-category statement)

030. [No Statement and Non-No Statement]

This statement has been added in accordance with the seven-fascicle version of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra.

A monk asked Chan Master Zhaozhou, “Does a dog have buddha-nature or not?”

The Master said, “No!”

The monk said, “From all Buddhas above down to ants below, all have buddha-nature. Why does a dog alone not have it?”

The Master said, “Because it has karmic consciousness-nature.”

031. [Having Statement and Non-Having Statement]

This statement has been added in accordance with the seven-fascicle version of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra.

Another monk asked, “Does a dog have buddha-nature or not?”

The Master said, “It does.”

The monk said, “Since it has buddha-nature, why has it deliberately entered this skin bag?”

The Master said, “Because it knowingly commits the offense!”

032. [Both Statement and Non-Both Statement]

Chan Master Wenyan of Guangfeng Monastery on Mount Yunmen in Shaozhou gave this instruction: “You may understand Buddha Dharma as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, but on the tip of a hundred grasses, speak a single phrase of the Way.”

He answered on his own behalf: “Both.” (Both statement)

A monk asked the Master of Mount Song in Luojing, “What is it like when the six consciousnesses arise together?”

The Master said, “Different.”

The monk asked, “Why is this so?”

The Master said, “The same.” (Non-both statement)

033. [Statement Conditioned by the Noble Wisdom of Self-Realization and Non-Self-Realization-Wisdom Statement]

This statement has been added in accordance with the seven-fascicle version of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra.

A monk asked Chan Master Yanzhao of Fengxue in Ruzhou, “The patriarchs’ mind-seal—please, Master, polish it for me.”

The Master said, “The ancestral moon hangs full in the sky of noble wisdom; on what mountain are pines and cypresses not verdant?” (Statement conditioned by the noble wisdom of self-realization)

Chan Master Zuxin Baojue of Huanglong in Longxing Prefecture gave this instruction in the Dharma hall: “The profound Way cannot be attained through contrived effort; noble wisdom cannot be known through intentional mind.” (Non-self-realization-wisdom statement)

034. [Present-Dharma Joy Statement and Non-Present-Dharma Joy Statement]

A monk asked Chan Master Yuanyan of Jile in Fuzhou, “What is the household style of Ultimate Bliss?”

The Master said, “The eye takes it in without exhausting it.” (Present-dharma joy statement)

A monk asked Chan Master Xingnian of Shoushan in Ruzhou, “What is a person of great peace and joy?”

The Master said, “Not seeing a single dharma.” (Non-present-dharma joy statement)

035. [Buddha-Land Statement and Non-Buddha-Land Statement]

Chan Master Zongben Yuanzao of Huilin in the Eastern Capital gave this instruction in the Dharma hall: “Look! Look! The dazzling auspicious light illumines the great thousandfold world. A hundred billion dust-mote lands, a hundred billion great oceans, a hundred billion Mount Sumerus, a hundred billion suns and moons, a hundred billion four continents, and even lands as numerous as dust motes all appear at once within that radiance. Worthy ones, do you see it? If you see it, I permit you to be personally within the auspicious radiance. If you do not see it, do not say that the auspicious radiance does not shine upon you. Investigate!” (Buddha-land statement)

Chan Master Wenyan of Guangfeng Monastery on Mount Yunmen in Shaozhou said, “I ordinarily tell you that, within dust-mote lands, the Buddhas of the three times,

the twenty-eight patriarchs of India, and the six patriarchs of China are all expounding the Dharma upon the tip of a staff." (Non-Buddha-land statement)

036. [Particle Statement and Non-Particle Statement] (nou, second tone)

Āṇu means a dust mote.

A monk asked Chan Master Ziqi of Kaiyuan in Qizhou, "I will not ask about Mount Sumeru containing a mustard seed; what is it like when the great Dharma wheel turns within a dust mote?"

The Master said, "One step after another." (Particle statement)

Chan Master Huisi of Nanyue composed this verse: "In sudden awakening, the source of mind opens its treasure store; hidden and manifest spiritual powers reveal the true appearance. Walking alone, sitting alone, ever majestic; a hundred billion transformation bodies beyond all number. Even if they fill the whole of empty space, when seen, no dust-mote appearance is found." (Non-particle statement)

037. [Water Statement and Non-Water Statement]

A monk asked Chan Master You of Tiangai Mountain in Fengxiang Prefecture, "What is the water of Tiangai?"

The Master said, "The four seas pour down in torrents, yet not a single drop is violated."

"The four seas pour down in torrents"—a water statement; "yet not a single drop is violated"—a non-water statement.

A monk asked Chan Master Chuanzu of Qingfeng in Fengxiang Prefecture, "What is a single color?"

The Master said, "There is not a single drop of water, yet the surging waves resemble mountains of silver."

"There is not a single drop of water"—a non-water statement; "the surging waves resemble mountains of silver"—a water statement.

038. [Bow Statement and Non-Bow Statement]

When Chan Master Yizhong of Sanping in Zhangzhou first visited Shigong, Shigong would habitually meet people by drawing his bow and setting an arrow.

When the Master arrived at the Dharma seat, Shigong said, "Watch the arrow!"

The Master bared his chest and said, “This is an arrow that kills people. What of the arrow that gives people life?”

Shigong plucked the bowstring three times. (Bow statement)

The Master then made a bow.

Shigong said, “For thirty years I have drawn the bow and set the arrow, yet I have shot only half a sage.” He then snapped the bow and arrows.

Later, he visited Dadian and brought up this earlier exchange. Dadian said, “Since it was an arrow that gives life, why distinguish it by means of the bowstring?” (Non-bow statement)

Sanping had no reply.

Dadian said, “Thirty years from now, it will be difficult to find anyone able to raise this exchange.”

039. [True Statement and Non-True Statement]

The Diamond Sūtra says: “What is called the true characteristic is precisely no characteristic; therefore the Tathāgata calls it the true characteristic.”

“What is called the true characteristic”—a true statement; “is precisely no characteristic”—a non-true statement.

040. [Number Statement and Non-Number Statement] Here, “number” means quantity, a noun.

Master Sheng of the pi tree asked Chan Master Shenying of Dingshan in Chuzhou, “Without falling into quantity, please speak.”

The Master raised his rosary beads (number statement) and said, “Does this fall into it or not?”

Sheng said, “Round beads have three openings; people of the time know that they exist. Please bring your previous words to completion.”

The Master struck him.

Sheng flicked his sleeves and left. (Non-number statement)

041. [Counting Statement and Non-Counting Statement] Here, “count” means counting, a verb.

Chan Master Zijuan of Deshan in Changde Prefecture gave this instruction in the Dharma hall. Holding his staff horizontally, he said: “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven; seven, six, five, four, three, two, one. Counting forward and backward in cyclic order, count on until the endless days of the future. Because of seven, one is seen; because of one, seven vanishes. Tread through the great void, and even an iron ox sweats. Cut off breath; leave no trace.” (Counting statement)

He threw down his staff and said, “You must further let go even of this; only then is the matter of Chan study complete.” (Non-counting statement)

042. [Brightness Statement and Non-Brightness Statement]

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch says: Wisdom is like the sun, insight is like the moon; wisdom and insight are constantly bright. When one is attached to external objects, deluded thoughts, like floating clouds, cover one’s intrinsic nature, and it cannot become luminous and clear.

“Wisdom and insight are constantly bright” is a brightness statement; “when one is attached to external objects” is a non-brightness statement.

043. [The Space Statement and the Not-Space Statement]

The Huayan Seat Master asked Chan Master Jingcen Zhaoxian of Changsha in Hunan, “Is space definitely existent, or is it definitely nonexistent?”

The master said, “It is acceptable to call it existent, and it is acceptable to call it nonexistent. When space exists, it is only provisionally existent; when space does not exist, it is only provisionally nonexistent.”

He asked, “What scriptural passage supports what you have said, Master?”

The master said, “Have you not heard the Śūraṅgama Sūtra say, ‘The space in the ten directions arises within your mind, like a small cloud in the vast clear sky’? Does this not mean that, when space arises, only a provisional name arises? It also says, ‘When one person among you returns to the source in truth, the space in the ten directions completely vanishes.’ Does this not mean that, when space ceases, only a provisional name ceases? That is why this old monk says: its existence is provisional existence, and its nonexistence is provisional nonexistence.”

“Arises within your mind” is the space statement; “completely vanishes” is the not-space statement.

044. [The Cloud Statement and the Not-Cloud Statement]

While admiring the moon, Chan Master Guichen of Luohan Monastery in Zhangzhou asked a monk, “When clouds move, is there [movement]? When rain passes, is there [movement]?”

The monk said, “It is not the clouds that move; it is the wind that moves.”

The master said, “I say that neither the clouds move nor the wind moves.”

The monk said, “But just now you said that the clouds move.” (Cloud statement.)

The master said, “Whose fault is that?”

Chan Master Kezhen of Cuiyan Mountain in Hongzhou had formerly studied Chan under Chan Master Chuyuan Ciming of Shishuang. During the summer retreat, he discussed Chan with Attendant Shan, who was a leading disciple of Ciming.

Shan picked up a piece of tile rubble, placed it on a boulder, and said, “If you can utter a turning word here, I will allow you personally to see Ciming.”

The master looked about to the left and right, intending to respond.

Shan rebuked him, saying, “You pause to think and halt your activity; your discriminating consciousness has not penetrated through. How could you ever have dreamed of it?”

Ashamed and alarmed, the master immediately returned to Shishuang.

When Ciming saw him arrive, he rebuked him: “A genuine traveling practitioner surely knows the proper time. What urgent matter brought you here before the summer retreat was over?”

The master wept and said, “Brother Shan’s poisonous words have completely obstructed me, so I have come to see you, Master.”

Ciming promptly asked, “What is the great meaning of the Buddhadharma?”

The master said, “Cloudless, the mountain ridge comes forth; the moon sets in the heart of the waves.”

Ciming glared and shouted, “Your head is white and your teeth are gapped, yet you still hold such views! How will you escape birth and death?”

The master was startled and begged for instruction.

Ciming said, “Ask me.”

The master repeated his earlier question.

Ciming thundered, “Cloudless, the mountain ridge comes forth; the moon sets in the heart of the waves.” (Not-cloud statement.)

At these words, the master attained great awakening.

045. [The Statement of Crafts and Technical Arts and the Not-Statement of Crafts and Technical Arts]

Chan Master Jicheng of Jingyin said, “With one shout of mine, I can enter not only the five teachings; I can also enter all crafts and technical arts, as well as the various schools of thought.” (Statement of crafts and technical arts.)

Chan Master Zonggao Dahui said, “What enters through a gate is not a family treasure. Truly, the households of lineage masters have no real dharma to give people. Consider the crafts and technical arts of the world: if there is a model, one can make it.” (Not-statement of crafts and technical arts.)

046. [The Wind Statement and the Not-Wind Statement]

While fanning himself, Chan Master Baoche of Magu Mountain in Puzhou was asked by a monk, “The nature of wind is ever-abiding and pervades every place. Why, then, do you still wave a fan, Master?”

The master said, “You only know that the nature of wind is ever-abiding; you do not yet know that it pervades every place.”

The monk asked, “What is the principle of its pervading every place?”

The master then waved the fan. (Wind statement.)

The monk made a bow.

A monk asked Chan Master Qingzhu of Shishuang Mountain in Tanzhou, “What is it like when wind arises and waves surge?”

The master said, “The city of Hunan is far too bustling; someone refuses to cross into Jiangxi.” (Not-wind statement.)

047. [The Earth Statement and the Not-Earth Statement]

Chan Master Zongzhi of Daowu Mountain in Tanzhou studied Chan under Yaoshan. When a donor offered a pair of trousers, Yaoshan held them up before the assembly and said, “Does the dharmakāya possess the four great elements or not? Whoever can answer shall receive this pair of trousers.”

The master said, “The nature-ground is not empty, and emptiness is not the nature-ground. This is the earth element; the other three elements are likewise.” (Earth statement.)

Yaoshan said, “I give you this pair of trousers.”

A monk asked Chan Master Zhiyuan Xianjiao of Baizhao in Anzhou, “What is it to have no mountains, rivers, and great earth?”

The master said, “Do not give rise to views.” (Not-earth statement.)

048. [The Mind Statement and the Not-Mind Statement]

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch says: “Your own mind is Buddha; do not harbor any further doubt. Outside, there is not a single thing that can be established; it is all the original mind giving rise to the myriad dharmas.” The sūtra says: “When mind arises, the various dharmas arise; when mind ceases, the various dharmas cease.”

“The various dharmas arise” is the mind statement; “the various dharmas cease” is the not-mind statement.

049. [The Statement of Establishment and the Not-Statement of Establishment]

When Chan Master Huifang Chaozong of Heshan in Jizhou ascended the Dharma seat, he raised his whisk and said, “The five houses and lineages all have their institutional arrangements. Even if you can discern them with untrammeled clarity, they are still matters at the edge of light and shadow. If you wish to contend with birth and death, they are as far apart as heaven and earth. But how would you speak the one sentence that transcends birth and death?” After a long pause, he said, “I had almost made a mistake in adding a footnote.”

“They all have their institutional arrangements” is the statement of establishment; “I had almost made a mistake in adding a footnote” is the not-statement of establishment.

050. [The Self-Nature Statement and the Not-Self-Nature Statement]

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch says: “Who would have thought that self-nature is originally pure? Who would have thought that self-nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing? Who would have thought that self-nature is originally complete in itself? Who would have thought that self-nature is originally without movement? Who would have thought that self-nature can give rise to the myriad dharmas?” (Self-nature statement.)

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch also says: “Originally, not a single dharma can be obtained from self-nature. If one claims to have obtained something and falsely speaks of fortune and misfortune, this is worldly toil and a misguided view.” (Not-self-nature statement.)

051. [The Aggregate Statement and the Not-Aggregate Statement]

A monk asked Chan Master Da’an of Changqing in Fuzhou, “What is it like when this aggregate has ceased and that aggregate has not yet arisen?” (Not-aggregate statement.)

The master said, “Who is this venerable one for whom this aggregate has not yet ceased?” (Aggregate statement.)

The monk said, “I do not understand.”

The master said, “If you understand this aggregate, you will then understand that aggregate.”

052. [The Sentient-Being Statement and the Not-Sentient-Being Statement]

The Diamond Sūtra says: “Those who have aroused the mind of unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening should give rise to this thought: ‘I should liberate all sentient beings.’ Yet, after liberating all sentient beings, there is not a single sentient being who has truly been liberated.”

The Diamond Sūtra also says: “What are called sentient beings, the Tathāgata says are not sentient beings; they are merely called sentient beings.”

053. [The Wisdom Statement and the Not-Wisdom Statement]

A monk asked Chan Master Kechang of Huili Monastery in Linjiang Prefecture, “I will not ask about the power of Buddha or the power of Dharma. What is the power of wisdom?”

The master said, “Tread down the mountain of self and others; prop up the bodhi tree.”

The monk said, “Bodhi originally has no tree. Where can one begin?”

The master said, “Where there is no place to begin is precisely where effort should be applied.”

“Where there is no place to begin” is the not-wisdom statement; “precisely where effort should be applied” is the wisdom statement.

054. [The Nirvāṇa Statement and the Not-Nirvāṇa Statement]

A monk asked Chan Master Shouren of Luohan Monastery in Zhangzhou, “What is nirvāṇa?”

The master said, “Birth and death.”

The monk asked, “What is birth and death?”

The master said, “What did you just say?”

“What did you just say?” means “What was it that you just said?” What was just said was “nirvāṇa.” Thus, when asked, “What is birth and death?” the answer is “nirvāṇa.”

055. [The Jñeya Statement and the Not-Jñeya Statement]

As stated earlier, jñeya means the hindrance of knowledge, or the cognitive hindrance.

A verse in praise of the Buddha by the Bodhisattva of Great Wisdom says: “Afflictions and jñeya are ever pure and without characteristics.”

056. [The Non-Buddhist Statement and the Not-Non-Buddhist Statement]

Chan Master Bao’en of Dahong Mountain in Suizhou said: “The great Indian treatise masters all regard the view that dharmas exist outside the mind as non-Buddhist, and that all phenomena are mind-only as the orthodox principle.”

“Dharmas exist outside the mind” is the non-Buddhist statement; “all phenomena are mind-only” is the not-non-Buddhist statement.

057. [The Disorder Statement and the Not-Disorder Statement]

The hermit Miaopu Xingkong of Huating in Jiaxing Prefecture said, “Since I have encountered an age of upheaval, I am a carefree, fiery fellow. Now is exactly the time to seize the moment, so please cut me in two with one stroke.” He then cried out loudly, “Cut! Cut!”

“Since I have encountered upheaval” is the disorder statement; “cut me in two with one stroke” is the not-disorder statement.

058. [The Illusion Statement and the Not-Illusion Statement]

A monk asked Chan Master Benji of Caoshan in Fuzhou, “What truth is originally present in illusion?”

The master said, “Illusion is originally true.” — Not-illusion statement.

Fayan offered a different saying: “Illusion is originally not true.” — Illusion statement.

059. [The Dream Statement and the Not-Dream Statement]

A court official asked Chan Master Benjing of Sikong Mountain, “Where does this body come from, and where does it return after a hundred years?”

The master said, “When a person is dreaming, where do they come from? When they awaken from sleep, where do they go?” (“When they awaken from sleep” means the moment of awakening from a dream.)

He said, “While dreaming, one cannot say there is nothing; once awake, one cannot say there is something. Though there is existence and nonexistence, there is nowhere to come from or go to.”

The master said, “This body of mine is likewise a dream.”

“While dreaming, one cannot say there is nothing”—a dream statement. “Once awake, one cannot say there is something”—a non-dream statement.

060. [Flame Statement and Non-Flame Statement]

A monk asked Master Lishan, “What is the dharmakāya?”

The master said, “Flowers in empty space and a mirage.”

A monk asked Chan Master Datong of Mount Touzi in Shuzhou, “What is the body within flames?”

The master said, “What place is there to conceal it?”

What Master Lishan said is a flame statement; what Chan Master Touzi said is a non-flame statement.

061. [Image Statement and Non-Image Statement]

A monk asked Chan Master Datong of Mount Touzi in Shuzhou, “Before an image has been cast, where is the body?”

The master said, “Do not fabricate.”

He said, “But what if it appears or does not appear?”—an image statement.

The master said, “Where is it concealed?”—a non-image statement.

062. [Wheel Statement and Non-Wheel Statement]

Chan Master Muzhe Zhenru of Great Wei Mountain in Tanzhou gave a teaching in the hall: “An ancient Buddha said, ‘Formerly, at Vārāṇasī, I turned the Dharma wheel of the Four Truths,’ only to fall into pits and ravines. Now I again turn the supremely wondrous, unsurpassed great Dharma wheel—adding mud on top of dirt. Is there anyone now who, without passing through the steps, transcends all things alone?” After a long pause, he said, “Raise your head beyond the heavens and look: who is the person within this?”

063. [Gandharva Statement and Non-Gandharva Statement]

The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom says: “When bodhisattvas know that all dharmas are like an echo or like a city of gandharvas, then at sunrise they see city gates, watchtowers, palaces, and people going in and out. As the sun rises higher, these gradually disappear. This city can only be seen by the eye and has no reality; it is called a city of gandharvas. Moreover, the city of gandharvas is not a city; the human mind imagines it to be a city.”

Ordinary beings are likewise: what is not a body is imagined to be a body, and what is not mind is imagined to be mind. The city of gandharvas likewise lacks any conditions of its own; like a whirling firebrand, it merely deludes the eye. To speak of something as like a city of gandharvas or like a dream is to say that, though there is no real thing in a dream, it is taken to be real. Once awake, one knows it is unreal and laughs at oneself. A verse says: “Like a dream, like an illusion, like a city of gandharvas—all dharmas are likewise so.”

064. [Heaven Statement and Non-Heaven Statement]

A monk asked Chan Master Zongzhi of Mount Daowu in Tanzhou, “Though there are no clouds for ten thousand miles, this is not the original heaven. What is the original heaven?”

The master said, “Today is fine for drying wheat.”

“Today is fine for drying wheat”—a heaven statement. “This is not the original heaven”—a non-heaven statement.

065. [Food and Drink Statement and Non-Food-and-Drink Statement]

The commissioner of Hongzhou asked Chan Master Mazu Daoyi of Jiangxi, “Is it so if one eats meat and drinks wine, or is it so if one does not?”

The master said, “If you eat, it is the deputy commissioner’s salary; if you do not eat, it is the deputy commissioner’s good fortune.”

“The deputy commissioner’s good fortune”—a food-and-drink statement. “The deputy commissioner’s salary”—a non-food-and-drink statement.

066. [Sexual Desire Statement and Non-Sexual-Desire Statement]

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch says: “The nature of sexual desire is originally the cause of the pure nature; to eliminate sexual desire is itself the body of the pure nature. Within one’s nature, one is naturally free from the five desires; to see one’s nature in an instant is the true.”

“Cause of the pure nature”—a sexual-desire statement. “Body of the pure nature”—a non-sexual-desire statement.

067. [Seeing Statement and Non-Seeing Statement]

The World-Honored One was in Trāyastriṃśa Heaven for ninety days. When he took leave of the heavenly realm and descended, the four assemblies and eight classes all went to the sky to welcome him. The bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarṇā thought, “I am a nun and will certainly see the Buddha after the senior monks. It would be better to use my spiritual powers to transform myself into a wheel-turning sage king, surrounded by a thousand sons, and be the first to see the Buddha.” Her wish was fulfilled. As soon as the World-Honored One saw her, he rebuked her: “Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarṇā, how dare you see me before the senior monks! Though you see my form body, you do not see my dharmakāya. Subhūti, seated in meditation in a rocky cave, sees my dharmakāya.”

“Sees my dharmakāya”—a seeing statement. “Sees my form body”—a non-seeing statement.

068. [Pāramitā Statement and Non-Pāramitā Statement]

The Diamond Sūtra says: “What the Buddha calls the prajñā-pāramitā is not the prajñā-pāramitā; it is merely called the prajñā-pāramitā.”

069. [Precept Statement and Non-Precept Statement]

When novice monk Gao of Lizhou first visited Yaoshan, Yaoshan said, “The matter of birth and death is grave. Why do you not go and receive the precepts?”

Novice Gao said, “Once one knows this very matter, one may rest. Why call anything precepts?”

“Knowing this very matter”—a precept statement. “Why call anything precepts?”—a non-precept statement.

070. [Sun, Moon, and Stars Statement and Non-Sun, Moon, and Stars Statement]

Chan Master Guangxu Zhide of Yunfeng on Mount Tiantai gave a teaching in the hall: “For example, in a three-thousand great-thousand world system, the sun, moon, stars, rivers, and all sentient beings enter from one pore into another pore. The pores do not become small, nor does the world become large; the beings within are unaware of it. If you want to understand, it is easy to understand. Yet in their daily activity, you monastics are likewise unaware of it.”

“Easy to understand”—a sun, moon, and stars statement. “Unaware”—a non-sun, moon, and stars statement.

071. [Truth Statement and Non-Truth Statement]

Emperor Wu of Liang asked Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch, “What is the highest meaning of the noble truth?”

The Patriarch said, “Vast emptiness—nothing noble.”

“The highest meaning of the noble truth”—a truth statement. “Vast emptiness—nothing noble”—a non-truth statement.

072. [Fruition Statement and Non-Fruition Statement]

Chan Master Fayan of the Fifth Patriarch Monastery in Qizhou instructed the assembly: “The Patriarch said, ‘I originally came to this land to transmit the Dharma and save deluded beings. One flower opens into five petals; the fruit ripens naturally of itself.’ Master Bodhidharma came on foot as chance led him and spoke as words came to his mouth. Later descendants have mostly turned this into conceptual calculation. Do you wish to understand where flowers bloom and fruits form? Pears of Zhengzhou, jujubes of Qingzhou—nothing surpasses the goodness of each thing’s place of origin.”

“The fruit ripens naturally of itself”—a fruition statement. “Mostly turned this into conceptual calculation”—a non-fruition statement.

073. [Cessation-and-Arising Statement and Non-Cessation-and-Arising Statement]

The verse for transmitting the Dharma by Buddha Viśvabhū reads: “Borrowing the four great elements as a body, mind is originally unborn and arises because of objects. If preceding objects are absent, mind too is absent; sin and merit, like illusions, arise and cease.”

Chan Master Junji of Mount Song said: “Evil people have no wholesome thoughts, and wholesome people have no evil mind. Therefore it is said that good and evil are like floating clouds: neither has a place of arising or ceasing.” Upon hearing these words, a monk attained great awakening.

074. [Curing Statement and Non-Curing Statement]

As Chan Master Zhiyi Xuanfa of Luohan in Zhangzhou was about to pass away, he said to everyone, “Tonight the four great elements are not in harmony: clouds surge, birds fly, wind stirs, and dust rises. Is there anyone who can set this right amid all this vastness? If you can set it right, we shall not recognize one another for kalpas without end; if you cannot set it right, you will see me constantly at every moment.” Having spoken, he passed away.

075. [Characteristic Statement and Non-Characteristic Statement] 003. “Characteristic statement and non-characteristic statement” refers to “essential characteristics”; 028. it refers to “indicative characteristics”; here it refers to “dharma characteristics.”

The Vimalakīrti Sūtra says: “Able to distinguish well the characteristics of all dharmas, yet unmoved by the highest truth.”

“Able to distinguish well the characteristics of all dharmas”—a dharma-characteristic statement. “Yet unmoved by the highest truth”—a non-dharma-characteristic statement.

076. [Branch Statement and Non-Branch Statement] A branch means a subdivision, section, or category.

The thirty-seven factors of awakening mentioned earlier are all branch statements.

The Great Prajñā Sūtra says: “The four right exertions up to and including the eightfold noble path are all unobtainable; their permanence or impermanence is also unobtainable. The four right exertions up to and including the eightfold noble path are all unobtainable; their pleasure and suffering are also unobtainable. The four right exertions up to and including the eightfold noble path are all unobtainable; their self and non-self are also unobtainable. The four right exertions up to and including the eightfold noble path are all unobtainable; their purity and impurity are also unobtainable.”

The thirty-seven factors of awakening, and even permanence, bliss, self, and purity, are all unobtainable: this is a non-branch statement.

077. [Craftsmanship Statement and Non-Craftsmanship Statement]

The Treatise on the Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras says: “There are five fields of knowledge: first, inner knowledge; second, knowledge of causes; third, knowledge of language; fourth, medical knowledge; and fifth, knowledge of crafts.”

A layman offered a painted hanging screen to Chan Master Wenyi of Qingliang Monastery in Jinling.

After looking at it, the master asked, “Are your hands skillful, or is your mind skillful?”

The layman said, “My mind is skillful.”

The master said, “Which one is your mind?”

The layman had no reply.

Rou, of Guizong, speaking in his stead, said, “Today, for me, it has instead become easy.”

“The mind is skillful”—mind is a field of craftsmanship. The layman’s inability to reply, however, is a non-craftsmanship statement.

078. [Chan Statement and Non-Chan Statement]

Chan Master Xinan of Luohan Monastery on Mount Lu gave a teaching in the hall: “Chan or no Chan, the Way or no Way—the three-inch tongue sweeps wildly about. Last night the sun’s wheel scattered cassia blossoms; this morning the moon’s cave sprouted miraculous grasses. Ah-ha-ha! Ten thousand taels of gold cannot be found anywhere. One phrase cuts off deliberation; all dharmas do not reach one another.”

“One phrase cuts off deliberation” is a Chan statement; “all dharmas do not reach one another” is a non-Chan statement.

079. [Delusion Statement and Non-Delusion Statement]

A monk asked Chan Master Benkong of Mount Majia, “Setting aside the words before us, I ask the master to point directly to the original nature.”

The master said, “How long have you come from being deluded at the source?”

The monk said, “Just now I have received the venerable monk’s instruction.”

The master said, “If I instructed you, I too would be deluded at the source.”

A monk asked Chan Master Yuncong Cizhao of Mount Guyin in Xiangzhou, “When coming, there is nothing; when going, there is emptiness. Both paths are deluded—how may one depart without delusion?”

The master said, “At the head of the scale, half a catty; at the tail of the scale, eight taels.” (In ancient times, sixteen taels made one catty.)

080. [The Present Phrase and the Non-Present Phrase]

A monk asked Chan Master Datong of Mount Touzi in Shuzhou, “Before a statue has been cast, where is its body?”

The master said, “Do not fabricate.”

The monk said, “But what of whether it manifests or not?”

The master said, “Where is it hidden?”

Chan Master Wenyan of Guangfeng Monastery on Mount Yunmen in Shaozhou addressed the assembly: “Great function is manifest before one, yet no rules are retained.”

At that time, a monk asked, “What is great function manifest before one?”

The master picked up his staff and called out loudly, “Old Śākyamuni is here!”

“Great function is manifest before one”—the present phrase; “yet no rules are retained”—the non-present phrase.

081. [The Guarding Phrase and the Non-Guarding Phrase]

Li Mixun, Vice Minister and lay practitioner Puxian, composed a verse: “Do not idly speak of herding and guarding from the beginning; today it is plainly revealed. Empty space topples Mount Sumeru—why speak of the path beyond?”

“Today it is plainly revealed”—the guarding phrase; “why speak of the path beyond?”—the non-guarding phrase.

082. [The Clan Phrase and the Non-Clan Phrase]

Mahāmatī Bodhisattva asked the Buddha, “What is the Śākya clan? What causes there to be a Śākya clan? What is the sugarcane clan? May the Unsurpassed Honored One explain.”

The World-Honored Śākyamuni countered, “What is a clan surname?”

“Clan” means race or clan identity. The question is the clan phrase; the answer is the non-clan phrase.

083. [The Immortal Phrase and the Non-Immortal Phrase]

A monk asked Chan Master Daoyan of the Donglin Hermitage in Jiangzhou, “The Three Jewels have already been explained by the master. What, then, is the matter of the supreme vehicle?”

The master said, “Wang Qiao feigned immortality and attained immortality.”

The monk burst into laughter.

The master then clicked his teeth.

According to tradition, there were at least three immortals named Wang Qiao:

(1) Ji Jin, Crown Prince of King Ling of Zhou, also called Ji Qiao. Since he bore the title "Prince," he was called Wang Qiao.

(2) Wang Qiao, magistrate of Ye County during the Han dynasty.

(3) Wang Qiao, who ascended to immortality after eating fleshy zhi fungus at Wuyang in Sichuan. The Biographies of Immortals of the Wang Clan by Du Guangting records: "On Beiping Mountain in Yizhou there is a white toad, called fleshy zhi. No one who lacks the spiritual capacity and bones of an immortal can obtain it. Qiao ate it and attained the Way."

The Wang Qiao who "feigned immortality and attained immortality" should be the third of these.

"Burst into laughter" is the immortal phrase; "the master then clicked his teeth" is the non-immortal phrase.

084. [The King Phrase and the Non-King Phrase]

A monk asked Chan Master Wenyi of Mount Longshan in Fuzhou, "What is a human king?"

The master said, "All people fear his majestic authority."

The monk said, "What is the Dharma King?"

The master said, "When a single command is issued, it is immediately carried out."

The monk said, "Are the two kings still distinct or not?"

The master said, "What did you just say?"

A monk asked Chan Master Yichu Mingwei of Mount Huanglian in Shaozhou, "What is it like when the human king and the Dharma King meet?"

The master said, "Two mirrors reflect each other, and the myriad forms are clearly revealed."

085. [The Phrase of Taking In and the Phrase of Non-Taking-In]

The Buddha told Mahāmatī Bodhisattva: “What is meant by taking in the Dharma? It means rightly realizing the direct manifestation of one’s own mind, seeing the marks of the no-self of persons and the no-self of dharmas, and allowing no deluded thoughts to arise.”

All is only the measure of mind; the two kinds of mind revolve.

In taking in and what is taken in, there is no self or what belongs to a self.

086. [The Treasure Phrase and the Non-Treasure Phrase]

A monk asked Chan Master Changzong Zhaojue of Xinglong Monastery on Mount Donglin in Jiangzhou, “Within heaven and earth, between the cosmos and the universe, there is a treasure concealed in the mountain of form. What is this treasure?”

The master said, “The white moon appears; the black moon withdraws.”

The monk said, “I have not merely heard its name; today I have seen it in person.”

The master said, “Tell me, where is the treasure?”

The monk said, “The doors of the ancient hall open, and its light shines brilliantly; beside the White Lotus Pond stands one of the community.”

The master said, “As for another treasure, give it back to the blue-eyed barbarian!”

A monk asked Chan Master Yingfu Guangzhao of Changlu in Zhenzhou, “What is it like when one recognizes the jewel in one’s garment?”

The master said, “Try taking it out and showing it to me.”

The monk held out one hand.

The master said, “There is no need to point east and draw west. Where is the treasure?”

The monk said, “But this student can make use of it.”

The master said, “Try using it and see.”

The monk flicked his sitting mat once.

The master said, “Everyone laughs at you.”

087. [The Prophecy Phrase and the Non-Prophecy Phrase]

The Diamond Sūtra says: “Subhūti, if there had been a dharma by which I attained anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi, Dīpaṅkara Buddha would not have bestowed upon me the prophecy: ‘In a future life, you will become a Buddha named Śākyamuni.’ Because in truth there is no dharma by which anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi is attained, Dīpaṅkara Buddha bestowed this prophecy upon me, saying: ‘In a future life, you will become a Buddha named Śākyamuni.’”

088. [The Icchantika Phrase and the Non-Icchantika Phrase]

The Nirvāṇa Sūtra says: “Moreover, liberation is called empty quiescence, and there is nothing indeterminate. ‘Indeterminate’ means that an icchantika is ultimately unchangeable, or that one who has violated grave precepts cannot attain Buddhahood. There can be no such thing. Why? If such a person develops pure faith in the Buddha’s True Dharma, then at that very time the state of icchantika is extinguished. If that person further becomes an upāsaka, the state of icchantika may likewise be eradicated. One who has violated grave precepts, having eradicated this offense, can attain Buddhahood.”

089. [The Female, Male, and Non-Male Phrase and the Non-Female, Non-Male, and Non-Non-Male Phrase]

Mahāmatī Bodhisattva asked, “How do males, females, and non-males all come to be?”—In the world there are men and women, as well as those who are neither male nor female. How do all these arise?

The Buddha countered Mahāmatī Bodhisattva: “And how, again, do these various sentient beings come to be?”—It is not only males, females, and “non-males.” There are many kinds of sentient beings; how are these to be explained?

The Lotus Sūtra says: “The dragon girl had a precious jewel worth three thousand great thousand-world systems, which she presented to the Buddha. The Buddha immediately accepted it. The dragon girl said to Bodhisattva Prājñākūṭa and Venerable Śāriputra, ‘I offered this precious jewel, and the World-Honored One accepted it. Was this done quickly?’ They replied, ‘Very quickly.’ The girl said, ‘By means of your spiritual powers, watch me attain Buddhahood, which will be even swifter than this.’”

At that time, the entire assembly saw the dragon girl suddenly transform into a man, fully endowed with the practices of a bodhisattva. She immediately went to the undefiled world in the south, sat upon a jeweled lotus, attained complete and perfect awakening, and, possessing the thirty-two marks and eighty excellent characteristics, expounded the wondrous Dharma for all sentient beings throughout the ten directions.

The monk Xian of Guanxi asked Chan Master Liaoran, a nun of Mount Moshan, “What is Mount Moshan?”

The master said, “It does not reveal its summit.”

He said, “What is the master of Mount Moshan?”

The master said, “It is neither the appearance of a woman nor that of a man.”

Xian then gave a shout and said, “Why do you not transform yourself?”

The master said, “I am neither a spirit nor a ghost. What is there to transform?”

090. [The Flavor Phrase and the Non-Flavor Phrase]

Chancellor Lü, Duke Xu, asked the great being Zhiyan of Fahua, “What is the great meaning of the Buddha Dharma?”

The master said, “Originally there is not a single thing; yet the one flavor becomes true.”

“Yet the one flavor becomes true” is the flavor phrase; “originally there is not a single thing” is the non-flavor phrase.

091. [The Phenomena Phrase and the Non-Phenomena Phrase]

A monk asked Chan Master Zuzheng of Dahong in Suizhou, “Is there still a matter beyond?”

The master said, “There is.”

The monk said, “What is the matter beyond?”

The master said, “Quickly make three prostrations.”

092. [The Body Phrase and the Non-Body Phrase]

The Diamond Sūtra says: “Subhūti, what do you think? Can one see the Tathāgata by means of bodily marks?”

“No, World-Honored One. One cannot see the Tathāgata by means of bodily marks. Why? The bodily marks of which the Tathāgata speaks are not bodily marks.”

093. [The Awakening Phrase and the Non-Awakening Phrase]

Someone asked Chan Master Farong of Mount Niutou, “For practitioners, objects exist in relation to the body; through awakening, one knows that objects vanish. Do

the prior awakening and subsequent awakening, together with the object, constitute three minds?”

The master said, “The functioning of objects is not the awakening of the essence. Once awakening has ceased, one should not think. Through awakening, one knows that objects vanish; at the time of awakening, objects do not arise. The prior awakening and subsequent awakening, together with the object, constitute three delays.”

094. [The Movement Phrase and the Non-Movement Phrase]

The Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng, said: “It is not the wind that moves, nor is it the banner that moves; benevolent one, it is your mind that moves.”

The movement of mind is movement; wind and banner are not movement.

095. [The Faculty Phrase and the Non-Faculty Phrase]

A monk asked Chan Master Datong Guangcheng of Lizhou, “How can the six sense faculties be extinguished?”

The master said, “Wheel a sword and cast it into empty space; it harms nothing.”

096. [The Conditioned Phrase and the Non-Conditioned Phrase]

The Diamond Sūtra says: “All conditioned dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; like dew and also like lightning. One should contemplate them thus.”

Chan Master Huanglong Huinan of Longxing Prefecture gave this instruction in the hall: “One person studies the Avataṃsaka Sūtra in the morning and contemplates prajñā in the evening, diligently striving day and night without a moment’s respite. Another neither investigates Chan nor discusses doctrine, but spends the day sleeping on a tattered mat. These two come together to Huanglong: one is conditioned, the other unconditioned. Which one should be accepted?” After a long pause, he said: “Goddess of Merit and the Dark Maiden: a wise householder accepts neither.”

097. [The Unconditioned Statement and the Non-Unconditioned Statement]

The Diamond Sūtra says: “All sages and saints are distinguished by unconditioned dharmas.”

Chan Master Shimen Yuanyi of Xiangzhou said: “If one truly does nothing and leaves nothing undone, heaven and hell will always follow close behind.”

Leaving nothing undone is the non-unconditioned; it is not the unconditioned.

098. [The Statement of Cause and Effect and the Non-Cause-and-Effect Statement]

A wild fox transformed himself into an old man and asked Chan Master Baizhang: "In the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, I once lived on this mountain and taught Chan. A student asked me, 'Does a person of great cultivation still fall under cause and effect, or not?' I answered, 'He does not fall under cause and effect.' Thereafter, for five hundred lives I fell into the body of a wild fox. I now ask you, Reverend, to utter a turning word on my behalf, so that I may escape the body of a wild fox."

Chan Master Baizhang said, "Ask your question."

The old man asked, "Does a person of great cultivation still fall under cause and effect, or not?"

Chan Master Baizhang said, "He is not blind to cause and effect."

At these words, the old man attained great awakening. Bowing, he said, "I have now escaped the body of a wild fox."

Not being blind to cause and effect is the statement of cause and effect; not falling under cause and effect is the non-cause-and-effect statement.

Chan Master Daoxin, the Fourth Patriarch, said: "The hundreds and thousands of dharma gates all return to this square inch; the wondrous virtues as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are all found at the source of mind. All gates of precepts, samādhi, wisdom, spiritual powers, and transformations are fully present within you and do not depart from your mind. All afflictions and karmic obstacles are originally empty and quiescent. All cause and effect are like dreams and illusions. There are no three realms to escape from and no bodhi to seek. Humans and nonhumans are equal in nature and appearance. The great Way is empty and vast, beyond thought and deliberation. Such a Dharma you have now attained: nothing is lacking, and how do you differ from the Buddha?"

"All cause and effect" is the statement of cause and effect; "are like dreams and illusions" is the non-cause-and-effect statement.

099. [The Ultimate Form Statement and the Non-Ultimate-Form Statement]

The great bodhisattva asked: "Why is perfect and complete awakening not attained in the desire realm? Why is bodhi attained in the Ultimate Form Heaven, apart from desire?"

The Buddha countered: “Why is there no awakening in the desire realm? Is it accomplished only in Akaniṣṭha?”

The Diamond Sūtra says: “If one sees me by form or seeks me by sound, that person follows a deviant path and cannot see the Tathāgata.”

100. [The Seasonal Statement and the Non-Seasonal Statement]

Chan Master Wanshou Puxin gave this instruction in the hall: “The last snow has melted away, and the spring breeze grows stronger by the day. If you understand this in terms of seasons, what then of the Buddhadharma? Tell me: are seasonal causes and conditions and the principles of Buddhadharma the same or different?”

After a long pause, he said: “The shadowless tree is planted where no one sees it; it blooms and bears fruit, fragrant of itself.”

“It blooms and bears fruit, fragrant of itself” is the seasonal statement; “the shadowless tree is planted where no one sees it” is the non-seasonal statement.

101. [The Thicket-and-Vines Statement and the Non-Thicket-and-Vines Statement]

Chan Master Zifu Zongyou of Hongzhou gave this instruction in the hall: “Today, Longquan will speak to you all of some entanglements.” After a long pause, he said: “Branches and vines grow yet more branches and vines.”

The Venerable Chen of Muzhou asked a newly arrived monk, “Are you newly arrived?” “Yes,” replied the monk. The master said, “Then put down your entanglements for the moment. Do you understand?” “I do not understand,” replied the monk. The master said, “Carry your cangue and state your case; lead yourself out.” The monk then left.

“Speak of some entanglements” is the thicket-and-vines statement; “put down your entanglements” is the non-thicket-and-vines statement.

102. [The Mixed Statement and the Non-Mixed Statement]

Venerable Jayatā, the twentieth patriarch of India, said: “I do not seek the Way, yet neither am I confused. I do not bow to the Buddha, yet neither am I disrespectful. I do not sit for long, yet neither am I indolent. I do not eat only one meal, yet neither do I eat indiscriminately. I am not content, yet neither am I greedy. When the mind seeks nothing, this is called the Way.”

Not eating only one meal is the mixed statement; not eating indiscriminately is the non-mixed statement.

Chan Master Yangqi Fanghui gave this instruction in the hall. Holding up his staff, he said: “One is all; all is one.”

He drew a line and said: “Mountains, rivers, the great earth, and all the old masters under heaven—one hundred fragments! What is the nostril of each of you?”

After a long pause, he said: “The sword leaves its jeweled case because of injustice; medicine issues from its golden vial to cure disease.”

He gave a shout and struck the staff once.

“One is all” is the mixed statement; “all is one” is the non-mixed statement.

103. [The Statement of Speaking and the Non-Speaking Statement]

The Diamond Sūtra says: “If anyone says that the Tathāgata has taught a Dharma, that person slanders the Buddha, for they cannot understand what I have taught. Subhūti, one who teaches the Dharma has no Dharma to teach; this is called teaching the Dharma.”

One day, the World-Honored One ascended the seat. When the assembly had gathered and settled, Kāśyapa struck the gavel and said, “The World-Honored One’s teaching of the Dharma is finished.”

Chan Master Jingming Fayin gave this instruction in the hall: “The patriarchs’ wondrous secret has nothing else to say. Even with iron beaks and iron tongues, one cannot avoid making a clever move that turns clumsy. Jingming has already divulged heaven’s secret.”

The patriarchs’ wondrous secret is the statement of speaking; “there is nothing else to say” is the non-speaking statement.

104. [The Determinate Statement and the Non-Determinate Statement] This statement has been supplemented in accordance with the seven-fascicle version of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra.

Chan Master Baoyin of Lin’an Prefecture gave this instruction in the hall: “The patriarchs’ mind-seal is neither long nor short, neither square nor round, neither within nor without, nor even in between. I ask the assembly: what shape does it definitively have?”

Holding up his staff, he said: “Do you see? Ancient seal script does not form words; flying silk cannot share one form. From the very beginning it is clear and distinct—why make a special effort again?”

He struck the Chan bench and descended from the seat.

“From the very beginning it is clear and distinct” is the determinate statement; “why make a special effort again?” is the non-determinate statement.

105. [The Vinaya Statement and the Non-Vinaya Statement]

Vinaya means the precepts and monastic discipline.

The layman Yang Jie, known as Wuwei, paid homage to Vinaya Master Bensong and asked about the “nature and essence of Vinaya” taught by Vinaya Master Daoxuan of Mount Zhongnan. Vinaya Master Bensong answered in verse: “How have feeling and wisdom ever differed? The dog barks while the snake goes on its way. This is precisely the meaning of Zhongnan: at noon, beat the third watch of the night.”

“This is precisely the meaning of Zhongnan” is the Vinaya statement; “at noon, beat the third watch of the night” is the non-Vinaya statement.

106. [The Bhikshu Statement and the Non-Bhikshu Statement]

The emperor issued an edict converting Buddhist monasteries into Daoist temples and transforming monks into Daoist priests; monasteries throughout the land had no choice but to comply. Once the conversion and change of dress had been completed, Chan Master Wenshu Xindao of Changde Prefecture gave this instruction in the hall: “The patriarchs’ intent in coming from the West is today made especially new. Formerly I bore the appearance of a bhikshu; now I take the form of the Venerable Lord. A crane-feather cloak covers a silver-brown robe, and a banana-leaf headcloth wraps my head.

“A guest of woods and springs, with nothing to do, I have twice received the sovereign’s favor. Thus it is said: to understand the meaning of Buddha-nature, one must contemplate the causes and conditions of the time. Tell me, what time is it now? Vairocana wears a jeweled crown, to show that within the true there is the conventional. The old man Mañjuśrī wears a crane-feather cloak, wishing only to comply humbly with the demands of the time. If one person is thus, then all are thus. Let us all establish a monastic community; happily, the host of immortals has gathered.

“Together we drink the immortals’ wine of delusion and sing hymns of walking in the void. Some read the Lingbao Scripture for Saving Humanity; some speak of medicines for immortality. The qin is played beneath the moon, and the fingertips send forth ancient tones; a chessboard is set before the pavilion, and wondrous moves arise beyond the workings of spirit. Advance one step and you reach the Great Luo Heaven; retreat one step and you enter the city of the nine underworlds. But how would you speak of the single statement of neither advancing nor

retreating? Even if you ascend the path to the Three Pure Ones, you are still an illusory body within saṃsāra."

"Formerly I bore the appearance of a bhikshu" is the bhikshu statement; "now I take the form of the Venerable Lord" is the non-bhikshu statement.

107. [The Place Statement and the Non-Place Statement]

Below are three kinds of place and non-place: the place sought, the place relinquished, and the place of transformation.

Chan Master Zhenxie Qingliao gave this instruction in the hall: "Nowhere can it be sought, yet there is one place where it is attained without seeking. Tell me, what place is that?" After a long pause, he said: "The thief has already revealed himself."

The Brahmin Black, using his spiritual powers, came to make an offering to the Buddha, carrying two flowering branches of albizia and wutong in his left and right hands. The Buddha called, "Immortal!" The Brahmin answered. The Buddha said, "Put it down." The Brahmin then put down the flower in his left hand. The Buddha again called, "Immortal! Put it down." The Brahmin put down the flower in his right hand as well. The Buddha again called, "Immortal! Put it down."

The Brahmin said, "World-Honored One, both my hands are now empty. What more are you telling me to put down?" The Buddha said, "I am not telling you to relinquish the flowers. You must relinquish the six external sense objects, the six internal sense faculties, and the six consciousnesses between them. Relinquish them all at once. When there is no place left to relinquish, that is the place where you are freed from birth and death." At these words, the Brahmin awakened to the forbearance of the unborn.

The verse of transmission by Venerable Manorhita, the twenty-second patriarch of India, says: "The mind follows the turning of the myriad circumstances; the place of turning is truly profound. Following the stream, recognize your nature; then there is neither joy nor sorrow."

"The mind follows the turning of the myriad circumstances" is the place of transformation; "there is neither joy nor sorrow" is the non-place-of-transformation statement.

108. [The Written-Word Statement and the Non-Written-Word Statement]

Written words mean language and script.

As the World-Honored One was about to enter nirvāṇa, the great bodhisattva Mañjuśrī asked the Buddha to turn the Dharma wheel once more. The World-

Honored One rebuked him: “Mañjuśrī! During my forty-nine years in the world, I have never spoken a single word. You ask me to turn the Dharma wheel again—have I ever turned the Dharma wheel?”

Turning the Dharma wheel again is the written-word statement; not having spoken a single word is the non-written-word statement.

[Mahāmati, these are the one hundred and eight statements taught by the Buddhas of the past. You and all great bodhisattvas should study and cultivate them.]

After finishing these 108 statements, the Buddha told Bodhisattva Mahāmati, “Mahāmati, these 108 statements were spoken by the Buddhas of the past. You and the many great bodhisattvas should all study and practice these 108 statements, and should learn to answer practitioners’ questions in this way.”

These 108 statements encompass phenomena, principle, nature, cultivation, truth, delusion, confusion, awakening, teachings, practice, causes, results, essence, function, identity, difference, cessation, illumination, and more; they leave nothing out. The essential purport of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra is all contained within them.

Yet many more passages of the sūtra follow. What do they discuss? If the preceding section concerns Chan, then what follows concerns doctrinal teachings. Although the Chan and doctrinal traditions differ in standpoint, perspective, and skillful means, both are Buddhadharma; they do not contradict one another.

There is a saying: “To understand the Chan school but not the teachings—open your mouth and invite ridicule; to understand the teachings but not the Chan school—it is like pouring water into empty space.” In fact, one who opens their mouth only to spout nonsense and invite ridicule does not truly understand the Chan school. And to expound doctrinal principles at great length by “interpreting the meaning according to the words” is like pouring water into empty space: one rambles on without limit, never getting to the point or addressing what truly matters. This, too, is not a genuine understanding of the teachings.

II. Separate Explanations of the Forty Gates

01. Arising and Ceasing of the Consciousnesses

[At that time, the Mahāsattva Mahāmati again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, in how many ways do the various consciousnesses arise, abide, and

cease?”]

Consciousness means mind-consciousness. Generally speaking, there are eight consciousnesses: the first five consciousnesses are eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, and body consciousness. The sixth consciousness is mental consciousness, that is, the thinking mind. The seventh consciousness is manas consciousness, also called the “mind faculty.” The eighth consciousness is ālaya consciousness, or “storehouse consciousness,” which contains the seeds of all wholesome and unwholesome dharmas and is the basis of saṃsāra.

Although the eighth consciousness is “storehouse consciousness,” among the three means of cognition—direct perception, inference, and erroneous cognition—it belongs to direct perception. Xian means manifestation, and liang means measure. So where does the eighth consciousness manifest? And how does it measure? This brings us to the two aspects of the eighth consciousness: the object aspect and the perceiving aspect.

The object aspect is the part in which images appear; the perceiving aspect is the part that can perceive the object aspect. The perceiving aspect can measure the object aspect. For example, there is a flower on the mountain ahead—the object aspect—which both people and bees can see, the perceiving aspect. In fact, that flower does not truly exist; it is merely an “object aspect” of mind-consciousness.

Seeing that flower is merely deluded seeing, because the flower does not truly exist. When Zhang San and Li Si can both see it, this is called “shared deluded seeing,” induced by collective karma. Yet the flower seen by Zhang San and Li Si may not be entirely the same. The subtle differences between their perceptions are “deluded seeing due to individual karma.”

Zhang San and Li Si are both human, so their differences are slight. The difference between a bee and a human is much greater: the flower seen by a bee is very different from the one seen by a human, for it is seeking the flower’s nectar sac. Suppose there were another form of life that swaggered through the flowers and even passed through mountains and rocks, floating away. It would not be because it possessed some miraculous ability, but because it did not see mountains, rocks, or flowers at all, owing to its “nonshared karma”—in past lives, it had not created the same karma.

This is true not only of flowers, mountains, and rocks, but of all things: “All appearances are illusory.” Ordinary beings do not understand this and take them to be real. The Buddha has directly realized this and teaches it for sentient beings: “If one wishes to know all Buddhas of the three times, one should contemplate the nature of the dharma realm: all is created by mind alone.” Beyond the eight

consciousnesses, some also posit a “pure consciousness” or an “undefiled consciousness.”

Others do not posit a pure consciousness or undefiled consciousness, but instead divide the eighth consciousness into four aspects: the object aspect, perceiving aspect, self-cognizing aspect, and cognition of self-cognition. These theoretical systems are vast and lengthy, so we will not examine them here. In short, these many kinds of consciousness are the “various consciousnesses” about which Mahāmati asks. Consciousness is mind, and mind is the basis of all phenomena.

Mahāmati asked the Buddha: “World-Honored One, in how many ways do the various consciousnesses arise? In how many ways do they abide? In how many ways do they cease?”

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The various consciousnesses have two kinds of arising, abiding, and cessation, which cannot be known through thought.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: the various consciousnesses have two kinds of arising, two kinds of abiding, and two kinds of cessation. Their principle is subtle and wondrous; it cannot be known merely by simple conceptual reflection.

[“The various consciousnesses have two kinds of arising: the arising of continuous flow and the arising of appearances.”]

The various consciousnesses have two kinds of arising, called “the arising of continuous flow” and “the arising of appearances.”

[“They have two kinds of abiding: the abiding of continuous flow and the abiding of appearances.”]

There are two kinds of abiding, called “the abiding of continuous flow” and “the abiding of appearances.”

[“They have two kinds of cessation: the cessation of continuous flow and the cessation of appearances.”]

There are two kinds of cessation, called “the cessation of continuous flow” and “the cessation of appearances.”

The wondrous nature of suchness is originally without arising or ceasing. Conditioned by ignorance, however, the various consciousnesses arise; hence there are arising, abiding, transformation, and cessation. Arising means arising through causes and conditions; abiding means temporary existence. Transformation means changing from moment to moment, and cessation means ultimately coming to an

end. The sūtra passage here does not mention “transformation,” because it has already spoken of “continuous flow,” which is transformation.

“Continuous flow” means that mind-consciousness continues from thought to thought, changing inwardly like an uninterrupted current of water. “Appearance” means outward manifestation: arising, abiding, and ceasing become apparent. Take the flower just mentioned as an example. As the plant gradually grows, this is arising; as it remains in bloom for a time, this is abiding; and when it eventually withers, this is cessation. These are all changes in mind-consciousness; in fact, there is no such flower.

[“Mahāmati, the various consciousnesses have three aspects: the aspect of transformation, the aspect of karma, and the true aspect.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: the various consciousnesses have three aspects, called the aspect of transformation, the aspect of karma, and the true aspect. The “aspect of transformation” refers to awareness being transformed into non-awareness through beginningless perfuming and transformation. What is “beginningless perfuming and transformation”? To explain this, we must trace it back to “beginningless ignorance.”

Put simply, beginningless ignorance means that intrinsic nature is originally luminous, yet another deluded thought arises that takes this luminosity as an object. From this single deluded arising, thoughts continue one after another and are repeatedly habituated, producing transformation. This is “beginningless perfuming and transformation.” Because of it, the intrinsic nature—which is thusness, unmoving, lucid, and greatly aware—is transformed into the various consciousnesses, which stir deludedly and lack awareness.

The “aspect of karma” means that, because of non-awareness—not understanding—one stirs deludedly, thereby forming karma. When conditions are met, one undergoes karmic retribution accordingly. The “true aspect” means that although mind-consciousness deludedly creates causes and deludedly receives results, intrinsic nature remains thusness, unmoving and unchanged amid conditions; its essential nature is truly pure.

According to Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna, the three aspects are the aspect of karma, the aspect of transformation, and the aspect of manifestation. From truth, delusion arises; deluded movement becomes karma; because there is movement, transformation occurs; and manifest object-realms arise in sequence. This sūtra does not speak of the “aspect of manifestation,” but of the “true aspect,” in order to emphasize that although the various consciousnesses accord with conditions, their intrinsic nature remains unchanged. Hence it is called the “true aspect.”

[“Mahāmati, briefly speaking, there are three kinds of consciousness; extensively speaking, there are eight aspects. What are the three? They are true consciousness, manifesting consciousness, and discriminating consciousness of objects.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: briefly speaking, there are three kinds of consciousness; extensively speaking, there are eight aspects. What are the three kinds when the various consciousnesses are explained briefly? They are true consciousness, manifesting consciousness, and discriminating consciousness of objects. True consciousness and manifesting consciousness both refer to the eighth consciousness—storehouse consciousness. True consciousness refers to the essence of storehouse consciousness, while manifesting consciousness refers to its function. Discriminating consciousness of objects refers to the first seven consciousnesses.

The “three kinds” divide storehouse consciousness into two and combine the consciousnesses of objects into one. The “eight aspects” combine storehouse consciousness into one and divide the consciousnesses of objects into seven. “Three kinds” and “eight aspects” are simply more concise and more detailed ways of classifying the various consciousnesses.

[“Mahāmati, just as a bright mirror holds images of all colors, so too does manifesting consciousness manifest where it is present.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: just as a bright mirror reflects things—when a Hu person comes, it reflects a Hu person; when a Han person comes, it reflects a Han person—manifesting consciousness is likewise. Manifesting consciousness belongs to direct perception; it is neither inference nor erroneous cognition.

[“Mahāmati, manifesting consciousness and discriminating consciousness of objects—these two are mutually causal in their perishing and nonperishing.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: manifesting consciousness and discriminating consciousness of objects have the two attributes of “perishing” and “nonperishing.” Manifesting consciousness stores the wholesome and unwholesome seeds produced by discriminating consciousness of objects, and these endure without being lost over long periods; thus it is called “nonperishing.”

When wholesome and unwholesome seeds encounter conditions and become manifest, they are like a seed sprouting and turning into a flower: that seed is then gone. When conditions are exhausted, the flower perishes; thus it is called “perishing.”

This is in fact worldly cause and effect: “Even through hundreds of thousands of kalpas, karma once created does not perish; when causes and conditions converge, one must still undergo its karmic result.” When the karmic result has been fully undergone, that karma is gone. Yet at the same time, more karma is created, to be repaid later. Such “mutual causation in succession” means that causes give rise to one another without end. This is the great ocean of suffering of rebirth in the six realms.

[“Mahāmati, inconceivable perfuming and inconceivable transformation are the causes of manifesting consciousness.”]

Perfuming means habituation, referring to the beginningless habit-energy of attachment to appearances. Transformation means alteration: through long and repeated habituation, the intrinsic nature, which is thusness and unmoving, is transformed into manifesting consciousness, which moves deludedly in successive turns. Not a single thing lies outside the principle-substance of suchness, yet now the whole of truth becomes delusion and the whole of principle becomes phenomena—this is inconceivable. Truth and delusion are nondual; principle and phenomena are one suchness. There is perfuming without perfuming, and transformation without transformation; it cannot be conceived by mind or expressed in speech. The habituation is inconceivable, and so is the transformation. Such perfuming and transformation are the causes of manifesting consciousness.

[“Mahāmati, grasping various sense objects and perfuming by beginningless deluded thoughts are the causes of discriminating consciousness of objects.”]

The various sense objects broadly refer to the six objects of form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharmas. Grasping various sense objects means that the six sense faculties cling to the six sense objects, giving rise to deluded thoughts of attachment and views. Perfuming by beginningless deluded thoughts means that, from beginningless kalpas onward, such deluded thoughts of attachment and views have arisen and perfumed consciousness of objects. Such deluded attachment is the cause of discriminating consciousness of objects.

[“Mahāmati, if one reflects upon that true consciousness, the various unreal delusions cease. Then all consciousnesses of the sense faculties cease; this is called the cessation of appearances.”]

Fu has the sense of repeatedly turning back and illuminating. “If one reflects upon that true consciousness” means that one can turn the light back to contemplate true consciousness. “The various unreal delusions cease” means that all the unreal deluded thoughts and attachments—namely, the various forms of perfuming and transformation discussed above—naturally disappear. These various forms of perfuming and transformation are the causes of deluded consciousness; when the

cause ceases, the result also ceases: “then all consciousnesses of the sense faculties cease.”

Once deluded thoughts and attachments have ceased, all consciousnesses of the sense faculties cease. But does true consciousness also cease? Since it is called “true,” it does not cease. Rather, it is transformed into wisdom—consciousness is transformed into wisdom. When one reflects upon true consciousness, all consciousnesses of the sense faculties cease. This is called the “cessation of appearances.”

[“Mahāmati, the cessation of continuity means that when the causes of continuity cease, continuity ceases. When that from which it arises and its supporting conditions cease, continuity ceases.”]

The cessation of continuity is what was previously called “the cessation of continuous flow.” The continuity of consciousness depends on causes and conditions; when the causes and conditions cease, continuity ceases. “The cause ceases” refers to causes, while “that from which it arises and its supporting conditions cease” refers to conditions.

[Mahāmati, why is this so? Because it is that upon which continuity depends. What is meant by dependence is beginningless deluded thought. What is meant by conditioning influences is the deluded thought of the objects of consciousness, such as those perceived by one’s own mind.]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: Why is it said that when causes and conditions cease, continuity also ceases? Because causes and conditions are the basis on which continuity depends—continuity continues by relying on causes and conditions. “Beginningless deluded thought” is beginningless ignorance. Intrinsically, one is originally luminous; yet when one further gives rise to a thought that apprehends that luminosity, this is beginningless ignorance. Beginningless ignorance is also called fundamental ignorance.

The “cause” is beginningless ignorance, and the “conditions” are the discriminated objects perceived by one’s own mind. Continuity depends on these causes and conditions. Therefore, when causes and conditions cease, continuity ceases. The causes and conditions spoken of here are worldly cause and effect.

[Thus, Mahāmati, a lump of clay and minute particles are neither different nor not different; the same is true of ornaments made of gold. Mahāmati, if a lump of clay and minute particles were different, the former would not be made from the latter; yet it is in fact made from them, and therefore they are not different. If they were not different, then there should be no distinction between a lump of clay and minute particles.]

Here the Buddha gives two analogies. First, he speaks of “a lump of clay and minute particles.” A lump of clay is made up of minute particles, and the lump of clay and the particles are “neither different nor not different.” Different means dissimilar; not different means identical. Neither different nor not different means neither identical nor dissimilar.

If one says that a lump of clay differs from minute particles, then the lump of clay would not be made of minute particles. Yet it is in fact made of minute particles, so the two are not different. If one says that a lump of clay and minute particles are identical, then there should be no distinction between them. Yet a lump of clay is large and minute particles are small, so they are distinct. Thus, the two are not identical. Ornaments are decorative objects fashioned from gold. “The same is true of ornaments made of gold”: likewise, ornaments and gold are neither different nor not different.

What do these two analogies illustrate? They illustrate that the transformative consciousnesses and the storehouse consciousness are neither different nor not different. The transformative consciousnesses refer to the first seven consciousnesses. The storehouse consciousness is the eighth consciousness. When a person dies, the first seven consciousnesses all cease, whereas the eighth consciousness does not cease. The eighth consciousness “comes first at birth and goes last at death, acting as the master”; it is the basis of saṃsāra. The lump of clay symbolizes the transformative consciousnesses, and the minute particles symbolize the storehouse consciousness; the ornaments symbolize the transformative consciousnesses, and the gold symbolizes the storehouse consciousness.

[Thus, Mahāmati, if the true characteristics of the transformative consciousnesses and the storehouse consciousness were different, the storehouse consciousness would not be the cause. If they were not different, then when the transformative consciousnesses ceased, the storehouse consciousness should also cease. Yet its own true characteristics do not in fact cease.]

Through these two analogies, the Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva that the true characteristics of the transformative consciousnesses and the storehouse consciousness are neither different nor not different. If the two were different, then “the storehouse consciousness would not be the cause.” Not being the cause means that it would not store the causes created by the transformative consciousnesses.

Yet in fact, the causes created by the transformative consciousnesses—that is, karmic seeds—are all stored in the storehouse consciousness. When seeds encounter conditions, they manifest in activity; this is what is called “undergoing karmic retribution.” Therefore, the two are not different.

If the two were not different, then when a lifetime of karmic retribution had ended and the person died, the storehouse consciousness should likewise cease when the transformative consciousnesses ceased. Yet in fact the storehouse consciousness's own true characteristics never perish: "Even through hundreds of thousands of eons, actions once performed do not vanish; when causes and conditions converge, one must still undergo their karmic result." Therefore, the transformative consciousnesses and the storehouse consciousness are not identical. This passage means that these two have neither identity nor difference.

[Therefore, Mahāmati, it is not the consciousness of its own true characteristics that ceases, but only the karmic characteristics that cease. If the consciousness of its own true characteristics ceased, then the storehouse consciousness would cease. Mahāmati, for the storehouse consciousness to cease would be no different from the doctrines of the non-Buddhists' annihilationist view.]

The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva that, from what was just said about neither difference nor non-difference, we know that the storehouse consciousness's own true characteristics do not cease. What perishes are only karmic characteristics: after karma that has been created receives its retribution, that karmic characteristic is no more. But the storehouse consciousness does not perish, for it still contains many karmic seeds that have not yet received retribution. How could it perish? If one were to say that the storehouse consciousness could perish, would that not mean that karma can be created without its retribution being received? Would that not be the non-Buddhists' theory of annihilationism?

[Mahāmati, those non-Buddhists advance the following doctrine: when the objects apprehended by consciousness cease, the continuous flow of consciousness also ceases. If the continuous flow of consciousness ceases, then the beginningless flow should be cut off.]

"Objects apprehended" are sensory objects grasped by consciousness—for example, the eye apprehends forms and the ear apprehends sounds. The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva that those non-Buddhists say this: if the sensory objects apprehended by consciousness are eliminated, then the continuous flow of consciousness perishes. This is the non-Buddhists' annihilationist view.

The "cessation of the continuous flow" of which the Buddha spoke earlier was said in relation to the cessation of characteristics. By "cessation of the continuous flow," the Buddha meant ceaseless arising and ceasing, like a flowing stream. But by cessation of the continuous flow, the non-Buddhists mean a dead, inert mass: there is no longer any flow; it has been annihilated.

This gives rise to a problem: "If the continuous flow of consciousness ceases, then the beginningless flow should be cut off." If the flow of consciousness can be

annihilated, then the original flow must also be annihilated. The original flow is beginningless ignorance. Once this origin is cut off, the world loses its first cause. Where, then, do this world and its many things come from? For example, where do human beings come from? How could the non-Buddhists explain themselves consistently? Please read on:

[Mahāmati, the non-Buddhists say that the cause of the arising of the continuous flow is not the conjunction of the eye, eye-consciousness, form, and light; there is another, different cause. Mahāmati, they speak of that cause as supreme excellence, a person, freedom, time, or minute particles.]

Let us first explain "arising from the conjunction of the eye, consciousness, form, and light." For example, when one sees an object, the phenomenon arises from the coming together of the four causes and conditions of eye, consciousness, form, and light. "Eye" refers to the eye faculty; "consciousness" refers to eye-consciousness; "form" refers to the object seen; and "light" refers to a bright environment, for one cannot see in darkness. This is a dharma arising from causes and conditions. The arising of the phenomenon called the continuous flow cannot be separated from dharmas arising from causes and conditions. This is the cause of the arising of the continuous flow.

The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva that, in explaining the cause of the arising of the continuous flow, the non-Buddhists say that it does not arise through the conjunction of causes and conditions, but has another, different cause.

What are these different causes? "Supreme excellence": some non-Buddhists say that the god Nārāyaṇa is supremely excellent and wondrous, and that Nārāyaṇa produces the four castes: Brahmins from his mouth, Kṣatriyas from his arms, and so forth. This is one form of the theory of divine creation.

Then there is "a person." A person, also called a man, is another name for the spiritual self; this is a theory of a spiritual self. There is also "freedom": freedom means Maheśvara, the Great Sovereign God, which is another theory of divine creation. Then there are "time and minute particles": this holds that things arise through the long evolution of tiny basic elements. This closely resembles modern evolutionary theory, or perhaps it may be called the natural evolutionary theory of the Buddha's time.

Having finished speaking of the various "different causes" falsely conceived by the non-Buddhists, it is now time to explain how the Buddhas and bodhisattvas understand these questions. Please read on:

[Moreover, Mahāmati, there are seven kinds of self-nature: the self-nature of aggregation, the self-nature of nature, the self-nature of characteristics, the self-

nature of the great elements, the self-nature of causes, the self-nature of conditions, and the self-nature of completion.]

In “the self-nature of aggregation,” aggregation means coming together, as in the “conjunction of eye, consciousness, form, and light” just mentioned. Here, “self-nature” means an inherently possessed characteristic, with the sense of a principle or regularity. “The nature of aggregation” is the nature of such conjunction; “the self-nature of aggregation” means that this nature follows a discernible regularity. The self-nature of aggregation is a general designation. When further analyzed separately from the perspectives of nature and characteristics, and of causes and conditions, it yields the following six kinds of self-nature.

From the perspective of nature and characteristics, these are the self-nature of nature, or “the self-nature of the nature of nature”; the self-nature of characteristics; and the self-nature of the great elements. Nature may be understood as inner content; characteristics may be understood as outward appearance; and the great elements are earth, water, fire, wind, space, perception, and consciousness.

The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says: “It is like a skilled painter who spreads out the various colors, falsely grasping distinct appearances, while the great elements are without differentiation. Within the great elements there are no colors; within colors there are no great elements. Yet, without departing from the great elements, colors can be found. Within mind there are no colored paintings; within colored paintings there is no mind. Yet, without departing from mind, colored paintings can be found.”

“That mind never abides; it is immeasurable and inconceivable. It manifests every color, yet none knows the others. It is like a skilled painter who cannot know his own mind, yet paints because of mind. The nature of all dharmas is thus. Mind is like a skilled painter, able to paint all the worlds. The five aggregates all arise from it; there is no dharma it does not create. As with mind, so too with Buddha; as with Buddha, so too with sentient beings. Know that the essential nature of Buddha and mind alike is inexhaustible.”

“If a person knows the workings of mind, which universally creates all the worlds, that person sees the Buddha and comprehends the Buddha’s true reality. Mind does not abide in the body, nor does the body abide in mind, yet it can perform the work of a Buddha, with an unobstructed freedom never before known. If one wishes to understand all Buddhas of the three times, one should contemplate the nature of the dharma realm: all is created by mind alone.”

Here we use the “skilled painter” as an analogy for the self-nature of nature, “colored paintings” as an analogy for the self-nature of characteristics, and “the various colors —red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet” as an analogy for the self-nature of the great elements.

A skilled painter has the characteristics of a skilled painter—the self-nature of nature; colored paintings have the characteristics of colored paintings—the self-nature of characteristics; and the various colors have the characteristics of the various colors—the self-nature of the great elements. Each has its own characteristics and its own regularities. Their inherent natures differ, yet they function in coordination, and a colored painting appears. This may be called "a colored painting is created by the painter alone."

All things are called "the various dharmas." The causes of the various dharmas, including the origin of humankind, are neither divine creation nor a spiritual self, much less evolution; rather, "all is created by mind alone." Mind is like a skilled painter, able to paint all the worlds.

Now from the perspective of causes and conditions, there are the self-nature of causes, the self-nature of conditions, and the self-nature of completion. Again taking the preceding verses from the Avataṃsaka Sūtra as an example, the "cause" is "like a skilled painter who spreads out the various colors"; the "conditions" are "falsely grasping distinct appearances, while the great elements are without differentiation"; and "completion" is "it manifests every color, yet none knows the others."

When an artist paints, the artist has his or her own rules and characteristics—this is the self-nature of causal nature. The various different images imagined in delusion use only a few kinds of pigments. For example, green is used equally in painting figures and landscapes; green pigment has its own characteristic of greenness—this is the self-nature of conditional nature.

According to the respective characteristics of the principal pigments—red, orange, yellow, green, cyan, blue, and violet—the skilled artist arranges them to form a vivid picture that seems ready to leap from the page—this is the self-nature of accomplished nature. The various pigments in the picture all manifest according to their own characteristics. They do not know the artistic conception of the picture, and one pigment does not know the characteristics of another. This is what is meant by: "They manifest all colors, yet each does not know the others."

These seven kinds of self-nature are the Buddha's and bodhisattvas' view of all things. The seven ultimate meanings discussed next are the state of mind of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, or, one might say, the course of their mental realization. Please see the text below:

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, there are seven ultimate meanings: the realm of mind, the realm of wisdom, the realm of knowledge, the realm of vision, the realm beyond the vision of duality, the realm beyond the stages of the Buddha's children, and the realm personally attained by the Tathāgata.]

“The realm of mind” refers to the vast breadth of heart of Buddhas and bodhisattvas: broad-minded, open, and as empty as a valley. As the saying goes, “The great void drinks in light and dissolves separation; echoes in a secluded valley speak of evening mist.” The mind can give rise to wisdom; such vastness of heart can evoke wisdom. This is “the realm of wisdom.” When the power of wisdom is sufficient, it can bring forth the functioning of knowledge; this is “the realm of knowledge.”

Once the functioning of knowledge has been accomplished, right view appears before one. This is “the realm of vision.” When right view appears, one can transcend narrow, one-sided views that fall into such dualities as annihilation and eternalism, existence and nonexistence, or ordinary beings and sages. This is “the realm beyond the vision of duality.” One may even transcend the state of bodhisattvas on the stages. Bodhisattvas are the Buddha’s children, and “the stages of the children” refers to the Buddha’s children on those stages. This is “the realm beyond the stages of the Buddha’s children.”

Having transcended the state of bodhisattvas on the stages, one realizes Buddhahood. This is “the realm personally attained by the Tathāgata.” Emperor Wu of Liang asked Patriarch Bodhidharma, “What is the highest meaning of the noble truth?” Patriarch Bodhidharma replied, “Vast emptiness—nothing holy.” “Vast” means breadth of heart; “nothing holy” means transcending the narrow, one-sided view that sets ordinary beings and sages in opposition.

[Mahāmati, this is the mind of self-nature and ultimate meaning of all the Tathāgatas, Arhats, and Perfectly Awakened Ones of the past, future, and present.]

The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that the “seven kinds of self-nature” and the “seven ultimate meanings” just discussed are the view and breadth of heart of all Buddhas throughout the ten directions and three times.

[Through the mind of self-nature and ultimate meaning, they accomplish the Tathāgata’s worldly dharmas, supramundane dharmas, and dharmas supreme even beyond the supramundane.]

With this mind of “self-nature” and “ultimate meaning,” the Tathāgata accomplishes worldly dharmas, supramundane dharmas, and dharmas supreme even beyond the supramundane. To accomplish worldly dharmas is to expound extensively on worldly cause and effect, exhorting the multitude to refrain from all evil and practice every good. To accomplish supramundane dharmas is to accomplish the Hīnayāna teachings of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, as well as the Mahāyāna teachings of bodhisattvas. To accomplish dharmas supreme even beyond the supramundane is the Buddha vehicle: this One Vehicle alone is the true reality; the other two are not true.

[The eye of noble wisdom enters into the establishment of individual and common characteristics. What is thus established is not shared with the erroneous views of non-Buddhist teachings.]

The eye of noble wisdom is the Buddha's knowledge and vision. Individual and common characteristics means the common characteristic of individual characteristics. Individual characteristic means one's own measure of realization—that is, swiftly opening wisdom. Common characteristic means the method of benefiting others—that is, liberating sentient beings. Establishment means establishing dharma gates suited to the capacities of their recipients, enabling all sentient beings to practice according to the Dharma and likewise awaken to and enter the Buddha's knowledge and vision.

"The eye of noble wisdom enters into the establishment of individual and common characteristics" means taking the Buddha's right knowledge and right view as one's guide, practicing in accordance with the Dharma, swiftly opening wisdom and attaining Buddhahood, liberating sentient beings, and seeking no other fruition. Non-Buddhist teachings refer to those mentioned earlier, such as "the supreme and wondrous," "a person," "a sovereign," "time," and "atoms."

Erroneous views include views of the body, extreme views, attachment to views, attachment to rules and prohibitions, and wrong views. "What is thus established is not shared with the erroneous views of non-Buddhist teachings" means establishing dharma gates suited to the capacities of their recipients as just described, liberating oneself and others. This differs from the wrong knowledge and wrong views of non-Buddhists; it does not share their views.

[Mahāmati, how does it share the erroneous views of non-Buddhist teachings? It is the deluded view of one's own experiential realm. Failing to realize that it is manifested by one's own consciousness and mind, they do not penetrate its limits.]

The deluded view of one's own experiential realm means giving rise to deluded thoughts regarding the states one sees in one's own practice and discriminating between ordinary beings and sages, and so forth. Failing to realize that it is manifested by one's own consciousness and mind means not knowing that these are all illusory appearances manifested by one's own conscious mind. Limits, also called boundaries, means scope or range.

Not penetrating its limits means being unable to comprehend matters within the scope of appearances manifested by one's own mind. The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati why one does not share the views of non-Buddhists: non-Buddhists, too, may arouse distorted wisdom through practice. They falsely discriminate among appearances manifested by their own minds, not knowing that these are deceptive manifestations of consciousness and mind. Unable to comprehend the appearances

that arise, they reach various incorrect conclusions, such as “the supreme and wondrous,” “a person,” “a sovereign,” “time,” and “atoms.” Therefore, one cannot share their views.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, deluded ordinary beings make theories of dualistic views regarding self-nature, the absence of self-nature, and ultimate meaning.]

The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that ordinary beings are deluded and ignorant. Unable to comprehend the mind of “self-nature” and “ultimate meaning,” they are confused and unaware. Because of this confusion, they give rise to the two views of existence and nonexistence regarding what is neither existent nor nonexistent; and to the two views of annihilation and eternalism regarding what is neither eternal nor annihilated; and so forth. All these are “making theories of dualistic views.”

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, I shall now explain the cessation of the suffering of the three kinds of existence imagined in delusion, the cessation of the conditions of ignorance, craving, and karma, and the illusory realms manifested by one’s own mind in accordance with one’s views.]

The “three kinds of existence” are existence in the desire realm, existence in the form realm, and existence in the formless realm—that is, the three realms. These are the realm of saṃsāra, and saṃsāra is suffering. To regard saṃsāra as truly existent and then imagine eliminating the suffering of these “three kinds of existence” is what is meant by “imagining the cessation of the suffering of the three kinds of existence.” But where does this suffering come from? It comes from the conditions of ignorance, craving, and karma. Ignorance is avidyā.

Craving is delusion and belongs to the delusions of thought. Karmic conditions are wholesome and unwholesome karmic conditions. Suffering arises from ignorance, delusion, and karma. One takes ignorance, delusion, and karma also to be truly existent and imagines eliminating them. Yet ignorance, craving, and karmic conditions are taken as causes, and the suffering of the three kinds of existence appears as their result. All these are illusory realms manifested by one’s own mind; they are not truly existent.

This is what is meant by “the illusory realms manifested by one’s own mind in accordance with one’s views.” “I shall now explain” means that one should tell them not to regard “the suffering of the three kinds of existence” or “the conditions of ignorance, craving, and karma” as truly existent. They are all illusory realms arising from one’s own mind and are not real.

[Mahāmati, if there are śramaṇas or brahmins who wish to make the results of cause and effect appear from the causeless or the caused, and who abide in things

or times, relying on the arising of the aggregates, realms, and entrances; or who say that what has arisen is annihilated—]

Śramaṇa is translated by meaning as “diligently cultivating and bringing evil to rest”: diligently practicing all good and bringing all evil to cessation. Brahmin is translated by meaning as “pure conduct”: cultivating purity. Some among these two groups may also maintain mistaken views. “Without seed” means naturalness; “with seed” means conditionality.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra repeatedly speaks of “neither conditionality nor naturalness,” yet they “wish to make the results of cause and effect appear from the causeless or the caused”—taking “without seed” or “with seed” as a cause and wishing for a result to appear. “And who abide in things or times” is another mistaken method of practice: abiding in dependence on some thing or some particular time.

“Relying on the arising of the aggregates, realms, and entrances” means clinging to the arising of the five aggregates, six entrances, eighteen realms, and so forth, and abiding therein. The arising of the five aggregates and the like is impermanent, but they mistakenly take it to be permanent and abide in reliance upon it. This is the mistaken view of eternalism. “Already” means afterward; “having arisen” means after something has arisen; “having arisen, it is annihilated” means that after it arises, it is entirely extinguished.

The Buddha has already said earlier that karmic appearances perish, but the storehouse consciousness does not perish. Yet they say that what has arisen is annihilated, thus falling into annihilationism. This is the mistaken view of annihilation. This passage means that if śramaṇas or brahmins maintain extreme views such as annihilation and eternalism, or existence and nonexistence, their error is the same as that of non-Buddhists.

[Mahāmati, if continuity, things, arising, existence, nirvāṇa, the path, karma, fruition, and truths are destroyed and annihilated, then why is this so? Because these present realities cannot be obtained, and because their initial view is not properly grounded.]

“Continuity” refers to the continuity of cause and effect. “Things” refers to phenomena. “Arising” refers to the arising of the aggregates, realms, and entrances. “Existence” refers to the three kinds of existence: existence in the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm. These are worldly dharmas.

“Nirvāṇa” is the resultant realm that neither arises nor ceases. “The path” is the way to realize nirvāṇa. Here “karma” refers to the karma of the path, and “fruition” refers to the fruition of the path. These are supramundane dharmas.

“Truths” refers to the four noble truths of suffering, origination, cessation, and the path. Of these, the truths of suffering and origination are worldly dharmas, while the truths of cessation and the path are supramundane dharmas. The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that according to their account, all the worldly and supramundane dharmas listed above would be destroyed and annihilated.

“Why is this so?” Why do they think in this way? “Because these present realities cannot be obtained”: because these worldly and supramundane dharmas cannot be obtained, they mistake “unobtainable” for nonexistence and thereby give rise to the view of annihilation. “And because their initial view is not properly grounded”: there is another reason—their initial resolve itself is incorrect.

[Mahāmati, it is like a broken jar, which cannot serve the function of a jar; it is also like a scorched seed, which cannot serve the function of a sprout.]

The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that they will attain nothing. It is like a cracked and leaking jar that can no longer be used as a jar, or a scorched seed that can no longer sprout.

[Thus, Mahāmati, if the natures of the aggregates, realms, and entrances are said to have ceased, to be ceasing now, or to be destined to cease, this is a deluded view of one’s own mind. Since there is no cause, they do not arise in any sequence.]

“Already ceased, now ceasing, and yet to cease” is successive cessation. There is also successive arising: “already arisen, now arising, and yet to arise.” The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that this is how they see matters. Take the aggregates, realms, and sense bases: they see the successive cessation of “already ceased, now ceasing, and yet to cease,” but fail to notice the cause of successive arising. Thus, deluded thoughts arise from their own minds, and they fall into annihilationist views.

The foregoing concerns possible deviations among the two groups of śramaṇas and brahmins. What follows concerns the erroneous views of non-Buddhist paths.

[Mahāmati, if they further maintain that the seedless, the seeded, and consciousness arise from the conjunction of three conditions, then turtles should grow hair and sand should yield oil. Your doctrine would thereby collapse and contradict established truth. The theories of the seeded and seedless entail such errors. All undertakings would be empty and meaningless.]

As explained earlier, “seedless” means natural causality, while “seeded” means causality through causes and conditions. These are originally two different views, and neither has anything to do with consciousness.

The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that some non-Buddhists also claim that "the seedless, the seeded, and consciousness arise from the conjunction of three conditions." They forcibly lump seedlessness, seedfulness, and consciousness together, though they are as unrelated as wind, horse, and ox. A turtle has nothing to do with hair, and sand has nothing to do with oil. To force these "three conditions" together is like saying that turtles ought to grow hair and sand ought to be pressed for oil.

Such an argument cannot stand ("your doctrine would thereby collapse") and violates both fact and principle ("contradicting established truth"). "The theories of the seeded and seedless entail such errors. All undertakings would be empty and meaningless." Theories such as seedfulness and seedlessness contain this fatal error. Whatever they undertake, and the ultimate aspect of noble wisdom, will all necessarily come to nothing and have no meaning. What, then, do they undertake? Please read on:

[Mahāmati, those non-Buddhists who maintain that the three conditions arise in conjunction speak of expedient teachings, cause and effect, and self-characteristics. They posit the aspects of the seeded and seedless in the past, future, and present. They say that things have been established from the beginning, and that consciousness, thought, and the element earth transform successively. Because of the habitual tendencies of their own erroneous views, they make such assertions.]

"Expedient teachings" refers to the teachings of non-Buddhist paths. "Cause and effect" refers to cultivating in accordance with those teachings as a cause, while anticipating the result to be realized. "Self-characteristics" refers to the illusory appearances and conceptions manifested by their own minds. The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that non-Buddhists who uphold the theory of the conjunction of three conditions cultivate causes according to their teachings, anticipate the results they expect to realize, and give rise in their own minds to illusory appearances and conceptions.

What kind of illusory appearances and conceptions? "The aspects of the seeded and seedless in the past, future, and present." Past, future, and present are the three periods of time. They manifest such appearances as seedfulness in the three periods and seedlessness in the three periods. "Things have been established from the beginning, and consciousness, thought, and the element earth transform successively"—they say that primordial matter first gives rise to consciousness, consciousness then gives rise to nature, and nature gives rise to earth, successively producing the twenty-five principles. "Because of the habitual tendencies of their own erroneous views, they make such assertions"—because the faults of their own wrong views have become ingrained as habits, they speak in this way.

[Thus, Mahāmati, foolish ordinary beings are harmed by erroneous views. Distorted, deluded, intoxicated, and without wisdom, they falsely claim to expound omniscient knowledge.]

The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that they are foolish ordinary beings, harmed by their own erroneous views. Though perverse, distorted, deluded, intoxicated, and without wisdom, they take themselves to be wise, establish teachings to instruct others, and falsely claim that their doctrines expound omniscient knowledge.

The source of the erroneous views of non-Buddhist paths lies in giving rise to deluded thought and attachment toward illusory realms manifested by one's own mind, mistaking them for real, and thereby drawing false conclusions. Attachment to self-arising is called attachment to the nature of self-arising; attachment to other-arising is called attachment to the nature of other-arising. There are also attachment to the nature of co-arising and attachment to the nature of causeless arising. Buddhas and bodhisattvas are free from deluded thought and attachment, and clearly point out: there is no self-arising, no other-arising, no co-arising, and no causeless arising; therefore, it is said to be unborn.

[Mahāmati, furthermore, other śramaṇas and brahmins see themselves as free from self-nature. They regard the deluded thoughts manifested inwardly and outwardly by mind as like floating clouds, a ring of fire, a city of gandharvas, an illusion, a mirage, the moon in water, and a dream. From beginningless time, falsehood has never departed from one's own mind. When the causes and conditions of deluded thought are exhausted, they depart from deluded thought, from speaker and spoken, observer and observed, and from the storehouse consciousness that supports and establishes the body. They are not associated with the objects of consciousness, the faculties that apprehend them, or their apprehenders. In the realm of nothing whatsoever, they are free from arising, abiding, and ceasing. Yet the mind itself arises and enters into discriminations accordingly.]

First, let us explain "seeing oneself as free from self-nature." Here, self-nature refers to attachment to the nature of self-arising, and more broadly to attachments to other-arising, co-arising, causeless arising, and the like. To see oneself as free from self-nature is to leave behind these erroneous views and clearly comprehend the right view of the unborn.

The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that, apart from the two kinds of non-Buddhist paths mentioned above, there are many other śramaṇas and brahmins who see themselves as free from self-nature. They regard the illusory realms manifested by their own minds as floating clouds, utterly unobtainable; as a revolving ring of fire, in which the spinning fire produces the appearance of a ring,

though no actual ring can be found; and as a city of gandharvas—a mirage—in which no such city truly exists.

They are like a mirage, like the moon in water, or like scenes in a dream. Illusory realms originally have neither inside nor outside; the perception of inside and outside is produced by beginningless false and deluded thought, and never departs from one's own mind. "When the causes and conditions of deluded thought are exhausted, they depart from deluded thought, from speaker and spoken, observer and observed, and from the storehouse consciousness that supports and establishes the body."

This means that when the causes and conditions of deluded thought have been exhausted, one departs from deluded thought and also from the dualistic views of speaker and spoken, observer and observed, and even from the storehouse consciousness that supports and establishes the body. Everything is beyond words, and there is apprehension within the sphere of the storehouse consciousness. "They are not associated with the objects of consciousness, the faculties that apprehend them, or their apprehenders."

This means that the objects are the six sense objects; apprehension refers to the six sense faculties; and the apprehenders are the six consciousnesses. "Not associated" means that consciousness and its objects are empty and quiescent, without duality. "In the realm of nothing whatsoever, they are free from arising, abiding, and ceasing." In the realm of nothing whatsoever, no real entity can be found. If not a single thing exists, how could there be arising, abiding, or ceasing? "Yet the mind itself arises and enters into discriminations accordingly." The storehouse consciousness then arises from the mind itself and enters all realms; to distinguish them by right wisdom is not in itself improper. As the Vimalakīrti Sūtra says: "Skilled at distinguishing the characteristics of all dharmas, yet unmoved in the ultimate truth."

[Mahāmati, such bodhisattvas will before long attain the equality of birth and death and nirvāṇa, great compassion and skillful means, and effortless expedient means.]

The dharma realm is inherently equal, without arising or ceasing. In delusion it is birth and death; in awakening it is nirvāṇa. Though delusion and awakening differ, the principle is always equal. Bodhisattvas cultivate from the shallow to the profound; therefore it is said that they "will before long attain the equality of birth and death and nirvāṇa." This is self-realization.

Having realized this for themselves, they then put it into function: exercising great compassion, they employ skillful means to guide and receive sentient beings, enabling them to cultivate effortless practice and reveal their intrinsic nature. Therefore it is called "great compassion and skillful means"; this is benefiting others.

As the Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “When self-awakening is complete, one can awaken others; this is the Tathāgata’s response in the world.” What is called “effortless expedient means” is practice without deliberate exertion. Although the principle-substance of suchness is inherently possessed by everyone, without this practice without deliberate exertion, both self-cultivation and benefiting others would have something on which to depend, and neither could be accomplished.

[Mahāmati, they regard all realms of sentient beings as illusory. Without laboring over causes and conditions, they leave behind inner and outer realms; outside mind, nothing is seen. They gradually enter the state without characteristics and gradually enter, from bhūmi to bhūmi, the realm of samādhi.]

Having understood this principle, such bodhisattvas can comprehend all sentient beings as illusory manifestations. They need not deliberately attend to causes and conditions, but naturally leave behind all appearances of inner and outer realms. There is only the one true mind; nothing else can be seen, and there is no dharma outside mind. Thus they proceed step by step to “enter the state without characteristics.” To enter the state without characteristics is to first break through ignorance, whereupon suchness and Buddha-nature shine forth clearly. “They gradually enter, from bhūmi to bhūmi, the realm of samādhi.” From bhūmi to bhūmi means from the first bhūmi to the tenth bhūmi.

[Understanding the three realms as illusory, and discerning and observing them, they will attain the illusory samādhi. Transcending the nothingness of what is manifested by their own minds, they abide in the perfection of prajñā. Abandoning the expedient means that produce what is born and made, they attain vajra-like samādhi and enter the body of the Tathāgata. They enter transformations in suchness, possess mastery of spiritual powers, compassionate skillful means, and complete adornment. They equally enter all Buddha-lands and the domains entered by non-Buddhist paths, free from mind, mentation, and consciousness. Such bodhisattvas gradually transform their bodies and attain the body of the Tathāgata.]

What was just said is that, in comprehending the realm of sentient beings as illusory, one knows that there is no dharma outside mind. Here one further comprehends the three realms as illusory; through discerning observation, one attains illusory samādhi. Transcending the realms manifested by one’s own mind, in which no various appearances remain, one can then abide in the perfection of wisdom, prajñā-pāramitā.

“Abandoning the expedient means that produce what is born and made” means leaving behind arising and deliberate making, and thereby attaining the unborn and the unmade. Such is the expedient means of abandoning what produces the born and made. “Vajra-like samādhi and entering the body of the Tathāgata”: vajra-like

refers to the equal-enlightenment bodhisattva's use of Buddha-wisdom to cut off the final, exceedingly subtle ignorance. What is difficult to cut off can be cut off, and it is likened to vajra, the hardest and sharpest of substances.

Samādhi means meditative stability. Vajra-like samādhi is the meditative stability attained by a mind as firm and sharp as vajra. From vajra-like samādhi, one enters the Buddha-stage. "They enter transformations in suchness, possess mastery of spiritual powers, compassionate skillful means, and complete adornment": suchness is the principle of original awakening. To abide constantly in this principle and give rise to manifold transformations is transformation in suchness.

They possess mastery of spiritual powers, compassionate skillful means, and complete adornment. "They equally enter all Buddha-lands and the domains entered by non-Buddhist paths, free from mind, mentation, and consciousness": all Buddha-lands are the Buddha realm, while the domains entered by non-Buddhist paths are the realm of Māra. Entering the Buddha realm presents no obstruction, and entering the realm of Māra likewise presents no obstruction; Buddha and Māra are equal.

This is because they have ultimately departed from mind, mentation, and consciousness, attained non-discriminating wisdom, and can universally manifest the samādhi of bodily forms. "Such bodhisattvas gradually transform their bodies and attain the body of the Tathāgata" means that they transform their comparatively coarse bodies and attain the Tathāgata's pure dharmakāya and various wondrous form-bodies. This summarizes the fruition bodhisattvas realize gradually.

[Mahāmati, therefore, those who wish to attain the body into which the Tathāgata freely enters should depart from the mind of aggregates, realms, and sense bases; from expedient means produced through causes and conditions; and from the false deluded thoughts of arising, abiding, and ceasing. Proceed directly through mind-only, observing the beginningless faults of falsity, the causes of the habitual tendencies of deluded thought, and the three realms of existence; contemplate nothing whatsoever. From the unborn Buddha-stage, reach the noble path of self-realization; from mastery of one's own mind, reach effortless practice.]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that, for the reasons explained above, anyone wishing to attain the Tathāgata body should distance themselves from the various deluded minds associated with the five aggregates, the six sense bases, and the eighteen realms; from all expedient means produced through the conjunction of causes and conditions; and from all false discriminations of arising, abiding, and ceasing. "Directly observe that all is mind-only; contemplate the error of

beginningless falsity, the causal basis of deluded habitual tendencies, and the three existences as having no inherent reality."

To directly observe that all is mind-only means to contemplate that all dharmas are mind-only and that there is no dharma outside the mind. The error of beginningless falsity refers to the fault of the first thought of beginningless ignorance; this is the path of delusion. The causal basis of deluded habitual tendencies means that deluded habitual tendencies create karmic causes; this is the path of karma.

The three existences are existence in the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. Taking deluded habitual tendencies as their cause, they necessarily bring about the painful results of the three existences in accordance with the worldly law of cause and effect; this is the path of suffering. To contemplate their having no inherent reality means to contemplate that these three paths of delusion, karma, and suffering are originally without inherent reality. They are only one mind; outside the mind, not a single dharma can be obtained.

"From the unborn at the Buddha-ground, one reaches the noble realm of self-realization; when one is free within one's own mind, one arrives at practice without contrivance." To contemplate their having no inherent reality is to accord with the unborn at the Buddha-ground and then attain the realm of noble self-realization. At that point, one is free within one's own mind. Having attained such freedom, one can give rise to boundless wondrous functioning from where wondrous functioning is originally absent, and liberate boundless sentient beings where sentient beings are originally absent.

As the Buddha says in the Diamond Sūtra: "Thus I liberate immeasurable, countless, boundless sentient beings, yet in reality no sentient being is liberated." Here the Buddha says, "When one is free within one's own mind, one arrives at practice without contrivance." Practice without contrivance is effortless practice.

[Just as a maṇi jewel accords with the many colors, entering into the subtle minds of sentient beings and, through transformation bodies, liberating them in accordance with the measure of their minds, so the stages are established progressively and continuously. Therefore, Mahāmati, you should become well versed in the siddhāntas and cultivate them.]

A maṇi jewel itself has no color, but when external colors are reflected upon it, the maṇi jewel can likewise reflect all kinds of colors. The Tathāgata knows and sees the hundreds of thousands of kinds of minds of sentient beings.

Just as the maṇi jewel accords with the many colors, the Tathāgata enters into the various subtle minds of sentient beings. In accordance with their minds and the measure of what they are able to understand, he teaches immeasurable gates of

liberation suited to their capacities, enabling those being liberated to establish themselves progressively and continuously from one stage to the next. Speaking of liberating sentient beings calls to mind the Four Siddhāntas, which we discussed earlier.

The term siddhānta combines Chinese and Sanskrit: xi is Chinese, while tan is a Sanskrit sound. Xi means “universal,” and tan is translated as “giving.” Because the Buddha universally bestows the four dharmas upon sentient beings, they are called siddhāntas. An ancient says: “The worldly siddhānta brings the benefit of joy; the siddhānta for individual persons brings the benefit of giving rise to goodness; the antidotal siddhānta brings the benefit of destroying evil; and the siddhānta of the highest truth brings the benefit of entering principle.” That which brings benefit is good. Therefore, the Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “You should become well versed in the siddhāntas and cultivate them.”

Overview of This Section:

This sūtra was taught in response to questions from Mahāmati Bodhisattva. At its very beginning, the sūtra praises Mahāmati Bodhisattva for his thorough understanding of the five dharmas, the three self-natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of non-self. Mahāmati Bodhisattva therefore naturally begins by asking about the five dharmas, three self-natures, eight consciousnesses, and two kinds of non-self. His first question concerns the eight consciousnesses: “In how many ways do the consciousnesses arise, abide, and cease?”

They are not called simply the eight consciousnesses, but the various consciousnesses, because the consciousnesses have at least two methods of classification: three kinds and eight aspects. The three kinds are true consciousness, manifest consciousness, and discriminating consciousness of objects. The eight aspects are the eight consciousnesses now widely known as the eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, mental consciousness, manas consciousness, and ālaya consciousness.

Beginning with the arising, abiding, and ceasing of the various consciousnesses, the Buddha points out that true consciousness neither arises nor ceases. What arises and ceases is the aspect of karma, which is false and has no actual existence. The Buddha refutes various heterodox views concerning a supreme and wondrous principle, a person, a sovereign being, time, and atoms. He also points out that heterodox views may arise within Buddhism—that is, non-Buddhist teachings attached to Buddhism. Finally, he sets forth the correct views that disciples of the Buddha should uphold, guiding them onto the path of proper cultivation.

02. The Realm of Ālaya Consciousness

[At that time, the Bodhisattva Mahāmati again addressed the Buddha: “The World-Honored One has spoken of mind, manas, consciousness, the five dharmas, their inherent characteristics, the practices of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the objects apprehended by one’s own mind and so forth, and non-combination. He has revealed that all teachings constitute the true mark and are the mind spoken by all Buddhas. For the great bodhisattvas dwelling in the ocean on Mount Malaya in Laṅkā, may he expound the dharmakāya realm of the storehouse consciousness, like waves on the sea, praised by the Tathāgata.”]

Earlier, the Buddha had said, “Briefly speaking, there are three kinds of consciousness; in detail, there are eight aspects.” At this point, Bodhisattva Mahāmati begins his inquiry with the “eight aspects.” Mind refers to the eighth consciousness; manas, to the seventh consciousness; consciousness, to the sixth consciousness; and the five dharmas, to the first five consciousnesses.

Here, the “five dharmas” should refer to the first five consciousnesses. The Buddha’s answer to this question begins with eye consciousness, the first of the five. “The World-Honored One has spoken of mind, manas, consciousness, the five dharmas, and their inherent characteristics”—that is, you have spoken of the mind-nature and mental characteristics of each of the eight consciousnesses.

“The practices of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the objects apprehended by one’s own mind and so forth, are not combined”—you have also spoken of the mental practices upheld by all Buddhas and bodhisattvas: “understanding the three realms as illusion” and “liberating oneself from what appears from one’s own mind as having no real existence.” What appears from one’s own mind is the realm apprehended by one’s own mind. The practices of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas are not combined with the realms apprehended by one’s own mind and so forth.

What Buddhas and bodhisattvas practice is true wisdom, whereas the realms apprehended by the mind are deluded consciousness; truth and delusion do not combine. “He reveals that all teachings constitute the true mark and are the mind spoken by all Buddhas”—because they do not combine with delusion, it can be revealed that all that Buddhas and bodhisattvas teach is the true mark. The true mark is markless; only by not clinging to marks can the true mark be revealed.

“The mind spoken by all Buddhas” means that all Buddhas and bodhisattvas speak of mind-nature and mental characteristics. Apart from mind, there is no dharma; only non-Buddhist paths seek dharmas outside the mind. The phrase “the mind spoken by all Buddhas” should be a key point of this sūtra. Each of its four fascicles bears the subtitle, “Chapter on the Mind Spoken by All Buddhas.”

“For the great bodhisattvas dwelling in the ocean on Mount Malaya in Laṅkā, may he expound the dharmakāya realm of the storehouse consciousness, like waves on the sea, praised by the Tathāgata”—Bodhisattva Mahāmati asks the World-Honored One to explain to the assembled great bodhisattvas the realm of mind and consciousness. The storehouse consciousness like waves on the sea is the eighth consciousness. Because this consciousness contains all wholesome and unwholesome dharmas and, according to defiled or pure conditions, raises waves like the sea, it is called the “storehouse consciousness like waves on the sea.” The dharmakāya is the realm of the Tathāgata’s ultimate true wisdom. The storehouse consciousness is consciousness, whereas the dharmakāya is wisdom. Relying on consciousness brings defilement; relying on wisdom brings purity. Defilement entails birth and death; purity is without Buddhas.

[The World-Honored One then said to Bodhisattva Mahāmati: “For four causes and conditions, eye consciousness turns. What are these four? They are: failure to awaken to the grasping of what appears from one’s own mind; beginningless habitual tendencies of falsely taking forms as real; attachment to the inherent nature of consciousness; and the desire to see various forms and appearances. Mahāmati, these are called the four causes and conditions. Where water flows, the waves of the storehouse-consciousness and the evolving consciousnesses arise.”]

What Bodhisattva Mahāmati asks about is the realm of the storehouse consciousness and the dharmakāya. In answering him, the Buddha begins with eye consciousness, one of the first five consciousnesses. Earlier, the Buddha had said, “Briefly speaking, there are three kinds of consciousness; in detail, there are eight aspects.” The three kinds are true consciousness, manifesting consciousness, and consciousness that discriminates objects.

True consciousness is the substance of the eighth consciousness, like a great warehouse filled with wholesome and unwholesome seeds. Manifesting consciousness is the function of the eighth consciousness, like the small portion of seeds in the warehouse that is sprouting and growing—the seeds currently manifesting—and is therefore called manifesting consciousness. Consciousness that discriminates objects is also called the “evolving consciousnesses” and refers to the first seven consciousnesses. The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that the evolving consciousnesses arise by depending on the storehouse consciousness. Eye consciousness, for example, arises from the storehouse consciousness through four causes and conditions. What are they? The condition of the faculty, the condition of the object, the condition of consciousness, and the condition of the desire to see.

The condition of the faculty: the faculty is the eye faculty. “Failure to awaken to the grasping of what appears from one’s own mind” means that what the eye

encounters appears from one's own mind. Because one does not awaken to this, one falsely gives rise to grasping.

The condition of the object: the object is visible form. "Beginningless habitual tendencies of falsely taking forms as real" means that visible forms are originally empty, yet since beginningless time they have been grasped as truly existent. Deluded conceptual habituation has continued to this extent.

The condition of consciousness: consciousness here is eye consciousness. "Attachment to the inherent nature of consciousness" means that attachment is discrimination, and consciousness takes discrimination as its nature. When faculty and object confront one another, discrimination arises.

The condition of the desire to see: "the desire to see various forms and appearances." Although the preceding three conditions may combine, if the mind does not give rise to the desire to see, forms and appearances will not be seen. Giving rise to the desire to see is the condition of the desire to see.

"These are called the four causes and conditions. Where water flows, the waves of the storehouse-consciousness and the evolving consciousnesses arise"—through the four causes and conditions described above, eye consciousness arises. Eye consciousness originates in the storehouse consciousness as waves arise from water. The storehouse consciousness produces the evolving consciousnesses: water is a metaphor for the storehouse consciousness, and waves for the evolving consciousnesses. This is true not only of eye consciousness, but also of ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, and the rest.

["Mahāmati, just as with eye consciousness, all the faculties, atoms, and pores arise together; the successive arising of their respective object-realms is likewise so. It is like a bright mirror reflecting images of many colors, or like a fierce wind blowing upon the waters of the great ocean."]

The substance of mind is like the ocean; the eighth consciousness is like seawater; the seventh consciousness is like its movement; and the first six consciousnesses are like waves. Through the movement of the eighth consciousness, the waves of evolving consciousnesses such as eye consciousness arise. The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that, just as eye consciousness arises, all faculties—the faculties of ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and so forth—as well as even a single atom or pore, arise together with consciousness; none is without awareness.

"The successive arising of their respective object-realms is likewise so" means that external object-realms also arise successively along with the evolving consciousnesses. This is what is meant by "all phenomena are consciousness-only." Yet such arising may be sudden or gradual. "Like a bright mirror reflecting images of

many colors” is a metaphor for sudden arising; “like a fierce wind blowing upon the waters of the great ocean” is a metaphor for gradual arising. A bright mirror reflects images without before or after; when wind blows upon the sea, the earlier wave rises and the later wave follows.

[“The wind of external object-realms stirs the ocean of mind, and the waves of consciousness continue without cease. Because the characteristics of what is produced are different and not different, karmic activity combines and gives rise to appearances, leading to deep attachment. Since one cannot understand the inherent nature of forms and the rest, the body of the five consciousnesses turns.”]

“The wind of external object-realms stirs the ocean of mind, and the waves of consciousness continue without cease” means that the mind is moved by external objects. Like wind blowing upon the sea, waves of the various consciousnesses arise in unbroken succession. The storehouse consciousness serves as the cause from which the various consciousnesses develop. “Because the characteristics of what is produced are different and not different, karmic activity combines and gives rise to appearances, leading to deep attachment” means that the many karmic appearances produced by the waves of consciousness are sometimes alike and sometimes different.

The karmic appearances produced combine with the causal conditions that give rise to them—the four previously mentioned: faculty, object, consciousness, and desire to see—and thus one becomes deeply entangled in deluded conceptualization and attachment. “Since one cannot understand the inherent nature of forms and the rest, the body of the five consciousnesses turns” means that, owing to deluded conceptualization and attachment, one cannot understand that forms and the rest are empty in their inherent nature. One cannot understand that forms and the rest are merely illusory images, without any substantial reality. Because one falsely conceptualizes and clings, mistaking illusory images for real, this develops in sequence, and the five consciousnesses of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body arise in sequence.

[“Mahāmati, together with that body of the five consciousnesses, the causes of the differentiated and segmented appearances should be understood to be consciousness.”]

The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that once the five consciousnesses arise, the sixth consciousness, consciousness proper, also arises together with them; hence, “together with that body of the five consciousnesses.” “The causes of the differentiated and segmented appearances” means that, because the five sensory objects differ as form, sound, smell, taste, and touch, the first five consciousnesses respectively give rise to different perceptions—the so-called “segmented

appearances." "Should be understood to be consciousness" means that the first five consciousnesses are causes for the arising of the sixth consciousness.

["That body turns. Yet it does not think, 'I arise from one another in succession.' Deluded conceptualization and attachment to what appears from one's own mind turn, and each turns together with appearances that perish. They discriminate the differentiated segments of object-realms; this is called their turning."]

"That body turns" means that the sixth consciousness arises through the turning of the first five consciousnesses themselves. "Yet it does not think, 'I arise from one another in succession'" means that the first five consciousnesses do not give rise to the thought: "I arise through the successive mutual conditioning of my own mind; I am not truly existent."

Because they do not know this to be delusory, they grasp it as truly existent. In this way, the sixth consciousness may give rise to eternalism. "Deluded conceptualization and attachment to what appears from one's own mind turn, and each turns together with appearances that perish"—all this arises from falsely calculating and falsely clinging to the deluded realms appearing from one's own mind; thus the mind turns with its objects.

The various deluded realms have various appearances of decay and destruction, and the consciousnesses all turn along with them. Thus the sixth consciousness may give rise to an annihilationist view. "They discriminate the differentiated segments of object-realms; this is called their turning" means that the consciousness discriminates the various realms of "segmented difference," and the mind consequently turns with its objects; this is called "their turning." It should be noted that the seventh consciousness is not explicitly mentioned here.

The seventh consciousness is called the mind faculty and is the basis for the arising of consciousness, the sixth consciousness. Although the seventh consciousness is not explicitly mentioned in this discussion of the causes of the sixth consciousness, deluded conceptualization and attachment are repeatedly mentioned; these are the seventh consciousness. The seventh consciousness "constantly and carefully deliberates, with the notion of self ever accompanying it," constantly grasping the perceiving aspect of the eighth consciousness as "self." Constant and careful deliberation is deluded conceptualization; the accompanying notion of self is deluded attachment. Because deluded conceptualization and attachment are fundamental to the arising of the sixth consciousness, the seventh consciousness is called the mind faculty.

["It is like practitioners who enter dhyāna and samādhi: subtle habitual tendencies turn, yet they do not know it, and they think, 'Consciousness has ceased; only then do I enter the proper experience of dhyāna.' In truth, consciousness has not ceased

when they enter the proper experience, for the seeds of habitual tendencies have not been extinguished and therefore do not cease. Because the conditions of object-realms have turned and the grasping is incomplete, it is said to cease."]

"It is like practitioners who enter dhyāna and samādhi" refers to practitioners of the two vehicles, śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, who cultivate the four dhyānas and eight meditative attainments and then enter the cessation of feeling and perception.

"Subtle habitual tendencies turn, yet they do not know it, and they think, 'Consciousness has ceased; only then do I enter the proper experience of dhyāna'" means that practitioners of the two vehicles cultivate meditative concentration but cannot perceive subtle habitual tendencies. They do not know that consciousness is turning, and thus mistakenly believe that through cultivating meditative concentration they have extinguished the consciousnesses and then entered the proper experience deeply.

"In truth, consciousness has not ceased when they enter the proper experience, for the seeds of habitual tendencies have not been extinguished and therefore do not cease" means that, in reality, even when they have entered the proper experience deeply, consciousness has never been extinguished. Although the seeds of habitual tendencies in the storehouse consciousness are not presently manifesting, they have not been extinguished. When conditions are met, they will manifest again and undergo karmic retribution; thus the consciousnesses have not truly been extinguished.

"Because the appropriation of objects is incomplete, it ceases." Incomplete appropriation means not grasping at sensory objects. They cultivate the samādhi of cessation, merely suppressing the six consciousnesses and not taking the objects of dharmas. That is, the sixth consciousness does not follow the objects of dharmas; the mind is tranquil, and for the time being the coarse waves of the six consciousnesses do not arise. Yet they themselves believe that they have extinguished all the consciousnesses.

[Mahāmati, the ultimate limits of this subtle storehouse consciousness cannot be measured or determined by the power of samādhi and wisdom attained through the cultivation of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and non-Buddhists, except by the Tathāgatas and bodhisattvas abiding on the stages.]

The Buddha told Bodhisattva Mahāmati that, as described above, only the Buddhas and bodhisattvas who have entered the stages can know the ultimate limits of the subtle modes of activity of the storehouse consciousness. The powers of samādhi attained through the cultivation of all adherents of the two vehicles and non-Buddhists cannot know them.

[The characteristics of the remaining stages are distinguished through wisdom and skillful means, and the meaning of the statements is definitively determined. When the supreme and boundless roots of goodness have matured, one is free from the false delusions manifested by one's own mind; sitting in meditation in mountains and forests, one cultivates at the lower, middle, and higher levels. One can see the flowing stream of one's own mind's delusions. The Buddhas of countless buddha lands confer empowerment, and one attains the power of mastery, spiritual powers, samādhi, spiritual friends, sons of the Buddha, and retinues. The mind, manas, consciousness, and the objects of intrinsic nature manifested by one's own mind are false imaginings. The existences of birth and death, oceanlike karma, craving, ignorance, and such causes have all been crossed beyond. Therefore, Mahāmati, practitioners should draw close to the most excellent spiritual friends.]

"The characteristics of the remaining stages are distinguished through wisdom and skillful means, and the meaning of the statements is definitively determined"—this refers to the characteristics of the remaining stages of the mind-ground, such as the Stage of Joy and the Immovable Stage. Through wisdom, skill, and expedient means, one distinguishes the characteristics of the various stages and determines the true meaning of the words and statements.

"When the supreme and boundless roots of goodness have matured, one is free from the false delusions manifested by one's own mind; sitting in meditation in mountains and forests, one cultivates at the lower, middle, and higher levels"—before innumerable Buddhas, one extensively accumulates the most excellent roots of goodness. When such roots of goodness mature, one departs from the false delusions manifested by one's own mind and sits in meditation at places of practice such as mountains and forests. "Cultivates at the lower, middle, and higher levels" means practicing in ways suited to practitioners of lesser, middling, and greater capacities.

Or one may practice progressively from the lower to the middle, and from the middle to the higher levels. "One can see the flowing stream of one's own mind's delusions. The Buddhas of countless buddha lands confer empowerment, and one attains the power of mastery, spiritual powers, samādhi, spiritual friends, sons of the Buddha, and retinues."

Through such practice, one can see the flowing stream of one's own mind's delusions. Therefore, the Buddhas of countless buddha lands confer empowerment, and one further attains the samādhi of mastery and spiritual powers, as well as spiritual friends (teachers), many sons of the Buddha (fellow practitioners), and many retinues (disciples). "The mind, manas, consciousness, and the objects of intrinsic nature manifested by one's own mind are false imaginings."

“The existences of birth and death, oceanlike karma, craving, ignorance, and such causes have all been crossed beyond”—one can understand that the empowerments conferred by the Buddhas, spiritual powers and samādhi, and the many teachers, fellow practitioners, and disciples are precisely objects of intrinsic nature manifested by one’s own eighth consciousness, seventh consciousness, sixth consciousness, and first five consciousnesses. They are all false imaginings, as the saying goes: “Buddha activities are like dreams and illusions; the bodhimaṇḍala is like the moon reflected in water.”

Thus one can cross beyond the existence of birth, the existence of death, oceanlike seeds of karmic habit, desire and attachment, ignorance, and so forth. The existence of birth and the existence of death are among the causes of suffering in the six realms of rebirth. Such causes of suffering have all been transcended and crossed beyond. “Therefore, Mahāmati, practitioners should draw close to the most excellent spiritual friends”—the Buddha told Bodhisattva Mahāmati that, as stated above, all practitioners should draw close to the most excellent spiritual friends.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]

At that time, in order to repeat the true meaning just explained, the Buddha spoke the following verses:

[Just as the waves of the great ocean / Arise from fierce winds, / Vast billows churn the dark abyss / Without ever ceasing; / The ocean of storehouse consciousness ever abides, / Stirred by the wind of objects, / And waves of the various consciousnesses / Leap up and arise in transformation.]

When fierce winds blow upon the great ocean, enormous waves arise. The vast billows surge and churn the deep abyss without ceasing. Likewise, the wind of objects stirs the ocean of storehouse consciousness and raises waves of the various consciousnesses. The waves of consciousness leap up and thereby give rise to the first five consciousnesses and the sixth consciousness.

[Blue, red, and various colors; / Conch-shell sound, milk, and rock honey; / Mild flavors produce flowers and fruits; / The sun, moon, and their light / Are neither the same nor different. / From ocean water arise ocean waves; / So too the seven consciousnesses / Arise together with the mind in harmonious combination.]

“Blue, red, and various colors” refers to visible objects, which give rise to eye consciousness. “Conch-shell sound” refers to the sound of conch-shell ornaments, an auditory object that gives rise to ear consciousness. “Milk” refers to the fragrance of sandalwood milk, an olfactory object that gives rise to nose consciousness. “Rock honey” refers to the smoothness of rock honey, a tactile object that gives rise to

body consciousness. “Mild flavors” refers to sweet and mild tastes, taste objects that give rise to tongue consciousness.

“Produce flowers and fruits” means that the first five consciousnesses are like flowers and the sixth consciousness is like fruit; thus the sixth consciousness arises.

“The sun, moon, and their light are neither the same nor different. From ocean water arise ocean waves; so too the seven consciousnesses arise together with the mind in harmonious combination”—just as the sun and moon and their light are neither the same nor different, and just as ocean water and ocean waves are neither the same nor different, so it is with the seventh consciousness: they all arise through the harmonious combination of mind and consciousness. The sun, moon, and ocean water symbolize the eighth consciousness; the light and ocean waves symbolize the seventh consciousness. Since the seventh and eighth consciousnesses are neither the same nor different, the seventh consciousness was not discussed separately earlier.

[Just as ocean water changes / And various waves arise, / So too are the seven consciousnesses: / They arise together with the mind in harmonious combination. / At the locus of that storehouse consciousness, / The various consciousnesses arise in transformation.]

Just as ocean water changes and surges into various waves, so too do the first seven consciousnesses arise through the harmonious combination and transformation of mind and consciousness. This is what is meant by: “At the locus of that storehouse consciousness, the various consciousnesses arise in transformation.”

[It is said that the consciousness / Contemplates the meanings of the various characteristics. / The eight have characteristics that are not destroyed; / The signless, too, is signless.]

This verse says that consciousness—the sixth consciousness—contemplates the principles of the various dharma characteristics. “The eight have characteristics that are not destroyed” means that the eight consciousnesses do not possess characteristics of destruction. “The signless, too, is signless” means that none of the eight consciousnesses has a characteristic that can be seen. The first seven consciousnesses all depend on the storehouse consciousness, and no characteristic of dependence can be seen either.

The Buddha taught “signlessness” originally in order to dispel attachment to “characteristics.” Once attachment to characteristics has been removed, if one still retains an idea of signlessness, or instead clings to that signlessness as something that can be obtained, one has greatly lost the intended meaning of signlessness. Hence he says, “The signless, too, is signless,” to dispel attachment to signlessness.

[Just as the ocean and its waves / Have no distinction, / So it is with mind and the various consciousnesses: / Difference, too, cannot be obtained.]

Just as the great ocean and its waves are both water and have no distinction, the various consciousnesses are all mind, and mind and consciousness are without distinction. “Difference” means dissimilarity. “Difference, too, cannot be obtained” means that the differences among the various consciousnesses cannot be obtained either.

[Mind is called the activity of gathering; / Manas is called extensive gathering. / The various consciousnesses know what is known; / Manifested corresponding objects are called five.]

This verse explains the concepts of “mind, manas, and consciousness.” “Mind is called the activity of gathering”—gathering and arising constitute mind. When faculties and objects come into contact, a thought of grasping arises in the mind; it gathers and forms karma. “Manas is called extensive gathering”—producing constitutes manas. With regard to what has been gathered, one gives rise to greed toward what accords with oneself and anger toward what opposes oneself; thoughts such as greed, anger, and ignorance arise, and one extensively creates various karmas.

“The various consciousnesses know what is known”—discrimination constitutes consciousness. “Knowing what is known” means “that which can know” and “that which is known.” For example, eye consciousness is that which can know, while a visible object is that which is known. Not only is eye consciousness consciousness; visible objects are consciousness as well. Visible objects are the object aspect of the eighth consciousness; in truth, there are no visible objects outside the mind. “The various consciousnesses know what is known” means that the various consciousnesses include both that which knows and that which is known.

“Manifested corresponding objects are called five”—corresponding objects are objects that stand in relation to one another. This means that, on the basis of the corresponding objects that manifest, five kinds are spoken of: eye and visible form, ear and sound, nose and fragrance, tongue and taste, and body and touch.

[At that time, Bodhisattva Mahāmati asked in verse:]

At that time, Bodhisattva Mahāmati had just heard the Buddha say, “The signless, too, is signless” and “Difference, too, cannot be obtained,” indicating that mind and objects are both empty. Yet he then heard the Buddha say that, regarding mind, manas, and consciousness, “manifested corresponding objects are called five,” and wondered whether this meant that mind and objects both exist. Could the Buddha’s

teaching contradict itself? He therefore asked the Buddha. Bodhisattva Mahāmati asked the Buddha in verse:

[Blue, red, and the various images of form / Cause sentient beings to give rise to the consciousnesses. / Like waves and the various dharmas— / How is this? We pray that you will explain.]

You have just said that objects and images such as blue and red give rise to the five consciousnesses in sentient beings, just as ocean water gives rise to waves. Please explain: are these various dharma characteristics ultimately empty or existent?

[At that time, the World-Honored One answered in verse:]

At that time, the World-Honored One knew where Bodhisattva Mahāmati's doubt lay, so he answered him with the true meaning and also gave a summary response. The Buddha answered in verse:

[Blue, red, and the various mixed colors, / And waves, are all nonexistent. / Mind is spoken of as the activity of gathering / In order to awaken ordinary beings.]

The various dharmas spoken of as blue, red, and other colors, and even the analogy of waves, are not truly existent; both dharmas and analogy are empty. The ocean is originally clear, but waves arise because of the wind; this means that objects are originally empty. The mind is originally clear and still, but consciousness arises in response to objects; this means that the mind is originally empty. As for statements such as "Mind is called the activity of gathering," they are expedient teachings spoken in language ordinary beings can understand, in accordance with sentient beings' minds and their capacity to know, so that they too may develop wisdom and awaken to the Buddha's knowledge and view.

[Those karmas are all nonexistent; / What is apprehended by one's own mind is free from apprehension. / What is apprehended is without apprehension, / The same as those waves.]

"Those karmas are all nonexistent" means that the karma created by sentient beings is not truly existent. "What is apprehended by one's own mind is free from apprehension"—one's own mind is the apprehending subject, while what is apprehended is the object. Thus, mind and objects are both not truly existent. Subject and object are nonexistent; mind and objects are both empty. "What is apprehended is without apprehension, the same as those waves"—what is apprehended is the dharma, and waves are the analogy. "What is apprehended is without apprehension" means that dharmas are empty; "the same as those waves" means that the analogy is likewise empty. These two lines mean that both dharma and analogy are empty.

[The body established for experience and enjoyment / Is the consciousness manifested by sentient beings. / Within it, the various karmas appear, / Like waves upon water.]

Enjoyments are the dependent retribution of sentient beings. The established body—the physical body—is their primary retribution. In fact, the dependent and primary retributions of sentient beings are merely the revolving flow of manifesting consciousness. Just as waves arise on water, so various karmic appearances falsely arise and manifest from their own minds.

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again spoke these verses:]

Mahāmati Bodhisattva heard the Buddha say that this was taught as an expedient for sentient beings, and another question arose. He therefore inquired again. Let us see how Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked at this point:

[The nature of the ocean's waves, / Their surging and leaping, can be distinguished. / The store consciousness and karma are likewise so; / Why is this not realized?]

Just as the ocean gives rise to waves, whose various swells and surges can be distinguished, none of these surges exists apart from the ocean. The store consciousness is like the ocean, and karmic appearances are like its waves; the various karmic appearances likewise do not exist outside the mind. This is so clear, so why are sentient beings unable to realize it and still suppose that things exist outside the mind?

[At that time, the World-Honored One replied in verse:] The Buddha answered Mahāmati Bodhisattva:

[Ordinary beings lack wisdom; / The store consciousness is like a vast ocean, / And karmic appearances are like waves. / I employ this analogy so they may understand.]

Ordinary beings lack wisdom and therefore cannot penetrate the true reality. The store consciousness is like the ocean, ever abiding, while karmic appearances are like waves, arising and changing. This analogy is used so that sentient beings too may penetrate the true reality.

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again spoke these verses:] Mahāmati Bodhisattva had another question and asked the Buddha in verse:

[When the sun rises, its light shines equally / Upon sentient beings of lesser, middling, and higher capacities. / The Tathāgata illumines the world / And teaches reality to the ignorant. / Having already distinguished the various divisions of dharmas, / Why does he not teach the truth?]

Just as the rising sun shines equally upon those of lesser, middling, and higher capacities, so when the Tathāgata appears in the world, he should equally teach the true Dharma to beings of lesser, middling, and higher capacities, and even to the ignorant. Yet you have also taught various provisional dharmas. Why do you not teach the true Dharma to them all?

[At that time, the World-Honored One replied in verse:] Śākyamuni Buddha answered:

[If the truth were taught, / Their minds would have no reality. / It is like waves of the sea, / Images in a mirror, and dreams: / All may appear simultaneously. / The realm of mind is likewise so. / When the requisite conditions are absent, / Karmic appearances arise in sequence.]

The Tathāgata appears in the world precisely to teach sentient beings the truth. But because their minds cannot yet accord with truth, he employs various analogies. When waves arise in the sea, they are not waves existing apart from water; images in a mirror do not mean that actual objects exist within the mirror; and events in dreams are not events that truly exist. Such analogies show that there are no dharmas outside the mind.

The realm of mind is like waves arising on the sea, images in a mirror, and events in dreams: none truly exists. Sometimes “all appear simultaneously”—they arise suddenly, like images immediately reflected in a mirror. At other times, “karmic appearances arise in sequence”—they arise gradually, like waves on the sea, where later waves drive those before them onward and arise one after another in sequence. When the conditions for sudden appearance are present, they appear suddenly; when those conditions are absent (“the requisite conditions are absent”), they arise gradually (“karmic appearances arise in sequence”).

[Consciousness apprehends what is apprehended; / Manas takes this to be so. / The five manifest accordingly, / Without any fixed sequence.]

The objective realm of external dusts does not truly exist; it is merely an illusory appearance arising in accordance with karma. The sixth consciousness discriminates among the illusory external-dust appearances apprehended by the first five consciousnesses. With respect to dharma-dusts, consciousness is the apprehending subject and dharma-dusts are what is apprehended; this is “consciousness apprehends what is apprehended.” The seventh consciousness constantly takes the perceiving aspect of the eighth consciousness as a self; this is “manas takes this to be so”—it always considers things to be thus. The first five consciousnesses manifest in dependence on the five dusts: on encountering form, one sees form; on encountering sound, one hears sound; and so forth. They apprehend whatever they encounter, without any fixed sequence.

[It is like a skilled painter / And the painter's apprentices, / Who spread colors to depict many forms. / What I teach is likewise so. / Colors themselves have no patterns; / They are neither brush nor plain silk. / To delight sentient beings, / They artfully paint a multitude of images.]

My teaching of the Dharma is like a painter who draws forms and apprentices who apply colors. Colors have no fixed patterns like those of written characters; colors are neither the brush nor the plain silk. To enable sentient beings to delight in and accept it, colors are used to form a great variety of intricate images.

[Teachings are differentiated and given according to circumstances; / Reality is apart from names. / Distinctions accord with beginners' karma; / Practice reveals reality. / Reality is where one awakens for oneself; / The awakening mind and what it awakens to both fall away. / This is taught for the Buddha's children.]

Teachings are differentiated and applied according to circumstances; the same words are not spoken to everyone. One should teach in accordance with the recipient's capacity. The true Dharma is originally apart from names, words, and phrases. “Distinctions accord with beginners' karma; practice reveals reality” means that distinctions of names and characteristics are explained in detail in order to accord with students who have only newly aroused the resolve. If one encounters a person who has genuinely aroused the resolve, one expounds the true Dharma for that person.

“Reality is where one awakens for oneself; the awakening mind and what it awakens to both fall away. This is taught for the Buddha's children” means that when a person who truly practices attains realization through practice, both the one who awakens and what is awakened to are relinquished, and both the one who thinks and what is thought of fall away. This is taught for Buddha's children who have genuinely aroused the resolve.

[For the foolish, distinctions are extensively made; / All kinds of things are like illusions. / Though they appear, they have no reality. / Such various teachings / Are provisionally established according to circumstances. / What is taught is not what they can receive; / For them, it is as though nothing had been taught.]

Although, for the foolish, many names and characteristics are extensively distinguished through verbal teaching, all these names and characteristics are illusory. Though many auspicious appearances may arise, such appearances are not real. “Such various teachings are provisionally established according to circumstances” means that teachings such as these are expediently established in accordance with circumstances and are not the true Dharma.

“What is taught is not what they can receive; for them, it is as though nothing had been taught” means that if the teaching is not suited to the recipient, the person cannot respond to what you say and may instead consider it to be a “non-teaching”—that is, may think that what you say is wrong. Or, if you teach that way to someone for whom it is unsuitable, then clarified butter becomes poison; precisely what you teach becomes a “non-teaching.” The Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra says: “To teach profound Dharma to sentient beings who are not vessels is a bodhisattva's error.”

[Just as skilled physicians prescribe according to each patient's illness, / So the Tathāgata teaches sentient beings / According to their minds and capacities. / Deluded thought is not their realm, / Nor is it the province of the śrāvakas. / What the compassionate teach / Is the realm of self-awakening.]

Just as skilled physicians prescribe different medicines according to illnesses, so the Tathāgata teaches sentient beings according to their minds and capacities. “Deluded thought is not their realm, nor is it the province of the śrāvakas” means that deluded thought refers to the deluded thoughts produced by non-Buddhist paths—that is, their erroneous views. The realm of true self-awakening taught by the Tathāgata is neither the realm of non-Buddhist paths nor that of śrāvakas of the Lesser Vehicle.

“What the compassionate teach is the realm of self-awakening” means that those who have genuinely aroused the resolve to seek liberation suffer because they cannot hear the ultimate Dharma. They seek the Buddha's compassion and ask him to explain its true meaning. The Buddha then teaches them the realm of self-awakening of all Buddhas.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas who wish to know the deluded realms of what is grasped and the grasping subject, encompassed by the direct perception manifested by their own minds, should leave behind crowds, worldly habits, and sleep. During the first, middle, and last watches of the night, they should constantly awaken themselves and cultivate skillful means. They should leave behind the words of sūtras and treatises embodying wrong views, as well as the characteristics of the vehicles of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, and should penetrate the characteristics of deluded thoughts manifested by their own minds.]

The true realm directly realized by all Buddhas, the Tathāgatas, is certainly beyond the reach of non-Buddhist paths and the Lesser Vehicle. Yet it is inherently possessed in the minds of sentient beings; it is their original landscape, not something obtained from outside. If they can cultivate it, they will certainly attain realization. Actual practice is very important. Therefore, the Buddha again instructs Mahāmati Bodhisattva, emphasizing the importance of actual practice.

“Direct perception manifested by one's own mind” means that the objects of direct perception do not lie outside one's own mind; because of delusion and non-

realization, one falsely gives rise to grasping and attachment. “The deluded realms of what is grasped and the grasping subject” means that grasping is the apprehending subject and that which is grasped is the apprehended object; both subject and object are realms of deluded thought.

“They should leave behind crowds, worldly habits, and sleep. During the first, middle, and last watches of the night, they should constantly awaken themselves and cultivate skillful means” means that, in order to understand this falsity and reveal the truth, one should withdraw from crowds and dwell alone, stay far from worldly habits, and avoid such dullness and distraction as excessive sleep. During the first, middle, and last watches of the night, one should constantly examine oneself and remain constantly awake. One should earnestly put into practice such skillful methods of cultivation.

“They should leave behind the words of sūtras and treatises embodying wrong views, as well as the characteristics of the vehicles of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, and should penetrate the characteristics of deluded thoughts manifested by their own minds.” The words of sūtras and treatises embodying wrong views refer to the erroneous writings of non-Buddhist paths. The characteristics of the vehicles of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas refer to the obstinate emptiness of the Lesser Vehicle. One should leave behind the erroneous and narrow views of non-Buddhist paths and the Lesser Vehicle, and should penetrate the characteristics of deluded thoughts manifested by one's own mind.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, after bodhisattva mahāsattvas establish the characteristic of wisdom and abide therein, they should diligently cultivate and learn the three characteristics of higher noble wisdom. What are the three characteristics of higher noble wisdom that they should diligently cultivate and learn? They are the characteristic of no-thingness, the characteristic of the state aspired to by all Buddhas, and the characteristic of the ultimate state of noble wisdom realized by oneself.

Having attained this through cultivation, they can relinquish the wisdom characteristic of the lame-donkey mind and attain the eighth ground of the Supreme Son. Then they cultivate and bring forth the preceding three characteristics. Mahāmati, the characteristic of no-thingness refers to the characteristics of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and non-Buddhist paths, which arise from their cultivation. Mahāmati, the characteristic of the state aspired to refers to the state aspired to and cultivated by the Buddhas of the past.

Mahāmati, the characteristic of the ultimate state of noble wisdom realized by oneself is that one does not conceptually cling to the characteristics of any dharma, attains a body in the samādhi like an illusion, and advances in practice toward the

grounds of the Buddhas. Mahāmati, these are called the three characteristics of noble wisdom. Those who accomplish these three characteristics of noble wisdom can reach the ultimate realm of noble wisdom realized by themselves. Therefore, Mahāmati, you should diligently cultivate and learn the three characteristics of noble wisdom.]

As stated earlier, the realm of the dharmakāya is the Tathāgata's ultimate ground. Practitioners who wish to reach this ground cannot advance without wisdom. Therefore, they must establish the characteristic of wisdom as the basis on which learners may abide. Without diligent effort, how could one attain realization? Thus, they are exhorted to diligently cultivate and learn the “three characteristics of noble wisdom.”

The “wisdom characteristic of the lame-donkey mind” is merely petty cleverness, not true wisdom. It is compared to a “lame donkey,” meaning that it can bray but cannot walk. The “eighth ground of the Supreme Son” is the eighth bhūmi of a bodhisattva. “Bring forth through cultivation” means that noble wisdom arises through cultivation. When one abandons petty cleverness, practices honestly and diligently, and realizes the eighth ground, the “three characteristics of noble wisdom” can arise.

The three characteristics of noble wisdom are the characteristic of no-thingness, the characteristic of the state aspired to, and the characteristic of the ultimate state of noble wisdom realized by oneself. The characteristic of no-thingness means the absence of the erroneous and narrow characteristics of non-Buddhist paths and the Lesser Vehicle. Those errors and narrowness arise through their incorrect cultivation; they are the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment in their own minds.

The aspect of the realm of self-established vows—this is the wisdom-aspect that arises when all Buddhas, having originally made vows, engage in correct cultivation. It may also be said that the aspect of the realm of self-established vows is the “nature of dependence on others” of one’s own mind.

The aspect of the ultimate realization of noble wisdom—this is the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya: “Without attachment to any appearances of dharmas”—that is, without attachment to any appearances of dharmas, one realizes the dharmakāya; “attaining the samādhi body like an illusion”—the samādhi body is the sambhogakāya; and “the progressive course of practice in the stages of the Buddhas arises”—this means that countless transformation bodies arise and pervade the lands of all Buddhas.

Therefore, the aspect of the ultimate realization of noble wisdom is the “nature of absolute reality and perfection” of one’s own mind. The Buddha told Mahāmati

Bodhisattva that what has been explained above constitutes the three aspects of noble wisdom. If one can accomplish these three aspects of noble wisdom, one can reach the ultimate state of the noble wisdom of self-realization. Therefore, one should diligently study and cultivate the three aspects of noble wisdom.

Overview of This Section:

The key phrase of this section is “the Dharma body as the realm of the ocean, waves, and storehouse consciousness,” and it was precisely from this point that Mahāmati Bodhisattva raised his question. The ocean is a metaphor for the eighth consciousness, and the waves are a metaphor for the preceding seven consciousnesses. Beginning with the arising of eye consciousness, the Buddha discusses the causes of the arising of the preceding seven consciousnesses. The Buddha also gives a detailed answer to Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s doubts concerning “expedient explanations” and “ultimate meaning.” Finally, he presents the “three aspects of noble wisdom,” thereby leading to Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question concerning the “three natures.” Please read on:

III. Deluded Conceptions of Existence and Nonexistence

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva Mahāsattva, knowing what the great assembly of bodhisattvas had in mind—namely, the “Sūtra on Noble Wisdom’s Discrimination of the Natures of Things”—and relying on the majestic spiritual power of all Buddhas, addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, we only pray that you will expound the Sūtra on Noble Wisdom’s Discrimination of the Natures of Things, the basis for the distinctions made in the one hundred and eight statements.”]

The preceding two sections, “The Arising and Ceasing of the Consciousnesses” and “The Realm of the Store Consciousness,” discuss the eight consciousnesses. The Buddha’s exposition of the eight consciousnesses culminates in the statement, “The three aspects of noble wisdom should be diligently cultivated.” The bodhisattvas gathered there had already heard the teaching in full. Mahāmati Bodhisattva knew that what occupied their minds at that moment must be the three natures associated with the three aspects of noble wisdom.

First, a brief explanation of the three natures. The nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment: sentient beings are deluded and cannot comprehend that all dharmas are originally empty. They mistakenly discriminate extensively with regard to their own bodies and all dharmas, grasping them as truly existent; hence it is called “pervasive discrimination and attachment.” The nature of dependence on others: all dharmas arise in dependence on the conjunction of many conditions;

none has self-nature, and all are illusory. Hence it is called “dependence on others.” The nature of absolute reality and perfection: the self-nature of suchness neither shifts nor changes and is originally complete and perfect. It is also called true reality; hence it is called “absolute reality and perfection.”

Let us further explain the “Sūtra on Noble Wisdom’s Discrimination of the Natures of Things” mentioned in the sūtra passage. Noble wisdom is the wisdom of sages. Noble wisdom is free from deluded discrimination and directly illumines ultimate truth, just as the preface by Sengzhao to the Vimalakīrti Sūtra says: “Noble wisdom is without knowing, yet it illuminates all myriad things; the Dharma body is without form, yet responds in diverse forms.”

Noble wisdom is without knowing, whereas the petty cleverness of ordinary beings —ordinary wisdom—is knowing, and always falls into the two extremes. “Discriminating the natures” refers to the three natures. The nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment among the three natures belongs only to ordinary wisdom, not to noble wisdom. The nature of dependence on others pertains both to ordinary wisdom and to noble wisdom. The nature of absolute reality and perfection belongs only to noble wisdom, not to ordinary wisdom.

Although noble wisdom knows existence and nonexistence, it is free from both existence and nonexistence. It is unlike pervasive discrimination and attachment, which always clings to the two extremes. Here, “sūtra” has the sense of a path and refers to the path of mind. The “Sūtra on Noble Wisdom’s Discrimination of the Natures of Things” is the mind-Dharma by which noble wisdom discriminates the three natures.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks the Buddha to expound for the assembly “the Sūtra on Noble Wisdom’s Discrimination of the Natures of Things, the basis for the distinctions made in the one hundred and eight statements.” What does this “basis for the distinctions made in the one hundred and eight statements” mean?

Previously, the one hundred and eight statements were explained, and the Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time all teach these one hundred and eight statements. On what basis, then, do the Buddhas distinguish these one hundred and eight statements? Clearly, that basis is precisely the “Sūtra on Noble Wisdom’s Discrimination of the Natures of Things.”

[The Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Awakened One, teaches distinctions on this basis. When bodhisattva mahāsattvas enter into the deluded natures of self-characteristics and common characteristics, and distinguish and explain the deluded nature, they are then able to know well. They thoroughly contemplate the selflessness of persons and dharmas, purify away deluded thoughts, and illuminate all the stages. They transcend all the delights of the meditative absorptions of

śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and all non-Buddhist paths; contemplate the inconceivable realm of the Tathāgata's activity; and definitively relinquish the natures of the five dharmas. The Dharma-body wisdom of all Buddhas and Tathāgatas adorns itself well, gives rise to illusory realms, ascends to the Tuṣita palaces in all Buddha lands, and even to the palace of the Highest Form Heaven, attaining the Tathāgata's ever-abiding Dharma body.]

The perfectly awakened Buddha has ten honorific titles: Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Knowing One, Perfect in Knowledge and Conduct, Well Gone One, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed One, Tamer of Men, Teacher of Humans and Devas, Buddha, and World-Honored One. Here, "the Tathāgata, the Worthy One, and so forth, the Perfectly Awakened One" means the perfectly awakened Buddha.

"Teaches distinctions on this basis"—on what basis does he teach distinctions? He explains separately on the basis of the question Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks concerning the "Sūtra on Noble Wisdom's Discrimination of the Natures of Things." First he discusses the five dharmas, then the three natures and the twofold selflessness.

The preceding two sections, "The Arising and Ceasing of the Consciousnesses" and "The Realm of the Store Consciousness," discuss the eight consciousnesses. Next come the five dharmas, the three natures, and the twofold selflessness. Mahāmati Bodhisattva is the one who initiates this sūtra, and at its beginning he is praised as having thoroughly penetrated the five dharmas, three natures, eight consciousnesses, and twofold selflessness. Since the Buddha teaches in response to Mahāmati Bodhisattva's question, he naturally begins with these matters.

First, a brief introduction to the five dharmas. Name means a provisional designation. All dharmas—sages and ordinary beings, sentient and insentient things, the six faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, the six objects of form, sound, odor, taste, touch, and dharmas, and so forth—are each given a name. This is called "name." Appearance means material form.

This means that all kinds of things in the three realms of desire, form, and formlessness—sentient and insentient things, faculties and objects, and all other dharmas—each have a shape or appearance. This is called "appearance." Deluded thought means falsely discriminating thoughts. When, on the basis of the two dharmas of name and appearance, discriminating mind arises, one takes a provisional name to be oneself and grasps an illusory appearance as one's actual body; then all kinds of grasping and attachment arise. This is called "deluded thought."

Right wisdom is the wisdom of right view realized by the Tathāgata. It means being able to comprehend that all dharmas are like illusions and transformations, neither

annihilated nor eternal, and transcending all partial, distorted, and heterodox views of ordinary beings and adherents of the Lesser Vehicle. This is called “right wisdom.” Suchness is the unchanging, unvarying principle-substance of true suchness. Right wisdom observes names and appearances and sees them all as illusory, neither existent nor nonexistent. Names and appearances are originally empty; this is the principle-substance of true suchness.

Principle becomes clear through wisdom, and wisdom arises through principle. Wisdom accords with principle, and principle accords with wisdom. This is called “suchness.” Among the five dharmas, the first three—name, appearance, and deluded thought—belong to the deluded realm of birth and death; the latter two—right wisdom and suchness—belong to the awakened realm of nirvāṇa.

Now consider this passage from the sūtra: “When bodhisattva mahāsattvas enter into the deluded natures of self-characteristics and common characteristics, and distinguish and explain the deluded nature, they are then able to know well.” This means that bodhisattvas can well understand the intentions of sentient beings. The minds of sentient beings do not go beyond name, appearance, and deluded thought. “They thoroughly contemplate the selflessness of persons and dharmas, purify away deluded thoughts, and illuminate all the stages.”

“They transcend all the delights of the meditative absorptions of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and all non-Buddhist paths; contemplate the inconceivable realm of the Tathāgata’s activity; and definitively relinquish the natures of the five dharmas.” This is right wisdom—the ability to distinguish well the characteristics of all dharmas. “The Dharma-body wisdom of all Buddhas and Tathāgatas adorns itself well, gives rise to illusory realms, ascends to the Tuṣita palaces in all Buddha lands, and even to the palace of the Highest Form Heaven, attaining the Tathāgata’s ever-abiding Dharma body.” Though illusions arise, there is no change; though manifestations follow circumstances, there is no difference. The Tathāgata’s ever-abiding Dharma body, unchanging and undifferentiated, is suchness—remaining unmoved in ultimate truth.

Special attention should be paid to the phrase in this passage, “definitively relinquish the natures of the five dharmas.” Take note: they are definitively relinquished; this is not a matter of some dharma being obtainable. This alone is right wisdom. If one knows a dharma and then clings to that dharma, that is not right wisdom but deluded thought. Attention should also be paid to “giving rise to illusory realms, ascending to the Tuṣita palaces in all Buddha lands [countless transformation bodies], and even to the palace of the Highest Form Heaven [the complete reward body].” These are all illusory realms. The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who teaches the Dharma.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “There are some followers of non-Buddhist paths who form the deluded attachment that nothing exists. Realizing that when causes are exhausted there is the notion of a rabbit without horns, they think that, just as a rabbit has no horns, so too are all dharmas. Mahāmati, there are still other followers of non-Buddhist paths who see the elements, qualities, atoms, substance, forms and locations, and the respective differences among dharmas. Having seen these, they attach to the notion that dharmas are not like rabbits without horns, and form the notion that they are like cows with horns.”]

The Buddha’s teaching here begins by refuting name, appearance, and deluded thought.

The views of non-Buddhist paths do not go beyond two kinds. First, they discriminate in terms of nonexistence. Seeing all dharmas perish when their causes and conditions are exhausted, they suppose that there can be no further causes and conditions, just as rabbits cannot grow horns (realizing that when causes are exhausted there is the notion of a rabbit without horns). They think all dharmas are likewise (just as a rabbit has no horns, so too are all dharmas). This is an annihilationist view.

Second, they discriminate in terms of existence. Seeing the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind (the elements), each with its own characteristics (qualities), and each divisible into extremely minute particles (atoms), they suppose that there are real dharmas to be obtained (substance), with actual individual forms and locations, and arbitrarily discriminate among the respective differences of dharmas.

This is what is meant by “dharmas being separately different.” They are not like rabbits without horns (attachment to dharmas not being like rabbits without horns), but are instead like cows with horns (forming the notion that cows have horns). This is eternalism. Let us explain two terms. Guṇa is translated as “virtue.” What was called “virtue” in ancient times is what is now called a “characteristic” or “attribute.”

For example, the four virtues of the Dharma body—permanence, bliss, self, and purity—are four characteristics, or four attributes, of the Dharma body. Dravya is translated as “real dharma,” meaning that there are truly substantial dharmas to be obtained.

[Mahāmati, they fall into the two views and do not understand mind-capacity. In the realm of their own minds, deluded thoughts increase. Regarding body, enjoyments, and seeing, they establish imagined measures of the faculties.]

Non-Buddhist adherents fall into the two extremes of existence and nonexistence, falsely giving rise to these two views, because they do not understand that the three

realms are mind-only and all phenomena are consciousness-only. Within the realms manifested by their own minds, they increase deluded discrimination. With regard to their own bodies, the objects enjoyed by those bodies, and the mind that sees, they discriminatively establish imagined measures of the faculties. Faculties refers to the six sense faculties.

The measures of the faculties are the six faculties' measurement of deluded objects. In fact, one's body, its objects of enjoyment, and the mind that sees are all realms manifested by consciousness. They are all illusory and unobtainable, and have nothing to do with existence or nonexistence.

[Mahāmati, the nature of all dharmas is likewise free from existence and nonexistence. One should not form such thoughts.]

Not only one's body, its objects of enjoyment, and the mind that sees have nothing to do with existence and nonexistence; the natures of all dharmas likewise have nothing to do with existence and nonexistence. One should not make arbitrary discriminations about them (one should not form such thoughts). One cannot call them existent because everything is manifested through consciousness and is not truly existent. Nor can one call them nonexistent, because the illusory appearances manifested by the store consciousness are not absent; they are not a lifeless mass of annihilation.

[Mahāmati, if, having departed from existence and nonexistence, one still forms the notion of a rabbit without horns, this is called a wrong thought. Since such a notion depends on observation, one should not form the thought that rabbits have no horns. Even atoms and the discriminated natures are wholly unobtainable. Mahāmati, the realm of sages is free from this; one should not form the notion that cows have horns.]

Even the concept of "being free from existence and nonexistence" must not be grasped. If one grasps "being free from existence and nonexistence" and conceives of a rabbit's lack of horns, that too is a wrong conception. Why is this so? Because "a rabbit has no horns" is said in relation to "a cow has horns." The dai in daiguan ("relational observation") means opposition, relativity, and comparison.

Daiguan means viewing by comparison: seeing that ox horns exist and observing that rabbit horns do not. Once one views in this comparative way, it is neither true emptiness nor wondrous presence. Hence it is said, "One should not form such a conception"—one should not conceive "beyond existence and nonexistence" as "a rabbit has no horns." If one forms this conception, it amounts to saying that there is still an "ox has horns."

Neither “a rabbit has no horns” nor “an ox has horns” can be obtained. Even when one analyzes and investigates down to minute particles, their intrinsic nature cannot be obtained—none of the myriad dharmas has an intrinsic nature. The realm of noble wisdom is beyond the two extremes (the noble realm is free from them). The realm of noble wisdom should not take “an ox has horns” as its basis (one should not conceive of ox horns), thereby conceiving “beyond existence and nonexistence” as “like a rabbit having no horns.”

[At that time, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, when one who has attained freedom from deluded thoughts sees the mark of non-arising and then reflects upon and observes it without giving rise to deluded thoughts, may this be called nonexistence?”]

Mahāmati Bodhisattva again asked: “World-Honored One, when a practitioner has reached the point of being without deluded thoughts, sees that all dharmas are originally unarisen, and accordingly reflects and observes without giving rise to deluded thoughts, may this be called ‘nonexistence’? May it be called ‘like a rabbit having no horns’?”

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: “It is not because one observes without giving rise to deluded thoughts that one may call it nonexistence. Why? Deluded thoughts arise in dependence on that; they arise as deluded thoughts in dependence on horns. Since deluded thoughts arise in dependence on horns, they are said to depend on a cause. Therefore, one must be free from difference and nondifference. Thus, one should not say that observing without giving rise to deluded thoughts means that horns are nonexistent.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that observing accordingly without giving rise to deluded thoughts does not mean that it is “nonexistent.” Why? Because deluded thoughts have no intrinsic substance. They “arise in dependence on that”: distinctions arise on account of horns and the absence of horns. Those horns are the cause on which deluded thoughts depend. Deluded thoughts are originally absent; they arise because of horns.

Deluded thoughts originally have no intrinsic nature and are therefore said to be “absent”; this does not mean that the absence of deluded thoughts is itself nonexistence. “Therefore, one must be free from difference and nondifference. Thus, one should not say that observing without giving rise to deluded thoughts means that horns are nonexistent.” Difference means that mind and object are differentiated; nondifference means that mind and object are undifferentiated. One should leave behind the two extreme views of “difference” and “nondifference.” It is not that observing without giving rise to deluded thoughts is like a rabbit having no horns.

Rather, the two extreme views of “difference” and “nondifference” are originally absent, like rabbit horns. That is to say, mind and objects admit of no comparison; they are originally unarisen. No thought can arise, and there is no room to speak of “difference” or “nondifference.”

[“Mahāmati, if deluded thought were different from horns, then it should not arise because of horns. If it were not different, then it would arise because of them.”]

This passage says that mind is originally unarisen. The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: if one says that mind, that is, deluded thought, differs from its object, that is, horns, then mind should not arise because of the object; it should have another intrinsic nature. Yet mind arises because of the object and has no separate intrinsic nature that can be obtained. This clearly shows that mind and object are not “different.”

If one says that mind, or deluded thought, is not different from its object, or horns, then when thought arises it would not arise because of the object. In that case, whom does the mind distinguish? If, upon encountering an object, no deluded thought arises, who distinguishes the object? Thus mind and object are not “nondifferent” either. Therefore one must be free from difference and nondifference; therefore one should not say that observing without giving rise to deluded thoughts means nonexistence. Mind is originally unarisen, and deluded thoughts are originally absent.

[“Even when analyzed and investigated down to minute particles, they cannot be obtained at all. Since they are not different from horns, they too have no intrinsic nature. If both lack intrinsic nature, what dharma, and for what reason, can be said to be nonexistent?”]

This passage says that objects are originally unarisen. Rabbits do not grow horns; rabbit horns are originally absent and therefore lack intrinsic nature. But what of ox horns? Though ox horns exist, if they are broken down and analyzed—“even when analyzed and investigated down to minute particles, they cannot be obtained at all”—ox horns likewise lack intrinsic nature, cannot be obtained, and are originally absent.

“Since they are not different from horns, they too have no intrinsic nature” means that ox horns do not differ from rabbit horns. Ox horns have no intrinsic nature that can be obtained and are likewise originally absent. “If both lack intrinsic nature, what dharma, and for what reason, can be said to be nonexistent?” Both rabbit horns and ox horns have no intrinsic nature that can be obtained; both are originally absent. How then can one mistakenly grasp the existence of ox horns and falsely speak of the nonexistence of rabbit horns?

["Mahāmati, because there are no horns, one says they are hornless. If, on seeing something existent, one says that rabbits have no horns, one should not form such a conception. Mahāmati, because it is not a valid cause, to speak of existence and nonexistence—neither can be established."]

Although ox horns exist, if they are broken down and analyzed, they ultimately come to nothing. Thus it is said that they are "like rabbit horns."

If one mistakenly grasps the existence of ox horns and falsely speaks of the nonexistence of rabbit horns, one should not think in this way. One should not grasp the existence of ox horns and speak of the nonexistence of rabbit horns, nor grasp relative existence and nonexistence. Rather, existence is precisely nonexistence, and nonexistence is precisely existence: "If it is not thus, there is certainly no need to hold to it." The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that non-Buddhists grasp relative existence and nonexistence, which is not a valid cause. Relying on an invalid cause, when one speaks of existence and nonexistence, neither "existence" nor "nonexistence" can be established.

The five dharmas are name, appearance, deluded thought, right wisdom, and suchness. The preceding passages dispel the relative notions of "existence" and "nonexistence," intending to transform deluded thought into right wisdom. The passages below dispel the relative notions of "form" and "emptiness," intending to transform names and appearances into suchness. Please consider what follows:

["Mahāmati, there are also other non-Buddhist views that cling to such matters as form, emptiness, things, shapes, and locations, making arbitrary discriminations about dharmas. They cannot properly understand the limits of space, and claim that form is separate from space, giving rise to the deluded conception that form and space have boundaries."]

The Buddha told Bodhisattva Mahāmati that there are also other non-Buddhist views that cling to "form, emptiness, phenomena, shapes, and locations." They arbitrarily discriminate and speculate, failing to understand correctly the characteristics of empty space. They mistakenly assert that "form is separate from empty space," thereby giving rise to the deluded notion that "form" and "empty space" have boundaries between them. Form means matter. These non-Buddhists say that matter is matter and empty space is empty space; matter and empty space are separate and have boundaries. (Fenqi means boundaries.)

["Mahāmati, space is form and is included among the kinds of form. Mahāmati, form is space; its nature is established through the locus of holder and held. The matter of form and space should be distinguished and understood in this way. Mahāmati, when the four great elements arise, their individual characteristics are each distinct. Nor do they abide in space; yet it is not that they lack space."]

There are many kinds of form, and space too is form; space is one among the many kinds of form. Form too is space. Form is established through the “holder,” which is able to maintain, and the “held,” which is maintained (the nature established through the locus of holder and held). The matter of form and space should be distinguished and understood in this way.

Just as the Heart Sūtra says: “Form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form; form is precisely emptiness, and emptiness is precisely form.”

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that when the four named forms of earth, water, fire, and wind arise, their individual appearances are each distinct. Their appearances do not abide in the appearance of space either. Yet they are not substantial, nor is it the case that there is no space within them.

It should be noted that this teaching of the Buddha is remarkably consistent with conclusions reached by modern physics.

In investigating the microscopic structure of matter, modern physics discovered atomic structure. An atom consists of a nucleus and electrons moving at great speed around it. The nucleus and electrons occupy an extremely small space, while the overwhelming majority of an atom’s volume is empty space.

Moreover, the atomic nucleus can be further divided, and electrons may not be solid particles; rather, they exhibit “wave-particle duality”—being like particles and also like waves. From the perspective of modern physics, the “holder,” which is able to maintain, is the energy that sustains atomic structure. The “held,” which is maintained, is the various properties of that atom.

[“Thus, Mahāmati, because one observes that ox horns exist, one says that rabbit horns do not exist. Mahāmati, if ox horns are further analyzed into minute particles, and if one further distinguishes that minute particles do not abide even for an instant, then in relation to what does one observe and say that something is nonexistent? If one says that one observes some other object, that dharma is likewise so.”]

Because ox horns exist, one says that rabbit horns do not exist.

Yet if ox horns are analyzed into minute particles, and then further into particles adjacent to space, and one observes the particles adjacent to space moving at immense speed without abiding even for an instant, then the ox horns—the object used as the comparison for saying that “rabbits have no horns”—are in fact absent. In comparison to what, then, can one say that something is absent? Particles

adjacent to space are minute particles next to space; this closely resembles the modern-physics concept of wave-particle duality.

Attention should be given to the phrase “do not abide even for an instant” in this passage, which closely resembles the concept of the “electron cloud” in modern physics. Because electrons move around the nucleus at immense speed, even a single electron can appear cloudlike. “If one says that one observes some other object, that dharma is likewise so”—even if one does not regard ox horns as existent but regards some other thing as existent, as long as one contrasts this “existence” with “nonexistence,” neither can be established. For any thing can be analyzed just as ox horns are analyzed, and the result will be the same: it cannot be obtained.

[At that time the World-Honored One told the bodhisattva mahāsattva Mahāmati: “You should leave behind the deluded thoughts of divergent views concerning rabbit horns, ox horns, space, shapes, and form. You bodhisattva mahāsattvas should contemplate the deluded thoughts manifested by your own minds and enter all Buddha-lands accordingly. The Most Excellent Sons should instruct others through skillful means based on what is manifested by their own minds.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: one should leave behind deluded thoughts concerning “rabbit horns, ox horns, space, shapes and form, divergent views,” and so forth. You great bodhisattvas should recognize that these are deluded thoughts manifested by your own minds, and enter all Buddha-lands accordingly. Buddha-lands are originally absent; they are merely deluded thoughts manifested by one’s own mind. “Most Excellent Sons” means sons of the Buddha whose realization is most extraordinary. They should use the teaching that all is manifested by one’s own mind as a skillful means to instruct and transform sentient beings.

[At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:] At that time, the World-Honored One again expounded the meaning stated above in verse:

Therefore: [Forms and the like are nonexistent; forms and the like nourish the mind. The body, its enjoyments, and its established supports; the storehouse consciousness manifests sentient beings.]

Forms and the like, together with the mind that recognizes them, are all “nonexistent”; no substantial entity can be found. Yet forms and the like are continually recognized by the mind (“forms and the like nourish the mind”). One’s body, its enjoyments, the necessities and dwelling places that support it, and the appearances of the multitude of sentient beings are all illusory images manifested by the storehouse consciousness; no substantial entity can be found in them.

[Mind, intellect, and consciousness; self-nature and the five dharmas; the two kinds of non-self and purity—these are what the extensively expounded teachings declare.]

“Mind, intellect, and consciousness” refers to the eight consciousnesses; “self-nature” refers to the three natures; “the five dharmas” refers to the five dharmas; and “the two kinds of non-self” refers to the two kinds of non-self. The single word “purity” sweeps away the five dharmas, the three natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of non-self alike. The five dharmas and three natures are all empty; the eight consciousnesses and two kinds of non-self are all relinquished. This is the manner in which all Buddhas of the ten directions and three times teach the Dharma; hence, “these are what the extensively expounded teachings declare.”

[Long and short, existence and nonexistence, and so forth, mutually give rise to one another in succession. Because of nonexistence, existence is established; because of existence, nonexistence is established.]

All conditioned dharmas in the world fall within the scope of “long and short defined in relation to one another; existence and nonexistence arising mutually.” They exist only through successive, relative discriminations. Because rabbit horns are nonexistent, ox horns are held to exist; because ox horns are held to exist, rabbit horns are held to be nonexistent.

[When phenomena are analyzed into minute particles, no deluded thought of form arises. The place established by mind-capacity is not pleasing to those of wrong views.]

If ox horns are analyzed into minute particles, one finds that even ox horns are nonexistent; thus one cannot speak of rabbit horns as nonexistent in contrast to ox horns. Taking this as an illustration, one no longer gives rise to the deluded thought that form exists outside the mind. “The place established by mind-capacity” is the state described above in which one’s own mind is free from existence and nonexistence—the place established by the ultimate meaning of the noble truths. Those who hold wrong views do not delight in hearing such a subtle Dharma gate.

[It is not the realm of their awareness or thought; nor is it the realm of śrāvakas. It is what the Savior of the World teaches—the realm of self-realization.]

They do not delight in hearing it because it is not a realm that they can apprehend or conceive. Not only is it not their realm; it is also not the realm of the śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and other adherents of the Lesser Vehicle. Rather, it is taught by the Tathāgata, the Savior of the World; it is the realm of self-realization of all Buddhas and Tathāgatas.

Summary of This Section:

The key phrase of this section is “the nature of phenomena as distinguished by noble wisdom.” The question asked by Mahāmati Bodhisattva concerns the three natures, but the Buddha begins with the five dharmas. For once the five dharmas have been clearly explained, the three natures are also readily understood.

In this chapter, the Buddha first removes the relative notions of existence and nonexistence, guiding everyone to transform deluded thoughts into right wisdom. He then removes the relative notions of form and emptiness, guiding everyone to transform names and appearances into suchness. Finally, he encourages everyone to use the principle that all is manifested by one’s own mind as an expedient means to teach sentient beings. He also refutes the wrong views of non-Buddhist paths and criticizes the biased views of the Lesser Vehicle.

04. The Pure Stream of Sudden and Gradual Teachings

At that time, in order to purify the flow of manifestations arising from his own mind, Bodhisattva Mahāmati again asked the Tathāgata: “World-Honored One, how is the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings purified? Is it sudden or gradual?”

The flow of manifestations arising from one’s own mind refers to the flowing afflictions presently active in the eight consciousnesses of one’s own mind—that is, the habitual tendencies of affliction manifested by one’s own mind. In order to purify this flow, Bodhisattva Mahāmati again asked the Tathāgata: “World-Honored One, how is the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings purified? Is it purified suddenly or gradually?” In response to Mahāmati’s question, the Buddha gave four analogies of sudden purification and four of gradual purification. Please see the text below.

The Buddha told Mahāmati: “It is purified gradually, not suddenly.”

Just as an āmra fruit ripens gradually rather than all at once, so too does the Tathāgata purify the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings gradually rather than suddenly. Just as a potter gradually makes various vessels rather than completing them all at once, so too does the Tathāgata purify the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings gradually rather than suddenly. Just as the earth gradually brings forth the myriad things rather than producing them all at once, so too does the Tathāgata purify the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings gradually rather than suddenly. Just as people gradually master such skills as music, calligraphy, and

painting rather than mastering them all at once, so too does the Tathāgata purify the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings gradually rather than suddenly.

The Buddha told Bodhisattva Mahāmati that it is purified gradually, not removed all at once. There are four analogies: (1) Just as an āmra fruit, a kind of fruit, ripens gradually rather than all at once, so too does the Tathāgata purify the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings gradually rather than remove it all at once.

(2) Just as a potter gradually fashions pottery rather than completing it all at once, so too does the Tathāgata purify the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings gradually rather than remove it all at once. (3) Just as the earth gradually brings forth the myriad things rather than producing them all at once, so too does the Tathāgata purify the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings gradually rather than remove it all at once. (4) Just as one gradually learns such arts as music, calligraphy, and painting rather than mastering them all at once, so too does the Tathāgata purify the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings gradually rather than remove it all at once.

Just as a bright mirror suddenly reveals all images without characteristics, so too does the Tathāgata, in purifying the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings, suddenly reveal a pure realm without characteristics and without anything whatsoever. Just as the sun and moon suddenly illuminate and reveal all images, so too does the Tathāgata, for sentient beings who are to be freed from the faults of habitual tendencies manifested by their own minds, suddenly reveal the supreme realm of inconceivable wisdom. Just as the storehouse consciousness suddenly discriminates and knows what is manifested by its own mind, as well as

the realm established for the body’s enjoyment, so too do those Buddhas upon whom the Dharma Buddha relies suddenly mature the realms in which sentient beings abide, placing practitioners in the Akaniṣṭha Heaven of the Form Realm. Just as the Buddha upon whom the Dharma Buddha relies radiates light, so too does the noble realm of self-realization illuminate and thereby eradicate deluded thoughts of evil views concerning the dharma characteristics of existence and nonexistence.

There are likewise four analogies for sudden purification rather than gradual removal: (1) Just as a bright mirror instantaneously reflects all forms and images without discrimination, so too does the Tathāgata instantaneously reveal a pure realm without characteristics and without anything whatsoever in purifying the flow of manifestations arising from the minds of all sentient beings.

(2) Just as the sun and moon illuminate and instantaneously reveal all forms and images, so too does the Tathāgata instantaneously reveal inconceivable wisdom and

the most supreme realm to sentient beings who have aroused the resolve to leave behind the afflictive habitual tendencies manifested by their own minds.

(3) Just as the storehouse consciousness instantly discriminates and knows what is manifested by its own mind and the realm established for the body's enjoyment, so too does the Dharma body instantly manifest as the Sambhogakāya Buddha, suddenly maturing the realm in which sentient beings abide and placing them, as practitioners, in the Akaniṣṭha Heaven of the Form Realm where the Sambhogakāya Buddha abides. (The Buddha upon whom the Dharma Buddha relies is the Sambhogakāya Buddha.

) (4) Just as the Sambhogakāya Buddha manifested by the Dharma-body Buddha instantaneously radiates light, so too does the noble realm of self-realization contemplate deluded thoughts such as dharma characteristics, existence, nonexistence, and evil views, causing them to be instantly eradicated.

Mahāmati, the Dharma-reliant Buddha teaches that all dharmas enter into individual characteristics and common characteristics; that the causes are the habitual tendencies manifested by one's own mind, the continuity of deluded thoughts, and attachment to an imagined nature; that the various things are unreal, like illusions; and that the various attachments are unobtainable.

Let us first explain "the Dharma-reliant Buddha." Dharma refers to the Dharma body, which is the essence; reliance refers to the reward body, which is its wondrous functioning. The Sambhogakāya Buddha is both essence and function, with essence and function being one. Thus, the Dharma-reliant Buddha is the Sambhogakāya Buddha. Next, let us explain "all dharmas enter into individual characteristics and common characteristics": suchness does not abide in its own nature but, according with conditions, becomes all dharmas.

Suchness is originally without characteristics, but because it does not abide in its own nature, characteristics appear; hence these are called "individual characteristics." According with the many conditions, it becomes all dharmas. Though dharma characteristics are many, all lack inherent nature and none depart from suchness; hence these are called "common characteristics." "All dharmas enter into individual characteristics and common characteristics" means that all dharmas arise in dependence on suchness and that no inherent nature can be obtained in any dharma.

That is to say, all dharmas are "conditioned arising without inherent nature." When the Sambhogakāya Buddha teaches the Dharma, he teaches the dharmas of conditioned arising without inherent nature. As the saying goes, "Ignorance as cause gives rise to the three subtle characteristics, and objects as conditions foster the growth of the six coarse characteristics." The three subtle characteristics are the

characteristic of karmic activity of ignorance, the perceiving characteristic, and the characteristic of objects—the "causes of habitual tendencies manifested by one's own mind" mentioned in this passage.

The six coarse characteristics are the characteristic of intellect, the characteristic of continuity, the characteristic of grasping, the characteristic of attaching names, the characteristic of initiating karma, and the characteristic of suffering bound to karma. These are the "causes of the continuity of deluded thoughts and attachment to an imagined nature" mentioned in this passage. The one mind of suchness accords with conditions to become all dharmas, and all dharmas arise conditionally without inherent nature; therefore, "the various things are unreal, like illusions." All dharmas originally lack substantial reality and arise from conditions; even their arising has no real nature. Therefore, "the various attachments are unobtainable."

Furthermore, Mahāmati, attachment to the inherent nature of dependent arising gives rise to the characteristics of an imagined nature. Mahāmati, it is like a conjurer who, relying on grass, wood, tiles, and stones, creates various illusions, producing the various forms and appearances of all sentient beings and giving rise to various deluded thoughts. Yet these deluded thoughts have no reality.

One discriminates over and clings to the "inherent nature of dependent arising," thereby producing the characteristics of an imagined nature. It is like a magician who uses grass, wood, tiles, and stones to create all kinds of illusory and unreal appearances. The various forms and appearances of all sentient beings, as well as their various deluded thoughts, are likewise illusory and unreal. Thus it is said, "Yet these deluded thoughts have no reality."

Thus, Mahāmati, on the basis of the inherent nature of dependent arising, there arise the imagined nature, the various minds of deluded thoughts, the characteristics of deluded thoughts concerning the various activities and affairs of appearances, and deluded thoughts of attachment based on habitual tendencies. This is called the arising of the characteristics of an imagined nature. Mahāmati, this is called the Dharma taught by the Buddha upon whom the Dharma Buddha relies.

Earlier, "the characteristics of an imagined nature" were mentioned. What are these characteristics? On the basis of the inherent nature of dependent arising, an imagined nature arises, along with various minds of deluded thoughts. Where there is thought, there is activity; where there is activity, there are affairs. Thus it is said, "the characteristics of deluded thoughts concerning the various activities and affairs of appearances." Within dependent arising, various appearances of imagined nature manifest; thus it is said, "deluded thoughts of attachment based on habitual tendencies."

From “the Dharma-reliant Buddha teaches that all dharmas enter into individual characteristics and common characteristics” to this point, the Buddha has summarized this passage: “This is called the Dharma taught by the Buddha upon whom the Dharma Buddha relies”—that is, the Dharma taught by the Sambhogakāya Buddha. The Buddha has the three bodies of Dharma, reward, and transformation. Above, the teaching of the Sambhogakāya Buddha was discussed. What Dharma, then, do the Dharma-body Buddha and the transformation-body Buddha each teach? Please see below.

Mahāmati, the Dharma Buddha is established and functions in the realm that is the object of noble self-realization, apart from the characteristics of the mind’s inherent nature.

“Apart from the characteristics of the mind’s inherent nature”: when characteristics are left behind, all dharmas are quiescent and extinguished. This characteristic of quiescent extinction is the manner in which the Dharma body teaches the Dharma. “The realm that is the object of noble self-realization is established and functions”: quiescent extinction is not annihilation, and it does not obstruct establishment and functioning. Further, “apart from the characteristics of the mind’s inherent nature” means ultimately unobtainable; “the realm that is the object of noble self-realization is established and functions” means ultimately not annihilated.

“The realm that is the object of noble self-realization” is only a name reluctantly assigned. Even “Dharma body” is only a name reluctantly assigned. To designate dharmatā as the Dharma body is to use a name for what is nameless, a characteristic for what is without characteristics. The Dharma-body Buddha’s teaching does not fall into language and has nothing to do with words and letters. It teaches without speaking and is complete in the present moment. This is precisely what was earlier called the “four sudden” teachings.

Mahāmati, the transformation Buddha teaches giving, precepts, patience, diligence, dhyāna, and wisdom. It frees beings from the characteristics of consciousness associated with the aggregates, realms, and sense entrances; it discriminates, observes, and establishes teachings, transcending the views of non-Buddhist paths and the view of formlessness.

What Dharma does the transformation-body Buddha teach? He teaches such dharmas as the six perfections of giving, upholding the precepts, patience, diligence, dhyāna, and wisdom. He leads beings to leave behind attachment to the five aggregates, six sense entrances, and eighteen realms, and then to become liberated from the illusory appearances manifested by consciousness. He distinguishes the various sentient beings, observes their differing capacities, and establishes dharma gates suited to their capacities.

The Dharma taught by this transformation-body Buddha also far transcends the views of non-Buddhist paths, such as the view of formlessness. The transformation-body Buddha teaches the Dharma so that sentient beings may leave behind wrong views, establish right view, and be guided onto the path of correct cultivation. This is precisely what was earlier called the “four gradual” teachings.

Mahāmati, furthermore, the Dharma Buddha is free from grasping at conditions. When grasping at conditions is absent, the characteristics of all acts, faculties, measures, and appearances are extinguished. This is not the realm to which ordinary beings, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, or followers of non-Buddhist paths cling through the characteristics of self and their attached objects. The ultimate differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization are established. Therefore, Mahāmati, one should diligently cultivate and learn these ultimate differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization. The manifestations seen in one’s own mind should be eradicated.

After explaining the teachings of the three bodies—the Dharma, reward, and transformation bodies—the Buddha again concludes with the Dharma body’s teaching, thereby highlighting that the three bodies are one body and attributing the act of teaching the Dharma to the Dharma-body Buddha. The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that the Dharma-body Buddha is free from grasping at conditions. Because it is free from such grasping, the characteristics of all acts, faculties, measures, and appearances are extinguished. The characteristics of all acts, faculties, measures, and appearances are the conditioned dharmas upheld by non-Buddhist paths.

To extinguish these characteristics is the unconditioned dharma. The realm of the unconditioned cannot be fathomed by non-Buddhist paths, cannot be fathomed by ordinary beings, and cannot be fathomed even by the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas of the Lesser Vehicle, because followers of non-Buddhist paths and ordinary beings cling to the characteristic of self, while śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas cling to the realm of nirvāṇa.

Earlier, in discussing the “three characteristics of noble wisdom,” we spoke of “the ultimate characteristic of noble self-realizing wisdom.” Now we speak again of “the ultimate differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization.” As it is said, “All sages and noble ones differ by means of the unconditioned dharma.” Where, then, does this difference lie? The difference lies precisely in the teachings of the three bodies.

In fact, the three bodies are one body; expedient means are ultimate; and gradualness is itself suddenness. It is not that the Buddha-bodies differ; rather, sentient beings differ in their capacities. Different teachings are taught for different

capacities; hence there is the establishment of “the ultimate differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization.” The Buddha exhorted Mahāmati Bodhisattva to diligently cultivate and study the ultimate differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization, and to eliminate the appearances perceived by one’s own mind. That is to say, one should diligently study non-contrivance and eliminate contrivance.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, there are two distinguishing characteristics of the śrāvaka vehicle: the characteristic of attaining the distinctions of noble self-realization, and the characteristic of attachment to the imagined nature of self-nature.]

The Buddha further told Bodhisattva Mahāmati that there are two kinds of the Śrāvaka Vehicle, one of which corresponds to the “characteristic of discriminative appearance.” Earlier, “the ultimate characteristic of distinctions realized by the noble ones through their own awakening” was discussed; now “the characteristic of discriminative appearance” and “the characteristic of distinctions realized by the noble ones through their own awakening” are mentioned, with the two words “ultimate” omitted. The point is that this characteristic of discriminative appearance is realized by śrāvakas and is not ultimate.

Of these two kinds of śrāvakas, the first is the śrāvaka who attains the differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization, and the second is the śrāvaka characterized by attachment to the imagined nature of self-nature. “The differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization” refers to śrāvakas of sharp faculties, who cultivate in accordance with the Four Noble Truths, contemplate emptiness and realize cessation, and attain the wisdom of self-realization.

Such śrāvakas realize the emptiness of self but do not yet understand the emptiness of dharmas. Attached to the bliss of quiescent cessation, they have not reached the ultimate; therefore, the two words “ultimate” are omitted, and this is called “the characteristic of distinctions realized by the noble ones through their own awakening.” “The characteristic of attachment to the self-nature of false discriminations”: this is the realm practiced by śrāvakas of dull faculties. Śrāvakas of dull faculties give rise to views by clinging to teachings; they extinguish form in seeking emptiness, failing to understand that the appearances of form have no inherent substance, and instead pursue objects, taking them to be real. “False discriminations of self-nature” means mistakenly clinging to illusory dharmas as truly possessing a self-nature. “Attachment to self-nature” means further falsely imputing a self-nature to these discriminations—in other words, adding delusion upon delusion.

[What is the śrāvaka who attains the differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization? It is one who, in the sphere of impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and

non-self, attains the ultimate truth of freedom from desire and quiescent cessation; who ceases the individual and common characteristics of the aggregates, realms, and sense-fields; who truly knows the indestructible characteristic as external; and whose mind attains quiescent cessation. Once the mind has attained quiescent cessation, there is liberation through dhyāna, liberation through the direct experience of samādhi, the path, and fruition. Yet one is not free from habitual tendencies or inconceivable transformational birth and death. One who attains and abides in the bliss of noble self-realization is called a śrāvaka who attains the differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization.]

What is meant by "the śrāvaka who attains the differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization"? It is one who clearly sees the sphere of "impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and non-self"; attains the ultimate truth of "freedom from desire and quiescent cessation"; extinguishes the individual and common characteristics of the "aggregates, realms, and sense-fields"; and understands the "external indestructible characteristic" as if it were truly existent. The mind thereby attains quiescent cessation. In fact, this means that the mind abides in a single object, abiding in the sphere of nirvāṇa.

This passage requires a brief explanation. First, "the individual and common characteristics of the aggregates, realms, and sense-fields": "aggregates, realms, and sense-fields" means the five aggregates, eighteen realms, and twelve sense-fields, also called the five aggregates, eighteen realms, and twelve bases—that is, form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness; the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, and so forth. "The individual and common characteristics of the aggregates, realms, and sense-fields" means their general and particular characteristics.

Next, "the external indestructible characteristic": nirvāṇa is indestructible, yet they cannot understand that birth and death are precisely nirvāṇa, and instead believe that nirvāṇa exists outside birth and death. "Truly knowing the external indestructible characteristic" means that they have understood the characteristic of nirvāṇa, but believe that nirvāṇa truly exists outside birth and death.

After the mind attains quiescent cessation, they realize liberation through dhyāna and liberation through the direct experience of samādhi, the path, and fruition, thereby escaping segmented birth and death. Yet habitual tendencies remain, as does transformational birth and death. What they realize is the bliss of noble self-realization, and they abide in that bliss. Such a śrāvaka is called one who attains the differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization.

[Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas who attain and abide in the bliss of the distinctions of noble self-realization do not take as realization the bliss of direct experience through the gate of cessation. Out of compassion for sentient beings

and in accordance with their original vows, they do not make it their realization. Mahāmati, this is called the bliss of the śrāvaka's attainment of the differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization. Bodhisattva mahāsattvas should not cultivate and study that bliss of attaining the differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization.]

Great bodhisattvas who arouse great vows to liberate sentient beings may also realize "the differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization," but they do not abide in the bliss of noble self-realization. Unlike adherents of the Lesser Vehicle, who abide in the bliss of direct experience through the gate of quiescent cessation, great bodhisattvas have compassion for sentient beings and do not forget their original vow to liberate them; therefore, they do not abide in such realization—they do not take it as realization. This realization is called the bliss of the śrāvaka's attainment of the differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization. Great bodhisattvas should not cultivate the state realized by such śrāvakas.

[Mahāmati, what is the śrāvaka characterized by the mind's imagined attachment to self-nature? Namely, the great elements—blue, yellow, red, white; hard, moist, warm, and moving—are not produced by fabrication and possess individual and common characteristics. The Foremost One of old has well explained this; having seen it, they give rise to imagined self-nature regarding it. Bodhisattva mahāsattvas should understand and abandon this, enter in accordance with the characteristic of the non-self of phenomena, eliminate the view of the characteristic of the non-self of persons, and progressively establish the successive stages. This is called the imagined attachment to self-nature of all śrāvakas.]

The śrāvaka characterized by the mind's imagined attachment to self-nature is the second kind of śrāvaka mentioned above—the śrāvaka characterized by attachment to the imagined nature of self-nature. What is this śrāvaka? If the first kind of śrāvaka is briefly called a "śrāvaka free from characteristics," then this second kind may briefly be called a "śrāvaka attached to characteristics."

The great elements are the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind, or the seven great elements of earth, water, fire, wind, space, faculties, and consciousness. Blue, yellow, red, and white are the various forms and colors of the four great elements. Hardness, moisture, warmth, and movement are their inherent characteristics. "The Foremost One of old" refers to the Buddha. "The Foremost One of old has well explained this" means that the Buddha is skilled in teaching the Dharma.

He taught that the great elements, the various colors of blue, yellow, red, and white, and the various inherent characteristics of hardness, moisture, warmth, and movement are not produced by fabrication. That is, they were not created by a god.

They each have their own characteristics—their individual characteristics—and also share common characteristics.

When śrāvakas attached to characteristics hear the Buddha teach in this manner, they become attached to the existence of dharmas outside the mind and falsely cling to the notion that the myriad dharmas have self-nature—thus, regarding them, they give rise to imagined self-nature. Yet what the Buddha more often expounds is that the myriad dharmas have no self-nature. They cannot accord with this because they are attached to characteristics. This is the second kind of śrāvaka, called the śrāvaka characterized by attachment to the imagined nature of self-nature.

Great bodhisattvas should recognize these attachments and abandon them. They should enter in accordance with the sphere of the non-self of phenomena. If one has not realized the non-self of phenomena and knows only the non-self of persons, then attachment to dharmas has not been broken. Hence it says, “eliminate the view of the characteristic of the non-self of persons.” To eliminate the view of the characteristic of the non-self of persons means that both persons and phenomena are without self. In this way, one progressively realizes and enters the various stages—the successive stages are progressively established.

Summary of This Section:

The preceding section eliminated “existence and nonexistence,” transforming deluded thought into right wisdom; it eliminated “form and emptiness,” transforming names and characteristics into suchness. This section now brings right wisdom and suchness to light. The preceding section concluded that “the Foremost One instructs through expedient means based on the appearances of one’s own mind”; therefore, in this section Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks, “How can the stream of appearances of the minds of all sentient beings be purified and eliminated?”

In this section, the Buddha first explains the method for purifying and eliminating the stream of appearances of the minds of all sentient beings—four sudden and four gradual approaches—in order to bring forth the Tathāgata’s right wisdom. He then explains the teaching of the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya, guiding the discussion back to the truth that the three bodies are one body and that gradualness is itself suddenness, in order to bring forth suchness. At the same time, he points out two kinds of śrāvakas, exhorting great bodhisattvas to abandon their narrow and inferior views and diligently cultivate and study the ultimate differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization. The so-called “ultimate differentiating characteristics of noble self-realization” are the Tathāgata’s sphere of noble self-realization—the ultimate meaning of the noble truths.

05. Ever Inconceivable

[At that time, the Mahāsattva Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, the realm of permanent inconceivability and self-realized noble attainment of which the World-Honored One speaks, and the realm of ultimate truth—are these not the permanent inconceivable causes and conditions spoken of by the non-Buddhist paths?”]

“Permanent” means without an end. The pure Dharma realm is neither arising nor ceasing, and its nature does not change; therefore, it is called permanent. Si means thinking, and yi means deliberation. Deliberation belongs to speech, while thinking is an activity of mind. “Inconceivable” means that the path of words is cut off and the course of mental activity comes to an end. It cannot be reached by thought or language; it is inconceivable. The non-Buddhist paths also use the expression “permanent inconceivability.”

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked the Buddha: “The ‘realm of permanent inconceivability and self-realized noble attainment’ and the ‘realm of ultimate truth’ of which you speak are not the ‘permanent inconceivable causes and conditions’ spoken of by the non-Buddhist paths, are they?” Self-realization is permanent wisdom. Noble attainment is a permanent realm. Ultimate truth is, in its essence, beyond words and thought, and is therefore called inconceivable.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The permanent inconceivability attained through the causes and conditions of the non-Buddhist paths is not so. Why is this? The permanent inconceivability of the non-Buddhist paths is not established through its own characteristics. If permanent inconceivability is not established through its own characteristics, then through what cause does permanent inconceivability appear? Furthermore, Mahāmati, if inconceivability were established through its own characteristics, then it should be permanent. Yet because of the characteristics of a creator as its cause, permanent inconceivability cannot be established.”]

The permanent inconceivability taught by the Tathāgata takes ultimate truth as its cause and self-realized noble attainment as its characteristic. Its cause is a true cause, and its characteristic is true reality. The non-Buddhist paths, however, mistakenly posit “God’s creation” and a “divine self” as causes, falsely taking what is impermanent to be permanent.

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva, “The permanent inconceivability attained through the causes and conditions of the non-Buddhist paths is not so”—the causes and conditions spoken of by the non-Buddhist paths cannot attain permanent inconceivability.

“Why is this?”—why is this said? “The permanent inconceivability of the non-Buddhist paths is not established through its own characteristics”—the permanent inconceivability spoken of by the non-Buddhist paths mistakenly takes “God’s

creation” and a “divine self” as its cause. It is not established by taking ultimate truth as its cause and self-realized noble attainment as its characteristic.

“If permanent inconceivability is not established through its own characteristics, then through what causes and conditions can permanent inconceivability appear?”—if it is not established by taking self-realized noble attainment as its characteristic, what other causes and conditions could make permanent inconceivability appear? “If inconceivability were established through its own characteristics, then it should be permanent”—if they also claimed that their “permanent inconceivability” were “established through its own characteristics,” then the “god” of “God’s creation”

and the “self” of a “divine self” should also be permanent! “Because of the characteristics of a creator as its cause, permanent inconceivability cannot be established”—“creator” refers to the “god” of “God’s creation” and the “self” of a “divine self.” They mistakenly posit god and self as causes; because the characteristics of “god” and “self” are impermanent, the “permanent inconceivability” of which they speak cannot be established.

[“Mahāmati, my ultimate truth is permanently inconceivable. It is established through the cause and characteristics of ultimate truth, and is free from being and nonbeing. Because it attains the characteristic of self-realization, it has a characteristic. Because ultimate truth is its wisdom-cause, it has a cause. Being free from being and nonbeing, it is permanent, like uncreated space and the extinction of nirvāṇa. Thus, Mahāmati, it differs from the doctrine of permanent inconceivability taught by the non-Buddhist paths. Thus, Mahāmati, this permanent inconceivability is attained by the self-realized noble wisdom of all Tathāgatas. Therefore, it is permanently inconceivable. What is attained by self-realized noble wisdom should be cultivated.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: The permanent inconceivability of which I speak is established with ultimate truth as both cause and characteristic; it is free from being and also free from nonbeing. Ultimate truth is the true reality of the Middle Way. Taking the true reality of the Middle Way as cause is a permanent cause, and taking it as characteristic is a permanent characteristic. Being free from being means that it is not existent; being free from nonbeing means that it is not nonexistent.

In this way, it is far removed from the errors of being and nonbeing; neither existent nor nonexistent precisely reveals the Middle Way. The Middle Way is not relative but absolute, and is therefore permanent. Because it is permanent, it is wondrous. Because it is wondrous, it is inconceivable. Because it attains the characteristic of self-realization, it has a characteristic. Because ultimate truth is its cause, it has a

cause. “Like uncreated space and the extinction of nirvāṇa, it is permanent”—uncreated means unconditioned.

Space is permanent because it is unconditioned. Nirvāṇa is permanent because of extinction. Therefore, this differs from the doctrine of permanent inconceivability taught by the non-Buddhist paths. This permanent inconceivability is attained through the self-realized noble wisdom of all Tathāgatas, and all great bodhisattvas should cultivate it.

[“Furthermore, Mahāmati, the permanent inconceivability of the non-Buddhist paths has no permanent nature because it has a cause of different characteristics. It is not permanent through the power of its own cause and characteristics.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that the permanent inconceivability spoken of by the non-Buddhist paths in fact has no permanent nature. Because they take “God’s creation” or a “divine self” as cause, establishing a separate “god” or “self” as cause, it is said that they have a “cause of different characteristics.” It is not its own cause and characteristic. The permanent inconceivability taught by the Buddha takes wisdom as cause and self-realization as characteristic; it is its own cause and characteristic, rather than establishing a different cause apart from itself.

[“Furthermore, Mahāmati, the non-Buddhist paths, having seen the impermanence of the being and nonbeing of what is produced, conceive and calculate permanent inconceivability.”]

Let us first explain “the being and nonbeing of what is produced.” What is produced means the conditioned. Being means existence, and nonbeing means nonexistence. “The being and nonbeing of what is produced” means that the existence of conditioned worldly dharmas does not endure forever; afterward, it is no longer there. The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that the permanent inconceivability spoken of by the non-Buddhist paths is conceived and calculated.

They see the conditioned dharmas of the world: after “being,” they become “nonbeing.” Having seen this, they conceive and calculate that a “god,” such as Nārāyaṇa, or a “self,” such as the yang spirit, is permanent, and take it to be permanently inconceivable. Yet this too is impermanent—though it may last through eighty thousand kalpas, in the end it still falls into emptiness and annihilation.

[“Mahāmati, having likewise seen that what is produced is being and nonbeing, and is impermanent, I speak, on the basis of the realm of self-realized noble attainment, of that permanent state as having no cause.”]

“The being and nonbeing of what is produced” has just been explained above; here, “the being and nonbeing of what is made” has the same meaning. The Buddha told

Mahāmati Bodhisattva: I too see that the conditioned dharmas of the world, after "being," become "nonbeing." Having seen this, I cultivate what is permanent and directly realize the realm of self-realized noble attainment. Only then do I know that the permanence spoken of by the non-Buddhist paths is in fact also impermanent; therefore, their "permanent inconceivability" is said to have no permanent cause.

["Mahāmati, if the permanent inconceivability of the non-Buddhist paths is established through causes and characteristics, then the being and nonbeing of its own causal characteristics are like rabbit horns. This permanent inconceivability is merely verbal delusion; the non-Buddhist paths have such an error. Why is this? Because their merely verbal delusion is like rabbit horns, and it does not partake of its own causal characteristics."]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that the permanent inconceivability spoken of by the non-Buddhist paths has not departed from being and nonbeing. Seeing impermanence, they analogize from it and conceive a "permanent" state. This is like seeing that cattle have horns and, by comparison with cattle horns, saying, "Rabbits have no horns."

If there were no cattle horns for comparison, if the very concept of "horn" did not exist, then how could one even speak of whether rabbits have horns? Therefore, their permanent inconceivability is merely verbal delusion, and the various non-Buddhist paths all make this error.

Why do they all make this error? Because they merely engage in verbal delusion. Like saying "rabbits have no horns" by comparison with cattle horns, they take a non-cause as a cause; there are only words, with no real meaning. Because they do not take the self-realized noble wisdom of ultimate truth as their cause, it is said that they do not partake of their own causal characteristics.

["Mahāmati, my permanent inconceivability is permanent because it attains self-realization as its cause and characteristic, and is free from the being and nonbeing of what is produced. It is not like the non-Buddhist paths, which, seeing the impermanence of external being and nonbeing, conceive and calculate permanence."]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: The permanent inconceivability of which I speak takes self-realization and direct realization as its cause and characteristic. It is free from the two extremes of being and nonbeing, and is therefore true permanence. The non-Buddhist paths see that "being" returns to "nonbeing," and, taking this impermanence as their comparison, conceive and calculate that a "god" or "self" is permanent. What I teach has nothing whatever to do with what they teach.

["Mahāmati, if, seeing the impermanence of external being and nonbeing, the non-Buddhist paths conceive and calculate a permanently inconceivable permanence, yet do not know the characteristics of the self-causes of permanent inconceivability, then they are far removed from the characteristics of the realm of self-realized noble wisdom. They should not make such assertions."]

"Being and nonbeing" have been mentioned repeatedly. Let us illustrate them here with an example. Consider flowers blooming and falling: a flower in full bloom possesses the nature of a flower; this is "being," or flower-nature. A withered flower no longer possesses the nature of a flower; this is "nonbeing."

"Being" means that there is a flower, while "nonbeing" means that there is no flower. This is why we said above that being means existence and nonbeing means nonexistence.

After "being," there is "nonbeing"—being returns to nonbeing: this is impermanence. "The impermanence of external being and nonbeing" means that the non-Buddhist paths see being return to nonbeing, see impermanence, and thus conceive and falsely calculate that a divine self is permanent.

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that, having seen being return to nonbeing and having seen impermanence, the non-Buddhist paths commit four errors. First, "they conceive and calculate a permanently inconceivable permanence"—by comparison with impermanence, they conceive and calculate an inconceivable permanence.

Second, "they do not know the characteristics of the self-causes of permanent inconceivability"—they do not know that permanent inconceivability takes wisdom as its cause and self-realization as its characteristic. They always seek outside the mind. Third, "they are far removed from the characteristics of the realm of self-realized noble wisdom"—seeking dharmas outside the mind, the more they seek, the farther away they become, until they differ greatly from the self-realized noble wisdom of the Tathāgata. Fourth, "they should not make such assertions"—they have not realized permanent inconceivability and should not establish such a doctrine.

["Furthermore, Mahāmati, śrāvakas, fearing the suffering of the deluded conception of birth and death, seek nirvāṇa. They do not know that the distinctions between birth and death and nirvāṇa, and all conceptions of things, are without inherent nature. Seeing the future cessation of the realms of the faculties, they conceive it as nirvāṇa. This is not the transformation of the storehouse consciousness through self-realized noble wisdom. Therefore, ordinary people and fools speak of three vehicles and say that the realms of mind-only are nonexistent. Therefore, Mahāmati, they do not know the realms manifested by the minds of the Tathāgatas of the past,

future, and present. Clinging to realms manifested by the external mind, they continually revolve in the cycle of birth and death.”]

Having finished discussing the non-Buddhist paths, the text turns to the Lesser Vehicle. Here, “the śrāvakas” refers to the Lesser Vehicle. The Buddha again told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that Lesser Vehicle practitioners fear birth and death and seek nirvāṇa with longing. They do not know that the distinguishing characteristics of birth and death and nirvāṇa are all deluded conceptions and have no inherent nature. With their eye of wisdom, Lesser Vehicle practitioners see the future cessation of the sense faculties and their objects, and take this to be nirvāṇa.

In fact, this is not the realm toward which self-realized noble wisdom tends, nor does it involve transforming consciousness into wisdom. Ordinary, deluded people cannot accord with the Mahāyāna teaching that birth and death are precisely nirvāṇa. They speak of three vehicles and say that “the mind's range tends toward nothingness.” This is the biased true nirvāṇa of the Lesser Vehicle.

They do not know that the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa of all Buddhas of the three times is discovered within one’s own mind; there is no separate nirvāṇa. They falsely imagine a nirvāṇa-dharma outside the mind. Since they have not ended transformational birth and death, the wheel of birth and death continues to turn. This explains that all dharmas do not cease. Yet the saints of the Lesser Vehicle lose heart and extinguish their aspirations, hoping that “the mind's range tends toward nothingness” and pursuing “no further rebirth.” In modern terms, they are extreme world-weary pessimists. The following explains that all dharmas do not arise.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, the non-arising of all dharmas is taught by the Tathāgatas of the past, future, and present. Why is this so? Because they are manifestations of one’s own mind; their nature and non-nature are free from arising as existent or nonexistent.]

The non-arising of all dharmas is taught by all Buddhas of the three times. Why is this said? Because all dharmas are originally unborn; they are illusory appearances manifested by one’s own mind, and no real nature can be found in them. They are free from arising as existent and also free from arising as nonexistent; both existence and nonexistence are left behind.

[Mahāmati, no nature arises. The claim that all dharmas are like the horns of a rabbit or horse is due to the deluded imaginings of foolish ordinary people, who do not realize their own imagined nature. Mahāmati, the non-arising of all dharmas is the realm toward which self-realized noble wisdom tends. The characteristics of the self-nature of all natures do not arise; this is not the dual realm of the foolish person's imaginings. The self-nature of body and possessions is established as characteristics of self-nature. Mahāmati, the ālaya consciousness turns through the

characteristics of grasping and what is grasped. Foolish people fall into the two views of arising, abiding, and ceasing, hoping that all natures arise and giving rise to the deluded imaginings of existence and nonexistence. They are not sages. Mahāmati, one should cultivate and learn this.]

To say that “no nature arises” means that “all dharmas do not arise” does not mean sheer nothingness; rather, it means that all dharmas lack real nature. Foolish ordinary people cannot realize that deluded imaginings arise from their own nature. On hearing that “all dharmas do not arise,” they falsely imagine that all dharmas are like the nonexistent horns of rabbits and horses. This is due to their deluded imaginings.

The non-arising of all dharmas is the realm of self-realized noble wisdom. The nature of all dharmas is emptiness dependent on conditions; it is not the self-nature of characteristics that gives rise to dharmas. This is not the twofold realm of “existence” and “nonexistence” imagined by foolish ordinary people. One’s body and the possessions that sustain it are all images of the ālaya consciousness; no actual things can be found.

Ordinary people fall into views of “arising, abiding, and ceasing,” and into the two views of existence and nonexistence. Hoping that all things may arise with a real nature, they give rise to the two deluded imaginings of “existence” and “nonexistence.” Ultimately, they are not sages. After explaining that all dharmas do not cease and that all dharmas do not arise, the text says, “one should cultivate and learn this,” meaning that one should cultivate and learn the non-arising and non-ceasing of all dharmas.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, there are five kinds of uninterrupted dispositions. What are the five? They are the uninterrupted disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle, the uninterrupted disposition of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, the uninterrupted disposition of the Tathāgata Vehicle, the indeterminate disposition, and the distinct disposition.]

“Uninterrupted” means pure and unmixed. Disposition means innate capacity. Thus, an uninterrupted disposition is a pure, unmixed temperament, or, one might say, a single-minded disposition. The Buddha further told Mahāmati that there are five kinds of uninterrupted dispositions. What are these five? They are the uninterrupted disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle, the uninterrupted disposition of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, the uninterrupted disposition of the Tathāgata Vehicle, the indeterminate disposition, and the distinct disposition.

[How does one recognize the uninterrupted disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle? When such a person hears that the individual and common characteristics of the aggregates, elements, and sense-fields can be cut off, and understands this, every

pore on the body thrills with delight and joy. Such a person delights in cultivating knowledge of characteristics, but does not cultivate the characteristics of awakening through dependent origination. This is called the uninterrupted disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle. Śrāvakas with uninterrupted dispositions see the eighth bhūmi; when afflictions arise, they are cut off, but the habitual tendencies of affliction are not cut off. They do not transcend the inconceivable transformational death, but transcend segmented birth and death. They rightly roar the lion's roar: "My birth has ended, the pure life has been established, and I will undergo no further rebirth." Knowing this as it truly is, they cultivate the selflessness of persons, until they attain the realization of parinirvāṇa.]

What kind of person belongs to the uninterrupted disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle? Upon hearing the Buddha explain that the five aggregates, eighteen elements, and twelve sense-fields can be eliminated, and understanding that they can be eliminated, they are so delighted that every pore of their body opens. They like to cultivate "knowledge of characteristics," but do not like to cultivate "the characteristics of awakening through dependent origination." Such people belong to the uninterrupted disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle.

"Knowledge of characteristics" means the wisdom that clearly sees the general characteristics of the Four Noble Truths: suffering, its origin, cessation, and the path. "The characteristics of awakening through dependent origination" means the twelve links of dependent origination. The twelve links of dependent origination are cultivated by pratyekabuddhas, through which they awaken, but śrāvakas do not like to cultivate them. When śrāvakas realize the fruit of arhatship, their realm of direct realization is roughly comparable to the eighth bhūmi.

Arhats can cut off the afflictions of views and thoughts as they arise, but have not cut off the seeds of the habitual tendencies of affliction. Therefore, they can only transcend the bitter ocean of segmented birth and death; they cannot transcend transformational birth and death. The lion's roar means a fearless proclamation.

Upon realizing the fruit of arhatship, they make the lion's roar and solemnly proclaim: "My birth has ended" (the truths of suffering and its origin have been cut off); "the pure life has been established" (the truth of the path has been perfected); "I will undergo no further rebirth" (the truth of cessation has been realized). They cultivate the path and realize cessation; this is true and not false, and therefore it is called "knowing as it truly is." To cultivate the "selflessness of persons" is to eliminate "attachment to self." Thus they attain the realization of nirvāṇa—that is, biased true nirvāṇa.

[Mahāmati, as for the distinct uninterrupted disposition: self, person, sentient being, life-span, nourisher, and puruṣa. Those sentient beings form such an understanding

and seek parinirvāṇa. Again, through the teachings of other non-Buddhist paths, they say that everything is made by a creator. Having seen all natures, they say, “This is parinirvāṇa.” Forming such an understanding, they are not suited to the view of the selflessness of dharmas; they have no liberation. Mahāmati, these non-Buddhist dispositions of the uninterrupted Śrāvaka Vehicle do not emerge from the awareness of emergence. In order to transform their wrong views, one should cultivate and learn this.]

It has just been said that arhats make the lion’s roar. Yet even a lion has parasites within its body; the distinct uninterrupted disposition is like a parasite within a lion’s body. The distinct uninterrupted disposition is the non-Buddhist disposition of the uninterrupted Śrāvaka Vehicle. Simply put, it refers to śrāvakas attached to characteristics, or to non-Buddhists who attach themselves to Buddhism.

These non-Buddhists falsely imagine that all sentient beings flow forth from a self, that this self can grant sentient beings life-spans and nourish all sentient beings. They therefore establish a “divine self” (puruṣa) as nirvāṇa. Is this not the non-Buddhist doctrine of a divine self? Yet outwardly they assume the appearance of śrāvakas. “Those sentient beings” refers to sentient beings who take such non-Buddhists attached to Buddhism as their teachers.

“Forming such an understanding” means imagining that realization of the “divine self” is awakening. “Seeking parinirvāṇa” means imagining that the “divine self” is nirvāṇa and seeking such a “nirvāṇa.” This is truly one blind person leading a multitude of blind people, drawing one another into a pit of fire. “Again, through the teachings of other non-Buddhist paths, they say that everything is made by a creator.” Here, “creator” means the Creator God.

There are also some non-Buddhists attached to Buddhism who adopt other erroneous non-Buddhist teachings and mistakenly uphold the theory that a god creates all things. “Having seen all natures, they say, ‘This is parinirvāṇa.’” Seeing the conditioned nature of all things, they say that this conditioned nature is nirvāṇa. “Forming such an understanding, they are not suited to the view of the selflessness of dharmas; they have no liberation.”

They actually take these things to be awakening. On hearing the Buddha teach the selflessness of dharmas, they give rise to slander. Or, on hearing the Buddha teach the dharma of nirvāṇa, they imagine that there is some real dharma to be obtained. Therefore, they are not suited to the view of the selflessness of dharmas, and they have not realized liberation. They are called children of the Buddha, but in fact they are non-Buddhists. “These non-Buddhist dispositions of the uninterrupted Śrāvaka Vehicle do not emerge from the awareness of emergence.”

“Not emerging from the awareness of emergence” means mistaking non-emergence for emergence. The awareness of not emerging from emergence is the mistaken notion of “not emerging from emergence.” “In order to transform their wrong views, one should cultivate and learn this” means that, in order to transform their wrong views, great bodhisattvas should cultivate and learn that all dharmas neither arise nor cease.

[Mahāmati, as for the uninterrupted disposition of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle: upon hearing of the uninterrupted succession of distinct conditions, one’s body hair stands on end, and one weeps sorrowfully. One does not draw near to conditions, and is unattached to all things. On hearing of various bodies, various spiritual powers, separation and union, and various transformations, one’s mind enters into them. Having recognized the uninterrupted disposition of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle in such a person, one explains the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle in accordance with that person. This is called the characteristic of the uninterrupted disposition of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle.]

Those who study and practice the Buddha’s teaching, contemplate the twelve links of dependent origination, and awaken to the principle of ultimate truth are called pratyekabuddhas. Those born in an age without a Buddha who contemplate the twelve links of dependent origination and awaken by themselves are called solitary realizers. The uninterrupted succession of distinct conditions refers to the twelve links of dependent origination: cause and effect cycle continuously, link after link, without interruption.

On hearing the teaching of the twelve links of dependent origination, they are overcome with sorrow and emotion, so that the hairs all over their body stand on end and they weep bitterly. “Not drawing near to conditions” means enjoying solitude and always wishing to withdraw from worldly entanglements. “Not clinging to anything” means having no liking for attachment to any worldly affair. If one speaks to them of spiritual powers and transformations—for example, dividing one body into many, or combining many bodies into one.

then, upon hearing such marvelous matters, they become deeply interested and their minds enter into them. If bodhisattvas encounter such people, they should explain to them the teaching of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle—the twelve links of dependent origination. What has been described above is the characteristic of the “uninterrupted disposition of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle.”

[Mahāmati, there are four kinds of uninterrupted disposition of the Tathāgata Vehicle: the uninterrupted disposition of the dharma of self-nature, the uninterrupted disposition of freedom from the dharma of self-nature, the uninterrupted disposition of attaining self-realized noble wisdom, and the

uninterrupted disposition of the excellence of other buddha-lands. Mahāmati, when, upon hearing each of these four matters explained, as well as hearing of the inconceivable realm in which one's own mind manifests and establishes body and possessions, one is not alarmed or afraid, this is called the characteristic of the uninterrupted disposition of the Tathāgata Vehicle.]

There are four kinds of uninterrupted disposition of the Tathāgata Vehicle: the uninterrupted disposition of the dharma of self-nature, the uninterrupted disposition of freedom from the dharma of self-nature, the uninterrupted disposition of attaining self-realized noble wisdom, and the uninterrupted disposition of the excellence of other buddha-lands. (1) The uninterrupted disposition of the dharma of self-nature: self-nature is the dharmakāya. The uninterrupted dharma of self-nature means that the dharmakāya ultimately does not cease. Such people readily realize the true characteristics of reality.

(2) The uninterrupted disposition of freedom from the dharma of self-nature: freedom from the dharma of self-nature means that the dharmakāya ultimately cannot be obtained. Such people readily realize signlessness. In fact, true characteristics are precisely signlessness; being signless, they are not without characteristics. Self-nature is the dharmakāya, while freedom from self-nature is liberation. People of these two dispositions readily see the dharmakāya clearly and attain liberation.

(3) The uninterrupted disposition of attaining self-realized noble wisdom: self-realized noble wisdom is prajñā-wisdom. Such people readily and swiftly open wisdom, attain Buddhahood, and liberate sentient beings; they do not seek any other fruition. (4) The uninterrupted disposition of the excellence of other buddha-lands: attaining self-realized noble wisdom is inner realization. Adorning buddha-lands and benefiting and bringing happiness to sentient beings is what is meant here by "other buddha-lands."

For example, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss was brought into being by Amitābha Buddha's compassionate vows and powers. With its manifold excellences and adornments, it gathers in bodhisattvas from other lands. If one explains to them each of the four matters mentioned above, saying that they are all manifestations of one's own mind and are not outside the mind—one's own body, the possessions that sustain and nourish it, and even the establishment of all kinds of inconceivable realms—these are all object aspects of the ālaya consciousness; there is no dharma outside the mind. If, upon hearing this, they are not alarmed or frightened, such persons possess the uninterrupted disposition of the Tathāgata vehicle.

[Mahāmati, those of indeterminate disposition are such that, when these three kinds are taught, they enter according to whichever is taught and become

established accordingly.]

Indeterminate disposition is like this: when they hear any one of the three teachings—the śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, or Tathāgata—they develop faith in it and enter it, then diligently cultivate and study it. Some enter the greater vehicle from the lesser, while others enter the greater vehicle directly; in the end, they will enter the Tathāgata vehicle. Because their disposition can change, they are called indeterminate.

[Mahāmati, this is for those at the initial stage of cultivation; it is the establishment of dispositions. This establishment is made in order that they may transcend into the stage of nothing whatsoever. Those who awaken to their own treasury, having purified themselves of the habitual tendencies of afflictions, see the non-self of dharmas and attain the bliss of samādhi; though abiding as śrāvakas, they will attain the Tathāgata's supremely excellent body.]

Let us first explain three terms in this passage of the sūtra. "Those at the initial stage of cultivation" refers to bodhisattvas who have first aroused the resolve. "The stage of nothing whatsoever"—the first of the preceding one hundred and eight answers stated that "the mind-ground has seven stages"; the stage of nothing whatsoever is the seventh and ultimate stage, simply speaking, the Buddha stage. "Those who awaken to their own treasury" refers to the eighth consciousness, or more precisely, to its self-cognizing aspect.

The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that the theory establishing the five dispositions described above is taught for bodhisattvas who have first aroused the resolve. These five dispositions are distinguished in order to enable such bodhisattvas ultimately to attain Buddhahood. This does not mean that those of śrāvaka-vehicle disposition cannot attain Buddhahood. "They," too, will become Buddhas and attain the Tathāgata's supremely excellent body.

Who are "they"? They are the "śrāvakas who attain the bliss of samādhi and abide therein"—arhats abiding in partial true nirvāṇa. "Those who awaken to their own treasury, having purified themselves of the habitual tendencies of afflictions, see the non-self of dharmas and attain the bliss of samādhi; though abiding as śrāvakas, they will attain the Tathāgata's supremely excellent body." If arhats abiding in partial true nirvāṇa can realize that even partial true nirvāṇa is an illusory manifestation of the eighth consciousness and belongs to their own habitual tendencies of affliction, purify such tendencies, clearly see the non-self of dharmas, turn from the lesser to the greater, then they will ultimately attain the Tathāgata's supremely excellent body.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:] [The fruits of the srotāpanna, the once-returner, and the non-returner, and

the attainment of arhatship—all these minds are confused by delusion.]

Srotāpanna means srotāpanna; its Chinese translation is “stream-enterer.” Such a person can cut off the delusions of views in the three realms and enter in advance the stream of the noble ones. This is the first-fruit arhat. “Returning once” refers to the sakadāgāmin. Such a person can cut off the first six grades of delusions of thought in the desire realm, but has not yet cut off the last three grades, and thus makes one further return among humans and devas. This is the second-fruit arhat. “Non-returning” refers to the anāgāmin.

Having cut off all delusions of thought in the desire realm, they no longer return to take birth in that realm. This is the third-fruit arhat. The arhat, abiding in partial true nirvāṇa and no longer subject to further existence, is the fourth-fruit arhat. These four are the noble ones of the lesser vehicle. Although arhats have cut off the afflictions of views and thought and realized partial true nirvāṇa, they have not yet cut off the two delusions of dust-like delusions and ignorance. Therefore, the Buddha says that their “minds are confused by delusion.”

[The three vehicles and the one vehicle, and the non-vehicle—these are what I teach. Ordinary people have little wisdom; the noble ones keep far from quiescence.]

The three vehicles refer to the three dispositions of śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and indeterminate. The one vehicle refers to the Tathāgata disposition. The non-vehicle refers to the separately fixed dispositions. Why does the Tathāgata not teach only the one-vehicle Dharma? It is because “ordinary people have little wisdom; the noble ones keep far from quiescence.” The noble ones refer to the saints of the lesser vehicle. To keep far from quiescence means to turn away from worldly life and delight in entering cessation. Thus, the Buddha must first teach them the three vehicles and warn them of the non-vehicle, then later guide them to abandon the provisional and return to the true, turning from the lesser to the greater.

[The Dharma gate of ultimate truth is far removed from the two teachings. Abiding in nothing whatsoever, how could one establish three vehicles?]

The two teachings refer to the “provisional teaching” and the “true teaching.” The provisional teaching is expedient teaching, namely the three vehicles and non-vehicle just discussed. The true teaching refers to the one vehicle. When it comes to the Dharma gate of ultimate truth, there is no distinction between provisional and true. The Dharma gate of ultimate truth establishes not a single dharma; it is utterly without anything. Even the one vehicle cannot be obtained, much less the three vehicles.

[The various dhyānas, the immeasurables, the formless samādhis—feelings and perceptions are all extinguished; there is also no mind-capacity.]

The various dhyānas refer to the four kinds of meditative absorption: the first, second, third, and fourth dhyānas. The immeasurables refer to the four immeasurable minds of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. The single word “and so forth” includes the thirty-seven factors of the Way and the other teachings mentioned before.

The formless samādhis refer to the four formless absorptions: infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothing whatsoever, and neither perception nor non-perception. “Feelings and perceptions are all extinguished” refers to the absorption in which feelings and perceptions cease. In fact, all of the foregoing are states of mind and do not depart from mind. Yet mind itself cannot be obtained—“there is also no mind-capacity.”

[Mahāmati, those icchantikas are not icchantikas. Who in the world would turn toward liberation?]

Icchantika is translated as “lacking faith,” meaning to have not the slightest faith in the Buddhadharma. It may also be translated as “utterly evil,” meaning to possess no wholesome roots at all. Let us briefly recount the story of “Master Sheng preaching the Dharma and stubborn stones nodding their heads.”

Master Sheng was Dharma Master Daosheng. He awakened to the profound principle of suchness. At that time, only six fascicles of the Nirvāṇa Sūtra had been translated, and its opening stated that icchantikas could not attain Buddhahood. Yet, on the basis of his own realization and the principle that sentient beings are equal, Dharma Master Daosheng advanced a different view: icchantikas, too, could attain Buddhahood.

Dharma Master Daosheng said: “Buddha-nature is equal, and dharma-nature is also equal. All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, and all things possess dharma-nature. Therefore, icchantikas will eventually give rise to wholesome minds and enter the Buddha Way.” This view differed from the prevailing view in Buddhist circles at the time and was regarded as gravely rebellious, an erroneous view and erroneous understanding.

Everyone unanimously expelled him from the monastery. Master Sheng had no choice but to go south, where he lived on Tiger Hill in Jiangsu. Seeing that he had been driven out of the north and held heterodox views, the monks in the south also excluded him. No one listened to his Dharma teachings.

Master Sheng could only preach the Dharma to stones. Arranging the stones in rows, he said to them: “Icchantikas, too, can attain Buddhahood. Do you agree?” All those stones moved as though nodding their heads. Some say that there happened to be an earthquake at the time, which caused the stones to move.

In fact, if it had been an earthquake, it would not have been only the stubborn stones nodding their heads; even the earth would have been nodding. When Master Sheng was initially driven out of the north, he said: “If what I say contradicts the meaning of the sūtras, may this present body immediately manifest an affliction. But if it does not contradict ultimate reality, may I, when relinquishing this life, ascend the lion seat.”

Later, the complete Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra arrived. Once it was translated, it indeed contained the teaching that icchantikas could attain Buddhahood, in accord with Master Sheng’s earlier view. Everyone came to admire him sincerely. They prepared a lofty seat and invited him to ascend it and teach the Dharma to the assembly. Master Sheng expounded the subtle principles of Buddhism before the great assembly; when he had finished, he sat upright with dignified composure and entered parinirvāṇa on the lion seat from which he had taught the Dharma.

“Those icchantikas are not icchantikas” means that although icchantikas presently engage in evil, they are not fixed in evil and will later change. “Who in the world would turn toward liberation?” means that if icchantikas are regarded as fixed in evil and incapable of change—if everything is viewed so rigidly—then among those in this world who pursue illusory fame and profit, who would turn and seek liberation?

[Mahāmati, there are two kinds of icchantika: first, those who abandon all wholesome roots; and second, those who make vows for sentient beings since beginningless time.]

The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that there are two kinds of icchantika: first, utterly evil persons—those who “abandon all wholesome roots”; second, bodhisattvas of great resolve—those who “make vows for sentient beings since beginningless time.”

[How do they abandon all wholesome roots? They slander the bodhisattva treasury and utter evil words, saying, “This is not teaching that accords with the sūtras, vinaya, and liberation.” Thus they abandon all wholesome roots and therefore do not enter parinirvāṇa.]

What does it mean to “abandon all wholesome roots”? It means that utterly evil persons use extremely vicious words to slander Mahāyāna scriptures. They do not accord with the liberating Dharma of the sūtras, vinaya, and treatises. They abandon all wholesome roots and therefore cannot enter nirvāṇa.

[Second, because of the bodhisattva's original vow and skillful means, it is not that they do not enter parinirvāṇa; rather, they enter parinirvāṇa only when all sentient beings have entered parinirvāṇa. Mahāmati, their entering parinirvāṇa is called the dharma-characteristic of not entering parinirvāṇa. This too reaches the course of the icchantika.]

What does it mean to "make vows for sentient beings since beginningless time"? It means that Mahāyāna bodhisattvas make great vows to liberate sentient beings: only after liberating all sentient beings into nirvāṇa do they themselves enter nirvāṇa. It is not that they do not enter nirvāṇa. Great bodhisattvas can clearly understand that "birth and death are precisely nirvāṇa"; nirvāṇa is inherently present, and there is no separate nirvāṇa to enter. Therefore it is said, "Their entering parinirvāṇa is called the dharma-characteristic of not entering parinirvāṇa."

Consider these two kinds of icchantika: one is good to the extreme, and the other evil to the extreme. Even being good to the extreme is still extreme; therefore it is said that "this too reaches the course of the icchantika."

[Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, what does it mean here to not enter parinirvāṇa ultimately?" The Buddha told Mahāmati: "The bodhisattva icchantika knows that all wholesome dharmas have from the outset entered parinirvāṇa, and therefore ultimately does not enter parinirvāṇa. This is not the icchantika who abandons all wholesome roots. Mahāmati, through the Tathāgata's spiritual power, the wholesome roots of the icchantika who abandons all wholesome roots may at some time arise again. Why is this? Because the Tathāgata does not abandon any sentient being. Therefore, the bodhisattva icchantika does not enter parinirvāṇa."]

Bodhisattva Mahāmati asked the Buddha: "You have just spoken of not entering nirvāṇa. What precisely does it mean ultimately not to enter nirvāṇa?" The Buddha told Bodhisattva Mahāmati: "The bodhisattva icchantika just mentioned knows all wholesome dharmas and knows their original nirvāṇa. There is no separate nirvāṇa to enter; therefore it is said that they ultimately do not enter parinirvāṇa. Bodhisattvas of great resolve are not icchantikas who 'abandon all wholesome roots.'"

Even an icchantika who has abandoned all wholesome roots may, when the conditions mature and through the blessing of the Tathāgata's spiritual power, still give rise to wholesome roots. For the Tathāgata does not abandon any sentient being. For the reasons stated above, it is said that bodhisattva icchantikas do not enter nirvāṇa.

What has been said above highlights that birth and death are suchness, nirvāṇa is suchness, and birth and death and nirvāṇa are originally suchness.

The first and second sections discuss the eight consciousnesses. From the third section, “False Conceptions of Existence and Nonexistence,” to this point, all that has been discussed is the five dharmas. As stated earlier, once the five dharmas have been clearly explained, the three self-natures are easy to understand. Once the five dharmas—name, appearance, false conception, right wisdom, and suchness—are understood, not only are the three self-natures easy to understand, but the two kinds of selflessness also become clear. We shall now discuss the three self-natures and the two kinds of selflessness.

[Again, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas should thoroughly understand the three self-natures. What are the three self-natures? They are the self-nature of false conception, the self-nature of dependent arising, and the self-nature of perfect accomplishment.]

The Buddha told Bodhisattva Mahāmati that great bodhisattvas should thoroughly understand the three self-natures. What are the three self-natures? They are the self-nature of false conception, the self-nature of dependent arising, and the self-nature of perfect accomplishment. The self-nature of false conception is the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment. The self-nature of dependent arising is the nature of dependence on others. The self-nature of perfect accomplishment is the nature of absolute reality and perfection.

[Mahāmati, the self-nature of false conception arises from appearances. Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: World-Honored One, how does the self-nature of false conception arise from appearances? The Buddha told Mahāmati: The self-nature of dependent arising functions through the appearances of phenomena and manifests the appearances of phenomena. Attachment gives rise to two kinds of self-nature of false conception, established by the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Awakened One. They are attachment to the appearances of names and attachment to the appearances of phenomena. Attachment to the appearances of names means attachment to inner and outer dharmas. Attachment to the appearances of phenomena means attachment to those very appearances. Attachment to the individual and shared appearances of inner and outer dharmas is called the two kinds of appearances of the self-nature of false conception. What arises in dependence upon something and through conditions is called dependent arising.]

The Buddha told Bodhisattva Mahāmati that the self-nature of false conception arises from appearances. Bodhisattva Mahāmati asked why it is said that the self-nature of false conception arises from appearances. To explain how the self-nature of false conception arises from appearances, one must first understand the characteristic mode of operation of the self-nature of dependent arising. “The self-nature of dependent arising functions through the appearances of phenomena and

manifests the appearances of phenomena." Phenomena are the various things that exist.

The appearances of phenomena are the images of the various things that exist. The operation of the self-nature of dependent arising is able to manifest the images of all kinds of things. The self-nature of false conception then gives rise to attachment to these images. Ji, "to calculate," means to calculate and scheme—that is, to indulge in false thoughts. Zhuo, "to cling," means attachment—that is, grasping and refusing to let go.

The Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Awakened One divides the self-nature of false conception into two kinds, called "attachment to the appearances of names" and "attachment to the appearances of phenomena." Attachment to the appearances of names means attachment to dharma objects. Attachment to the appearances of phenomena means attachment to the five sense objects of form, sound, smell, taste, and touch. One inwardly attaches to dharma objects, outwardly attaches to the five sense objects, individually attaches to dharma objects, and collectively attaches to the five sense objects. Such attachment to the individual and shared appearances of inner and outer dharmas constitutes the two kinds of appearances of the self-nature of false conception. Whatever arises by relying on something and depending on conditions is called dependent arising.

What has been discussed above is the self-nature of false conception and the self-nature of dependent arising. We should now discuss the self-nature of perfect accomplishment.

[What is the self-nature of perfect accomplishment? It is freedom from false conceptions of names, appearances, and phenomena; the attainment of noble wisdom; and the realm traversed by the noble wisdom of self-realization. This is called the Tathāgata-garbha mind of the self-nature of perfect accomplishment.]

What is the self-nature of perfect accomplishment? We have just discussed the false-conceptual attachments to the appearances of names and to the appearances of phenomena. To be free from these false calculations and false attachments is "freedom from false conceptions of names, appearances, and phenomena." "The attainment of noble wisdom" is right wisdom, while "the realm traversed by the noble wisdom of self-realization" is suchness. Right wisdom and suchness together are collectively called the self-nature of perfect accomplishment, also called the Tathāgata-garbha mind: "This is called the Tathāgata-garbha mind of the self-nature of perfect accomplishment."

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:] [Name and appearance, perception and conception—the two aspects of

self-nature; right wisdom and suchness—these are the aspect of perfect accomplishment.]

Name and appearance are the self-nature of dependent arising; perception and conception are the self-nature of false conception; the two aspects of self-nature are the self-nature of dependent arising and the self-nature of false conception; right wisdom and suchness are the self-nature of perfect accomplishment. Here, the five dharmas—name, appearance, false conception, right wisdom, and suchness—are subsumed under the three self-natures. Thus, the five dharmas and the three self-natures do not differ in content, but only in classification.

[Mahāmati, this is called the sūtra of observing the characteristics of the self-natures of the five dharmas, the realm traversed by the noble wisdom of self-realization. You bodhisattva mahāsattvas should cultivate and study it.]

What this sūtra teaches is that the five dharmas also encompass the three self-natures. This is the purport of the noble wisdom of self-realization and the realm in which that wisdom operates. For the sake of the noble wisdom of self-realization, all of you great bodhisattvas should cultivate and study it.

Having discussed the three self-natures, we next discuss the two kinds of selflessness:

[Again, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas should thoroughly contemplate the characteristics of the two kinds of selflessness. What are the two kinds of selflessness? They are the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of dharmas. What is the selflessness of persons? It is freedom from self and what belongs to self. The aggregates, realms, and sense bases are a collection; through ignorance, karma, and craving they arise. The eye and forms, and so forth, are apprehended and grasped, giving rise to consciousness. All the faculties, the body, and the world of objects manifested by one's own mind are displayed through the construction of one's own false-conceptual appearances.]

What are the two kinds of selflessness? They are the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of dharmas. What is the selflessness of persons? It is freedom from attachment to "self" and "what belongs to self." What is "self"? It is nothing more than my body and my mind.

What is my body? It is "the aggregates, realms, and sense bases are a collection"—the temporary aggregation of the five aggregates, six sense bases, and eighteen realms. What is my mind? It is "through ignorance, karma, and craving they arise; the eye and forms, and so forth, are apprehended and grasped, giving rise to consciousness"—because of ignorance, one takes what is illusory to be real, and attachment consequently arises.

The eye apprehends forms, the ear apprehends sounds, and so forth. Through such apprehension, consciousness arises; this is “my mind.” Because of attachment, one wishes to possess things and acts accordingly; karma then arises, even to the point of conjuring up the vast sea of suffering that is the cycle of rebirth in the six realms.

What is “what belongs to self”? It is nothing more than the things I possess and the environment in which I live.

What are the things I possess? They are “all the faculties, the body, and the world of objects manifested by one’s own mind.” First, there are all the faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. Yet all these faculties are manifestations of mind alone, not truly existent. This is called the body repository, or karmic recompense proper.

Second is the repository of objects, or karmic recompense dependent on the body: the various things that belong to me and satisfy my needs. These too are manifestations of mind alone and are not truly existent. What is the environment in which I live? It is “displayed through the construction of one’s own false-conceptual appearances”—it too is not truly existent, but merely an illusory false-conceptual appearance manifested by one’s own mind. It is a constructed display of the nature of mind, or what is called the object aspect of the eighth consciousness.

[Like a flowing river, like a seed, like a lamp, like wind, like clouds, they perish from moment to moment in continuous succession. Restless like monkeys, delighting in impure places like flying flies, insatiable like wind and fire. Through the causes of beginningless, false habitual tendencies, like a water-drawing wheel, they revolve through the states of birth and death. The various bodily forms and appearances arise like images produced by magical arts, spells, and mechanisms. To know these appearances well is called the wisdom of the selflessness of persons.]

“Self” and “what belongs to self” are like a flowing river—passing in an instant; like seeds—sprouting and perishing; like a lamp—going out when its oil is exhausted; like wind—without substantial entity; and like clouds—impossible to grasp. These five analogies chiefly express how body and environment “perish from moment to moment in continuous succession.” They show that “self” and “what belongs to self” are merely passing travelers and are not truly existent.

“Self” and “what belongs to self” are restless like monkeys, delight in impure places like flying flies, and are insatiable like wind and fire. The literal meanings of these three analogies are easy to understand; they chiefly show that the mind too is impermanent. Restlessness symbolizes anger, delight in impure places symbolizes ignorance, and insatiability symbolizes greed. What is called “my mind” is in fact an aggregation of greed, anger, ignorance, and many other afflictions.

“Through the causes of beginningless, false habitual tendencies, like a water-drawing wheel, they revolve through the states of birth and death”—taking the false for the real on the basis of beginningless false habitual tendencies, one moves toward the various states of existence and revolves without cease like a water-drawing wheel, turning within the illusory vast sea of suffering of birth and death.

“The various bodily forms and appearances arise like images produced by magical arts, spells, and mechanisms”—the various physical forms in the cycle of rebirth in the six realms, namely the so-called “self,” are all not truly existent. They are like illusory images produced by magical arts and spells. They are also like wooden figures that can stand up and walk when their mechanisms are activated. The so-called “self,” or bodily form and appearance, is in fact illusory and not truly existent.

“To know these appearances well is called the wisdom of the selflessness of persons”—shan means “well,” and zhi means “to know.” To know well that the true nature of the so-called self is illusory is called the wisdom of the selflessness of persons.

[What is the wisdom of the selflessness of dharmas? It is realizing that the false-conceptual appearances of the aggregates, realms, and sense bases are suchness in their self-nature. The aggregates, realms, and sense bases are free from self and what belongs to self. They are accumulated aggregates, bound by the rope of karma and craving, arising through mutually conditioning relations in continuous succession, yet without movement. All dharmas are likewise free from individual and shared characteristics and are not real. False-conceptual appearances and the force of false conception arise in ordinary beings, not in sages. Mind, consciousness, the five dharmas, and self-nature are free from this.]

What was discussed above was the wisdom of the selflessness of persons. What, then, is the wisdom of the selflessness of dharmas? The wisdom of the selflessness of dharmas is the ability to realize that the illusory appearances of the five aggregates, six sense bases, and eighteen realms are all false conceptions, with no substantial entity to be found. All appearances are false; their self-nature is originally suchness.

The five aggregates, six sense bases, and eighteen realms are merely illusory appearances formed by the aggregation of causes and conditions. They are originally free from “self” and “what belongs to self”; originally, there is no such thing as “self” or “what belongs to self.”

Yet craving is like a rope that binds the mind. Because of craving, one creates karma; because of karma, one undergoes karmic retribution. Thus, through mutually conditioning relations in continuous succession, the vast sea of suffering of rebirth in the six realms arises. All these are illusory. The fundamental reality, however, is

suchness and does not move. “All dharmas are likewise free from individual and shared characteristics and are not real”—individual characteristics correspond to “self,” while shared characteristics correspond to “what belongs to self.”

Apart from self-characteristics and common characteristics—there simply is no “self” or “what belongs to the self.” All dharmas are like this: they possess neither self-characteristics nor common characteristics and are all illusory and unreal. “The characteristics of deluded thought and the power of deluded thought arise in ordinary beings, not in sages”—the characteristics of deluded thought that create karma and undergo retribution, and the power of deluded thought that takes the false for the real, arise in ignorant ordinary beings; they are not the work of sages.

Why is this so? Because “mind, consciousness, the five dharmas, and the self-natures are separate from [inherent existence]”—the eight consciousnesses, the five dharmas, the three self-natures, and so forth are all illusory dependently arisen phenomena and have no real nature of their own. Here, “self-nature” means one’s own real nature. In other words, all phenomena are without self-nature. This is the wisdom of the non-self of dharmas.

Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas should skillfully discern that all dharmas are without self. Bodhisattva mahāsattvas who skillfully understand the non-self of dharmas will soon attain the first bhūmi, the stage of contemplating the absence of anything possessed. Through contemplation they awaken and become joyful. They then advance gradually, transcend the characteristics of the ninth bhūmi, and attain the Dharma Cloud bhūmi.

There they establish an image of a great jeweled lotus king adorned with innumerable treasures, and a great jeweled palace. Born from the cultivation of the realm of illusory self-nature, they sit there. Surrounded by retinues of the most excellent heirs, all of the same appearance, Buddhas come from every Buddha-land and empower them with their hands, just as a wheel-turning sage king empowers his crown prince. Transcending the stages of the Buddha’s heirs and reaching the Dharma course of the noble wisdom of self-realization, they will attain the Tathāgata’s sovereign dharmakāya, because they see that dharmas are without self. This is called the characteristic of the non-self of dharmas. You bodhisattva mahāsattvas should cultivate and study it.”

The preceding discussion concerned the wisdom of the non-self of dharmas; here it goes on to discuss the characteristic of the non-self of dharmas. Great bodhisattvas should be able to understand well that all dharmas are without self. Such great bodhisattvas will soon realize the first bhūmi.

What is a first-bhūmi bodhisattva like? That is, what are the characteristics of the first bhūmi? Its principal feature is contemplation of the absence of anything

possessed. Through observation, one awakens and becomes greatly joyful; therefore, the first bhūmi is called the Joyful Ground. One then gradually advances, surpasses the ninth bhūmi, the Ground of Good Wisdom, and realizes the tenth bhūmi, the Dharma Cloud Ground. The ten bhūmis are briefly introduced below:

1. The Joyful Ground—Having completed cultivation over one great asaṃkhyeya kalpa, the bodhisattva first sees the nature of mind, destroys the delusions of views, realizes the "twofold non-self," accomplishes the perfection of giving, and gives rise to great joy.

2. The Ground Free of Defilement—The bodhisattva cultivates the cessation of delusions of thought, eliminates evil habitual tendencies, purifies body and mind, accomplishes the perfection of moral discipline, and is far removed from every defilement.

3. The Luminous Ground—The bodhisattva cultivates the removal of ignorance, realizes the three insights of "knowledge of past lives, knowledge of the exhaustion of defilements in the present, and the divine eye regarding the future," accomplishes the perfection of forbearance, and causes the mind's light to unfold in clarity.

4. The Blazing Wisdom Ground—The bodhisattva fully perfects the thirty-seven factors of awakening, remains far from laziness, accomplishes the perfection of diligence, and causes the flame of wisdom to blaze.

5. The Difficult-to-Conquer Ground—For the benefit of sentient beings, the bodhisattva outwardly learns various skills and inwardly realizes the perfection of meditative stability, thereby accomplishing a supreme state that cannot be overcome.

6. The Ground of Direct Presence—The bodhisattva abides in the dharma gate of liberation, cultivates the samādhi of emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness, accomplishes the perfection of prajñā, and causes all distinctions presently before them to fall away.

7. The Far-Going Ground—The bodhisattva cultivates the cessation of the subtle manifest characteristics of all karmic results, gives rise to sublime conduct, liberates sentient beings extensively, accomplishes the perfection of skillful means, and fully prepares the provisions for far-going.

8. The Immovable Ground—The bodhisattva realizes the forbearance of the unborn, brings all deliberate effort to an end, and abides with body and mind in quiescent extinction, like empty space. Accomplishing the perfection of vows, the bodhisattva remains limpid and unmoving in the mind of nirvāṇa.

9. The Ground of Good Wisdom—The bodhisattva eliminates the characteristics of mind, realizes mastery of wisdom, possesses great spiritual powers, skillfully safeguards the treasury of the Buddhadharma, accomplishes the perfection of powers, and skillfully employs wisdom and understanding.

10. The Dharma Cloud Ground—The bodhisattva extensively gathers innumerable dharma gates, increases boundless merit and wisdom, knows everywhere the mental dispositions of sentient beings, and teaches the three vehicles according to superior, middling, and lesser capacities. Accomplishing the perfection of wisdom, the bodhisattva is like a great Dharma cloud and a great Dharma rain.

After directly realizing the ten bhūmis, one establishes an exceedingly magnificent image of a great jeweled lotus king, together with a great jeweled palace adorned with innumerable treasures, and teaches the Dharma for the assembly in such surroundings. Of course, this too is illusory: Buddhist activities like a dream, a practice hall like the moon reflected in water. This is what is meant by "born from the cultivation of the realm of illusory self-nature": it is an illusory appearance produced through cultivation from the realm of self-nature.

"Surrounded by retinues of the most excellent heirs, all of the same appearance, Buddhas come from every Buddha-land and empower them with their hands, just as a wheel-turning sage king empowers his crown prince. Transcending the stages of the Buddha's heirs and reaching the Dharma course of the noble wisdom of self-realization, they will attain the Tathāgata's sovereign dharmakāya, because they see that dharmas are without self." This passage from the sūtra is easy to understand, so let us explain it briefly. "All of the same appearance" means that those who come are all tenth-bhūmi bodhisattvas.

Moreover, the Buddhas come from every Buddha-land, and all the bodhisattvas receive empowerment from the hands of the Buddhas, just as a wheel-turning sage king empowers his crown prince. They then transcend the bodhisattva stage, reach the Dharma course of the noble wisdom of self-realization, and attain the Tathāgata's sovereign dharmakāya. All of this is realized through clearly seeing that dharmas are without self. "This is called the characteristic of the non-self of dharmas. You bodhisattva mahāsattvas should cultivate and study it"—this is the characteristic of the non-self of dharmas, which all you great bodhisattvas should cultivate and study.

Outline of This Section:

Chang means permanence. In modern language, this section's "permanence beyond conception" means "an inconceivable realm of permanence." It may also be said that this realm is suchness among the "five dharmas." The expression "permanence

beyond conception" is also used by non-Buddhist paths. That is, non-Buddhist paths also speak of permanence.

The Buddha expounded the permanence realized by the Tathāgata and pointed out that the permanence spoken of by non-Buddhist paths is not true permanence. This section also discusses the five kinds of spiritual capacity among Buddhist practitioners and the two extremes—the two kinds of icchantika. To review what was discussed above, the first section, "Arising and Ceasing of the Consciousnesses," and the second, "The Realm of the Storehouse Consciousness," concern the "eight consciousnesses."

The third section, "Deluded Conceptions of Existence and Nonexistence," the fourth, "Sudden and Gradual Purification of the Stream," and the middle portion of this section concern the "five dharmas." Once the "eight consciousnesses" and the "five dharmas" have been clearly explained, the "three self-natures" and the "twofold non-self" are easy to understand. Therefore, the final part of this section explains the "three self-natures" and the "twofold non-self" without taking up much space.

6. Establishing Slander

[At that time, the Mahāsattva Mahāmati again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, I pray that you will explain the characteristics of assertion and denigration, so that I and all the bodhisattva mahāsattvas may abandon the two erroneous extreme views of assertion and denigration and swiftly attain anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi. Having awakened, we will depart from the eternalist assertion, eliminate the view of denigration, and not disparage the true Dharma."]

At the beginning of this sūtra, Mahāmati Bodhisattva praises the Buddha in verse, emphasizing three times that "wisdom does not apprehend existence or nonexistence, yet gives rise to great compassion." Thus, the Tathāgata's true wisdom is neither existent nor nonexistent. To speak of what is originally nonexistent as existent is called assertion; this is eternalism. To speak of what is originally not nonexistent as nonexistent is called denigration; this is annihilationism.

True wisdom is suchness: it can be described neither as existent nor as nonexistent. To speak of existence or nonexistence is to disparage the Dharma. Assertion is the disparagement of superimposition; denigration is the disparagement of diminution; both existent and nonexistent is the disparagement of contradiction; neither existent nor nonexistent is the disparagement of vain conceptualization. Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks the Buddha: "Please explain to us the manifest characteristics of assertion and denigration, so that we may leave behind these two extreme views and swiftly attain unsurpassed perfect enlightenment. After awakening, we will

depart from the eternalist assertion and the annihilationist denigration, and thus not disparage the true Dharma."

[Then the World-Honored One, having accepted Mahāmati Bodhisattva's request, spoke these verses:]

In response to Mahāmati Bodhisattva's question, the Buddha spoke the following verse:

[Assertion and denigration—
Neither has such a measure of mind.
The assertion of body and possessions,
And what the mind cannot know:
Through ignorance and lack of wisdom,
Assertion and denigration arise.]

Assertion and denigration are both measures of mind, measurements made by one's own mind. Originally, these two views do not exist; neither can be obtained. Hence it is said, "Neither has such a measure of mind." Body refers to the physical body, which is the direct recompense. Possessions refer to wealth and other resources, which are the dependent recompense. All these are delusive manifestations of one's own mind. Because of ignorance and lack of wisdom, people do not know that these are delusive manifestations of their own mind. They therefore mistakenly conceive existence and nonexistence and fall into the two views.

[Then the World-Honored One further clarified the meaning of this verse, telling Mahāmati: "There are four kinds of assertions of existence where there is no existence. What are the four? They are the assertion of characteristics where there are no characteristics, the assertion of views where there are no views, the assertion of causes where there are no causes, and the assertion of inherent nature where there is no inherent nature. These are called the four kinds of assertion. Denigration means that, with respect to what has been asserted, one finds nothing obtainable and, through improper observation, gives rise to denigration. These are called the characteristics of assertion and denigration."]

The Buddha then reiterated and clarified the meaning of this verse. He told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that there are four kinds of "asserting existence where there is no existence." This means reckoning something as existent when it is not; that is, conceiving as existent what originally does not exist. What are these four kinds? They are the assertion of characteristics where there are no characteristics, the assertion of views where there are no views, the assertion of causes where there are no causes, and the assertion of inherent nature where there is no inherent nature.

Denigration does not arise independently; it follows from the dharmas of assertion. When one seeks what has been asserted and finds it unobtainable, one then disparages it by saying that all dharmas are nonexistent. First there is attachment to existence, and afterward one falls into emptiness. Being unable to depart from the two extremes of emptiness and existence is called “improper observation.” Because of such improper observation, the view of denigration arises. This is a general explanation of the characteristics of assertion and denigration; they will now be explained separately.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, what are the characteristics of asserting characteristics where there are no characteristics? It is to conceive and become attached to the aggregates, realms, and sense-fields as having no self-characteristics or common characteristics, saying, “This is thus; this is not different.” This is called the assertion of characteristics where there are no characteristics. This assertion of characteristics where there are no characteristics arises from the faults of beginningless false delusive thought and attachment through various habitual tendencies.]

What is the “assertion of characteristics where there are no characteristics”? Dharmas such as the five aggregates, six sense-fields, and eighteen realms originally have neither self-characteristics nor common characteristics; they have no real existence and are only illusions of consciousness. Yet people arbitrarily conceive of them and become attached, saying that these are thus and those are not different. “Thus” means self-characteristics, and “not different” means common characteristics.

Self-characteristics and common characteristics are originally nonexistent, yet they are reckoned to exist where there is no existence. This is the “assertion of characteristics where there are no characteristics.” It is an error generated by habitual tendencies of various false and delusive thoughts and attachments from beginningless time. Hence it is said, “It arises from the faults of beginningless false delusive thought and attachment through various habitual tendencies.”

[Mahāmati, what are the characteristics of asserting views where there are no views? It is to establish views of self, person, sentient being, life span, nurture, and personhood with respect to such aggregates, realms, and sense-fields. This is called the assertion of views where there are no views.]

What is the “assertion of views where there are no views”? With respect to dharmas such as the five aggregates, six sense-fields, and eighteen realms, people mistakenly give rise to views of self, person, sentient being, and life span, as well as views of nurture and personhood. This is the “assertion of views where there are no views.” Here, “nurture” refers to sustenance through food, resources, sleep, and the like. Regularly maintaining and nourishing oneself in order to endure for a long time is

the view of nurture. “Personhood,” mentioned earlier, may be understood simply as the spiritual self. Sentient beings mistakenly conceive that they possess the function of personhood, enabling them to trade, keep accounts, manage enterprises, farm, and work in crafts. This is the view of personhood.

[Mahāmati, what are the characteristics of asserting causes where there are no causes? It is to claim that initial consciousness arises without a cause, and that what follows is unreal, like an illusion, and originally unborn. Through eye, form, light, space, and thought, what previously arose, having arisen, truly returns to destruction. This is called the assertion of causes where there are no causes.]

What is the “assertion of causes where there are no causes”? Let us first explain “initial consciousness arises without a cause, and what follows is unreal, like an illusion.” At the beginning, ignorance stirs delusively and gives rise to the eight consciousnesses. These have never departed from one’s own mind; it is not as non-Buddhist paths claim, that there is some separate external cause beyond the mind. This is “initial consciousness arises without a cause.”

What does “what follows is unreal, like an illusion” mean? The previously discussed “assertion of characteristics where there are no characteristics” mistakenly takes the object aspect of the eight consciousnesses to be truly existent. The “assertion of views where there are no views” mistakenly takes their perceiving aspect to be truly existent. In fact, the perceiving and object aspects of the eight consciousnesses arise illusorily only after the formation of the eight consciousnesses; they are not truly existent. Hence it is said that “what follows is unreal, like an illusion.”

Since they are like illusions, how could they arise? Thus it is said, “Originally unborn.” The separate external cause posited by non-Buddhist paths is what is meant by “a cause.” Because what non-Buddhist paths assert is nonexistent, it is called “no cause.” For example, when the four conditions of eye, form, light, and space are complete, there arise the seer and the seen.

Yet all that fills the eye is arising and ceasing: “What previously arose, having arisen, truly returns to destruction.” Therefore, know that it is unreal, like an illusion, and lacks any substantial entity. If it truly possessed a substantial entity, it should not perish in an instant, but should abide permanently and remain indestructible. Once we know that it arises and ceases instant by instant and has no substantial entity, we know that the four conditions likewise have no reality. Would not the separate external cause asserted by non-Buddhist paths also “truly return to destruction”? Therefore, the theory of separate causes cannot stand. This is the characteristic of asserting causes where there are no causes.

[Mahāmati, what are the characteristics of asserting inherent nature where there is no inherent nature? It is to become attached to the assertion of inherent nature with

respect to space, cessation, and parinirvāṇa, which are unproduced. This is apart from inherent nature and non-inherent nature. All dharmas are like the horns of rabbits and horses, and like hair hanging before the eyes: apart from existence and nonexistence. This is called the assertion of inherent nature where there is no inherent nature.]

What is the "assertion of inherent nature where there is no inherent nature"? First, let us discuss the three unconditioned dharmas: the unconditioned dharma of space, the unconditioned dharma of cessation through discernment, and the unconditioned dharma of cessation not through discernment. In the sūtra, "space" refers to the unconditioned dharma of space; "cessation" refers to cessation not through discernment; and "parinirvāṇa" refers to cessation through discernment. These three unconditioned dharmas all lack the nature of production, and are therefore called "unproduced."

Yet assertion is conditioned and produced. Because it is in fact unproduced and unconditioned, the asserted has no inherent nature that can be obtained; hence it is called "no inherent nature." The phrase in the sūtra, "this is apart from inherent nature and non-inherent nature," means that assertion is apart from inherent nature and also apart from non-inherent nature. "Apart from" means to leave behind, to have no connection with.

To be apart from inherent nature and non-inherent nature means to have no connection with either "inherent nature" or "non-inherent nature." This is the "assertion of inherent nature where there is no inherent nature." Yet foolish ordinary people of non-Buddhist paths conceive inherent nature where there is none, mistakenly asserting and clinging to a real inherent nature—"becoming attached to the assertion of inherent nature." Inherent nature means real nature, that is, actual existence; non-inherent nature means the absence of real nature, that is, annihilatory nonexistence.

Dharma here refers to things and their principles. All dharmas refers to all things and their principles. "All dharmas are like the horns of rabbits and horses, and like hair hanging before the eyes: apart from existence and nonexistence" means that all dharmas are originally neither existent nor nonexistent. The horns of rabbits and horses are an analogy for nonexistence.

When hanging hairs obstruct the eyes, one does not see what is real but instead sees illusory images; these illusory images are not altogether absent. This is an analogy for non-nonexistence. Nonexistence means that they are not truly existent and therefore have no real inherent nature. Non-nonexistence means that illusory images are not altogether absent, but since they are not truly existent, they likewise

have no real inherent nature. This is the characteristic of asserting inherent nature where there is no inherent nature.

[Assertion and denigration are the delusive thoughts of foolish ordinary people. They do not skillfully observe the immediate manifestation of their own minds and are not sages. Therefore, one should cultivate the practice of departing from the erroneous views of assertion and denigration.]

Assertion and denigration are both the delusive thoughts of ignorant ordinary people. They are not skilled at contemplating the immediate manifestations of their own minds; unable to understand that things are neither existent nor nonexistent, they mistakenly conceive existence and nonexistence. They are, after all, not sages. Therefore, abandoning the two erroneous views of assertion and denigration should be the direction of cultivation for great bodhisattvas.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas thoroughly understand mind, mentation, and consciousness, the five dharmas, inherent nature, and the characteristics of the twofold selflessness, and proceed toward the ultimate. For the sake of comforting sentient beings, they manifest forms of various kinds, relying on dependent arising in the realm of delusive thoughts and inherent nature. It is like a wish-fulfilling jewel of many colors, which universally manifests all Buddha-lands and all assemblies of the Tathāgatas, who all hear and receive the Buddha Dharma within it. That is, all dharmas are like illusions and dreams, like light and shadow, and like the moon in water.]

In the sūtra, “mind, mentation, and consciousness” refers to the eight consciousnesses. Great bodhisattvas thoroughly understand the five dharmas, the three inherent natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the twofold selflessness, and can proceed toward the ultimate ground. Having accomplished their own practice, they then transform sentient beings and manifest forms according to the different kinds of beings. Hence it is said that they “manifest forms of various kinds.”

They do so only to bring comfort to sentient beings and therefore guide them in accord with conditions. Yet the dependent arising of delusive thought is originally unborn in its arising; the dharmakāya accords with conditions, transforming without truly transforming. Hence it is said that they “rely on dependent arising in the realm of delusive thoughts and inherent nature.”

“A wish-fulfilling jewel of many colors universally manifests all Buddha-lands” is an analogy for a bodhisattva manifesting all bodies through one body, even universally manifesting all Buddha-lands and, together with all the assemblies, hearing and receiving the Tathāgata’s teaching. What is taught is like an illusion or dream, like an image in a mirror or the moon in water. They universally manifest all Buddha-lands, yet not a single dharma can be obtained; though not a single dharma can be

obtained, they universally manifest all Buddha-lands. The Tathāgata's self-awakened noble wisdom reaches its ultimate consummation here.

[With regard to all dharmas, they are free from arising and ceasing, annihilation and eternalism, and from the dharmas of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. They attain hundreds of thousands of samādhis, even hundreds of thousands of billions of nayutas of samādhis. Having attained samādhi, they travel through the Buddha lands, make offerings to the Buddhas, are born in the palaces of the devas, proclaim the Three Jewels, manifest Buddha bodies, and are surrounded by great assemblies of śrāvakas and bodhisattvas. By means of what is manifested by their own minds, they liberate sentient beings, explaining in detail that external objects have no inherent nature, causing them all to depart from such views as existence and nonexistence.]

This passage of the sūtra says that there is no dharma outside the mind. "External objects have no inherent nature" means that external realms are manifested solely by the mind; there is no so-called "objective" external realm. No real nature can be found in external realms. The dharmas of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas involve arising and ceasing, annihilation and eternalism.

The Four Noble Truths of suffering, origination, cessation, and the path, cultivated by the śrāvakas, posit birth and death as something that can be ended and cessation as something that can be realized; they take cessation (nirvāṇa) to be eternal.

The twelve links of dependent origination cultivated by the pratyekabuddhas—ignorance, volitional formations, consciousness, name and form, the six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, and old age and death—investigate the process of "arising" in even greater detail. Naturally, the process of "cessation" is likewise detailed: when ignorance ceases, volitional formations cease; when volitional formations cease, consciousness ceases . . . until, when birth ceases, old age and death cease.

Detailed though they may be, they still posit arising and ceasing as something that can be ended and nirvāṇa as something that can be realized. The sūtra says, "With regard to all dharmas, they are free from arising and ceasing, annihilation and eternalism, and from the dharmas of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas"—one should depart from these dharmas. As the Heart Sūtra says: "There is no ignorance and also no ending of ignorance, up to and including no old age and death and also no ending of old age and death; no suffering, origination, cessation, or path."

"Samādhi" is a transliteration; it is also translated as sanmodi or sanmodi, and is rendered semantically as "right concentration," meaning freedom from deviant distraction and the gathering of the mind so that it is not scattered. "Nayuta" is also

a transliteration, alternatively rendered ayuta; semantically, it means one hundred million, referring to an exceedingly large number.

“They attain hundreds of thousands of samādhis, even hundreds of thousands of billions of nayutas of samādhis.” Simply put, this means attaining immeasurable samādhis. After attaining immeasurable samādhis, they “travel through the Buddha lands, make offerings to the Buddhas, are born in the palaces of the devas, proclaim the Three Jewels, manifest Buddha bodies, and are surrounded by great assemblies of śrāvakas and bodhisattvas.” All these are manifestations of one’s own mind; no real nature can be found in them.

“By means of what is manifested by their own minds, they liberate sentient beings, explaining in detail that external objects have no inherent nature, causing them all to depart from such views as existence and nonexistence.” To liberate sentient beings by means of what is manifested by one’s own mind is, of course, to teach them that “external objects have no inherent nature”—that there is no external, objective realm outside the mind. This enables them all to depart from incorrect views such as existence and nonexistence.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]

Having finished explaining the foregoing principles, the Buddha gave a concise summary in verse, restating this meaning:

[The mind-measured world / Buddhist disciples contemplate / bodies of every kind / free from contrived activity / they attain powerful spiritual powers / and accomplish them with ease]

The meaning of this verse is as follows: Buddhist disciples observe with wisdom that this world and all the various kinds of bodies within it are manifestations of their own minds; there is no dharma outside the mind. “Contrived activity” means activity involving deliberate action; it is conditioned. “Free from contrived activity” means unconditioned. “Powerful spiritual powers” refers to the immeasurable samādhis mentioned above.

Having departed from the conditioned, they attain immeasurable samādhis and effortlessly accomplish the foregoing: “traveling through the Buddha lands, making offerings to the Buddhas, being born in the palaces of the devas, proclaiming the Three Jewels, manifesting Buddha bodies, being surrounded by great assemblies of śrāvakas and bodhisattvas, liberating sentient beings by means of what is manifested by their own minds, and explaining in detail that external objects have no inherent nature.”

Summary of This Section:

Establishment and refutation mean assertion and negation. Neither asserting nor negating is to depart from establishment and refutation. In response to Mahāmati Bodhisattva's question, the Buddha explained in detail the outward forms—the modes of expression—of establishment and refutation. He then pointed out that one should depart from establishment and refutation. Even ultimately attaining Buddhahood and liberating vast numbers of sentient beings is illusory; it is not establishment.

Even completely ending all afflictions is illusory; it is not refutation. All these are manifestations of one's own mind; there is no dharma outside the mind. This section not only criticizes the teachings of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, the Lesser Vehicle, but also clearly points out that even directly realizing the sacred wisdom of the Tathāgata, ultimately attaining Buddhahood, and liberating vast numbers of sentient beings—the teachings of such an unsurpassed vehicle—are not truly existent and cannot be grasped. As the Heart Sūtra says: "There is no wisdom and no attainment."

VII. The Empty, Unarisen Nature

At that time, the Mahāsattva Bodhisattva Mahāmati again requested of the Buddha: "World-Honored One, we pray that you will explain for us the emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the marks of inherent nature of all dharmas. Once we and the other bodhisattvas realize this emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the marks of inherent nature, we will be free from deluded thoughts of existence and nonexistence and swiftly attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening." At that time, the World-Honored One said to the Mahāsattva Bodhisattva Mahāmati: "Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I shall now explain it to you in detail." Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "Excellent, World-Honored One. Yes, I respectfully receive your teaching."

Mahāmati Bodhisattva again asked the Buddha: "Please, World-Honored One, explain to us the emptiness of all dharmas, the non-arising of all dharmas, the nonduality of all dharmas, and the freedom of all dharmas from the marks of inherent nature." Thus, after we bodhisattvas realize this "emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the marks of inherent nature," we may be free from deluded thoughts of "existence" and "nonexistence" and swiftly realize unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening. The Buddha said to Mahāmati Bodhisattva: "Listen attentively and remember well; I shall explain it to you in detail." Mahāmati Bodhisattva said: "Excellent! Excellent! Please instruct us."

The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The emptiness of emptiness is the domain of the inherent nature of deluded thought. Mahāmati, for those who cling to the inherent nature of deluded thought, one speaks of emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the marks of inherent nature. Mahāmati, these may be briefly stated as seven kinds of emptiness: emptiness of characteristics, emptiness of inherent nature, emptiness of activity, emptiness of nonactivity, the emptiness of all dharmas as beyond speech, the great emptiness of noble wisdom of ultimate truth in all dharmas, and emptiness of one thing in relation to another.”

The first “empty” in “the emptiness of emptiness” is a verb: that which empties. The second “emptiness” is a noun: that which is emptied. If one retains an emptier and something to be emptied, this is the domain produced by deluded discrimination. Thus, it is emptiness emptied once more. The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that the emptiness of emptiness is precisely the domain of the inherent nature of deluded thought.

That is to say, emptiness itself is deluded thought, and deluded thought itself is emptiness; apart from deluded thought, there is no separate emptiness. Deluded thought is originally unborn, originally nondual, and originally free from the marks of inherent nature; it cannot admit of speech. Yet for those who do not comprehend that the substance of deluded thought is empty and who cling to it as truly existent, it is necessary to explain the principle of “emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the marks of inherent nature.”

Briefly stated, this principle comprises seven kinds of emptiness: emptiness of characteristics, emptiness of inherent nature, emptiness of activity, emptiness of nonactivity, the emptiness of all dharmas as beyond speech, the great emptiness of noble wisdom of ultimate truth in all dharmas, and emptiness of one thing in relation to another. Of these seven kinds of emptiness explained below by the Buddha, the first six are original emptiness contemplated through right wisdom, while the seventh is annihilationist emptiness conceived through wrong views. Please see the following text:

What is the emptiness of characteristics? It means that the individual and common characteristics of all natures are empty. Observing that they are formed through successive accumulation, one discriminates that they lack inherent nature; therefore, individual and common characteristics do not arise. Since the natures of self, other, both, and neither lack inherent nature, characteristics do not abide. Therefore, it is said that the characteristics of all natures are empty. This is called the emptiness of characteristics.

What is the emptiness of characteristics? It means that “the individual and common characteristics of all natures are empty.” Here, “all natures” refers to the actual

natures of all things. “Individual and common characteristics” refers to the four modes of self, other, both, and neither—that is, arising from oneself, arising from another, arising from both, and arising without cause. Arising apart from these is arising without cause.

“The individual and common characteristics of all natures are empty” means that the appearances of all things have no real nature that can be apprehended. They do not arise from themselves, from another, from both, or without cause; therefore, they are said to be “unborn.” “Observing that they are formed through successive accumulation, one discriminates that they lack inherent nature; therefore, individual and common characteristics do not arise.” Successive accumulation means the mutual interaction, change, and accumulation of all things.

When one observes such successive accumulation, “one discriminates that they lack inherent nature”—upon analysis and inquiry, all are brought about by causes and conditions, and no independent real nature can be apprehended. Thus, “individual and common characteristics do not arise”—that is, the “non-arising” just explained above. “Since the natures of self and other alike lack inherent nature, characteristics do not abide.”

That is, “self” lacks real nature, “other” lacks real nature, “both” lack real nature, and “neither” lacks real nature. Since no real nature can be apprehended, “characteristics do not abide.” When characteristics do not abide, one does not abide in characteristics or in the characteristics of self, other, both, and neither. “Therefore, it is said that the characteristics of all natures are empty. This is called the emptiness of characteristics.” Thus, this is the first meaning of emptiness: the emptiness of characteristics.

What is the emptiness of inherent nature? It means that one’s own inherent nature does not arise. This is called the emptiness of the inherent nature of all dharmas; therefore, it is called the emptiness of inherent nature.

What is the emptiness of inherent nature? Simply put, it is the emptiness of nature: no inherent real nature can be apprehended. It has already been said that no real nature can be apprehended in any thing; that was from the perspective of “characteristics.” Here, the statement that no real nature can be apprehended in any thing is from the perspective of “nature.” Thus, “one’s own inherent nature does not arise”: the nature of every thing does not arise from itself, from another, from both, or without cause. “This is called the emptiness of the inherent nature of all dharmas; therefore, it is called the emptiness of inherent nature.”

Explaining “nature” and “inherent nature” separately: “nature” means the qualities of all things, while “inherent nature” means an independently existing real nature of its own. The qualities of all things have no inherent real nature that can be

apprehended; in themselves, they are empty. This is the second meaning of emptiness: the emptiness of inherent nature.

What is the emptiness of activity? It means that the aggregates are free from self and what belongs to self. They are produced by causes and arise through the means of karma performed. This is called the emptiness of activity.

What is the emptiness of activity? It means that “the aggregates are free from self and what belongs to self.” The aggregates are the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Take the aggregate of form, for example: this physical body is formed through karmic causes and results and arises through the accumulation of many conditions; it is “produced by causes and arises through the means of karma performed.” It is neither “I” nor “mine”; therefore, it is said that “the aggregates are free from self and what belongs to self.”

Yet from the aggregates one forms a self, and from this self activity arises; activity is then regarded as “what belongs to self.” Because “the aggregates are free from self and what belongs to self,” this activity is empty and quiescent in itself. This is the third meaning of emptiness: the emptiness of activity.

Mahāmati, this very emptiness of activity arises through successive conditions and lacks inherent nature. This is called the emptiness of nonactivity.

What is the emptiness of nonactivity? The “emptiness of activity” just explained begins with the five aggregates. Yet the five aggregates arise through successive conditions and lack inherent nature. That is, no real nature can be apprehended in the five aggregates; they are originally quiescent and extinct. Or, one may say that the five aggregates are originally nirvāṇa, and there are no activities whatsoever. This is the fourth meaning of emptiness: the emptiness of nonactivity.

What is the emptiness of all dharmas as beyond speech? It means that the inherent nature of deluded thought is without speech; therefore, all dharmas are beyond speech. This is called the emptiness of all dharmas as beyond speech.

What is the emptiness of all dharmas as beyond speech? It means that “the inherent nature of deluded thought is without speech; therefore, all dharmas are beyond speech.” All dharmas include all worldly dharmas and all supramundane dharmas. The dharmas of the worldly and supramundane realms are originally nonexistent; all are false discriminations of deluded thought. Wherever there is speech, there is no real meaning. Since the discriminating mind—the aggregate of perception—is itself absent, how can the dharmas that are discriminated exist? How could they admit of speech? This is the fifth meaning of emptiness: the emptiness of all dharmas as beyond speech.

What is the great emptiness of noble wisdom of ultimate truth in all dharmas? It means that, upon attaining noble wisdom of self-realization, the habitual tendencies of all erroneous views are empty. This is called the great emptiness of noble wisdom of ultimate truth in all dharmas.

What is the great emptiness of noble wisdom of ultimate truth? It means that "upon attaining noble wisdom of self-realization, the habitual tendencies of all erroneous views are empty." Since the habitual tendencies of all erroneous views are emptied, the words "all dharmas" are placed before "the great emptiness of noble wisdom of ultimate truth." "Noble wisdom of ultimate truth" is that which empties, while "all dharmas" are that which is emptied. Once that which is emptied is empty, that which empties is also empty. At this point, the measure of the dharma realm is extinguished, and there is ultimate empty quiescence. This is the sixth meaning of emptiness: the great emptiness of noble wisdom of ultimate truth in all dharmas.

What is emptiness of one thing in relation to another? It means that in one place there is no other thing; this is called emptiness of one thing in relation to another. Mahāmati, for example, the hall of Deer Mother contains no elephants, horses, cattle, sheep, and the like, but it is not without a community of bhikṣus. One may therefore say that it is empty in that respect; this does not mean that the hall and the inherent nature of the hall are empty, nor that the bhikṣus and the inherent nature of the bhikṣus are empty, nor that there are no elephants or horses elsewhere. This is the individual characteristic of all dharmas: in one place there is no other thing. This is called emptiness of one thing in relation to another. These are called the seven kinds of emptiness. Emptiness of one thing in relation to another is the coarsest form of emptiness; you should keep far from it.

What is emptiness of one thing in relation to another? It means that "in one place there is no other thing." To clarify the meaning of "in one place there is no other thing," the Buddha uses the hall of Deer Mother as an example. Deer Mother is a person's designation: Deer Mother was the mother of Deer Child, and her name was Viśākhā. "The hall of Deer Mother" means Viśākhā's residence.

Viśākhā deeply believed in the Buddhadharma and revered the Three Jewels. She built many residences. Rather than keeping elephants, horses, cattle, sheep, and the like in them, she made offerings to bhikṣus and invited them to dwell there. Unlike most people, Viśākhā did not build residences in order to keep elephants, horses, cattle, and sheep.

Non-Buddhists consider "emptiness" to mean "absence." According to their view, because there are no elephants, horses, cattle, or sheep in the residence, it is an empty house. Such a conclusion is far too crude. Why? Because "although there are no elephants, horses, cattle, sheep, and the like, it is not without a community of

bhikṣus.” Although there are no elephants, horses, cattle, or sheep in the residence, there is still a community of bhikṣus. How can it be called an empty house? Now, to return to “in one place there is no other thing”: it means that in the residence there are no elephants, horses, cattle, or sheep.

Non-Buddhists crudely and simplistically take such absence to be emptiness. By contrast, in the first two forms of emptiness—the “emptiness of characteristics” and the “emptiness of inherent nature”—the appearance of the residence is empty in its very characteristic, and the nature of the residence is empty in its very nature. This is the emptiness of “the residence and the inherent nature of the residence.”

Likewise, bhikṣus and the inherent nature of bhikṣus are empty; elephants, horses, and their inherent natures are empty.

“One may therefore say that it is empty in that respect; this does not mean that the hall and the inherent nature of the hall are empty, nor that the bhikṣus and the inherent nature of the bhikṣus are empty, nor that there are no elephants or horses elsewhere.” That crude and simplistic emptiness of “in one place there is no other thing” asserted by non-Buddhists is neither the emptiness of “the residence and the inherent nature of the residence,” nor the emptiness of “the bhikṣus and the inherent nature of the bhikṣus,” nor yet the emptiness of “elephants, horses, and their inherent natures.”

Not only does it fall short of the state in which elephants, horses, and their inherent natures are empty; one cannot even say that there are no elephants or horses in places outside the residence.

“This is called the characteristic of the emptiness of all dharmas: one thing is absent in another; this is called the emptiness of one thing in another.” Extending this to all dharmas, if one crudely assumes that “absence” itself is emptiness—that is, mistakenly takes “one thing is absent in another” to be emptiness—this is called “the emptiness of one thing in another.” “These are called the seven kinds of emptiness”—the seven meanings of “emptiness” have been explained above. “The emptiness of one thing in another is the coarsest kind of emptiness; you should stay far away from it”—the seventh kind of emptiness, “the emptiness of one thing in another,” is the crudest. You should avoid this view.

[Great Wisdom, non-self-arising is not non-arising, except for abiding in samādhi. This is called non-arising.]

What is non-arising? The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra says: “All dharmas do not arise from themselves, nor do they arise from another, nor arise from both together, nor without cause. Therefore, they are said to be non-arising.” In other words, non-arising is not simply the absence of arising. Then why does it say, “except for abiding

in samādhi”? Those who abide in samādhi are spiritually luminous and tranquilly aware; they do not illusorily bring forth a realm of unceasing arising. The absence of an appearance of unceasing arising is not called non-arising. Rather, unceasing arising is precisely non-arising.

[To be free of inherent nature is precisely non-arising. Free of inherent nature are the moment-to-moment continuous flow and the appearance of differentiated characteristics; all natures are free of inherent nature. Therefore, all natures are free of inherent nature.]

What Great Wisdom Bodhisattva asked about was “emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature.” The Buddha has already answered regarding emptiness and non-arising; he next answers regarding freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature and nonduality. What does freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature mean? To be free of inherent nature is precisely non-arising.

The reason there is no characteristic of arising to be found in unceasing arising is precisely that everything that arises lacks any inherent reality of its own. That is, everything that arises is free of inherent nature. This is freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature. “The moment-to-moment continuous flow” is a characteristic of mind, while “the appearance of differentiated characteristics” is a characteristic of dharmas. Mind and phenomena both fall away, and neither has any real nature that can be found; therefore, all natures are said to be free of inherent nature.

[What is nonduality? It means that all dharmas are like coolness and heat, length and shortness, black and white. Great Wisdom, all dharmas are nondual: it is not that birth and death exist apart from nirvāṇa, nor that nirvāṇa exists apart from birth and death. Differentiated characteristics arise because one posits inherent nature. This is called nonduality. As with nirvāṇa and birth and death, so it is with all dharmas. Therefore, emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature should be cultivated and studied.]

What is nonduality? It means that all dharmas—such as coolness and heat, length and shortness, black and white—are relative and cannot exist independently. For example, without length as a contrast, there would be no concept of shortness. That is, shortness does not exist apart from length.

“It is not that birth and death exist apart from nirvāṇa”—birth and death do not exist outside nirvāṇa. “Nor that nirvāṇa exists apart from birth and death”—nor does nirvāṇa exist outside birth and death. Nirvāṇa and birth and death originally have no differentiated characteristics.

Yet ordinary beings and practitioners of the two vehicles always suppose that there is birth and death to be transcended apart from nirvāṇa, and nirvāṇa to be realized apart from birth and death. They consider nirvāṇa and birth and death to be intensely different; difference is precisely differentiation.

Because they cannot penetrate that neither nirvāṇa nor birth and death has any inherent reality that can be found, they mistakenly conceive differentiated characteristics—"Differentiated characteristics arise because one posits inherent nature." "This is called nonduality"—what has been explained above is the principle of nonduality. "As with nirvāṇa and birth and death, so it is with all dharmas"—just as nirvāṇa and birth and death are nondual, so too are all dharmas nondual.

Above, the Buddha explained the "emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature" about which Great Wisdom Bodhisattva had inquired. Having completed the explanation, he encouraged the great assembly of bodhisattvas to cultivate and study them.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]

: Having finished explaining "emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature," the Buddha again restated their meaning concisely in verse:

[I always teach the Dharma of emptiness, / Far removed from annihilation and eternalism. / Birth and death are like illusion and dream, / Yet karma is not destroyed. / Space and nirvāṇa, / And the cessation of the two, are likewise so. / Foolish people give rise to deluded thoughts; / All noble ones are free from existence and nonexistence.]

"I always teach the Dharma of emptiness"—I often teach the Dharma of "emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature." "Far removed from annihilation and eternalism"—it is neither annihilation nor eternal existence. "Birth and death are like illusion and dream"—this is non-eternalism. "Yet karma is not destroyed"—this is non-annihilation.

"Space and nirvāṇa, and the cessation of the two, are likewise so"—space refers to the "unconditioned space" among the three unconditioned dharmas: unconditioned space, cessation through discernment, and cessation not through discernment. Nirvāṇa refers to cessation through discernment among the three unconditioned dharmas, while the cessation of the two refers to cessation not through discernment among the three unconditioned dharmas.

The unconditioned is contrasted with the conditioned. “Likewise so” means “also like this.” Like what? It is also neither conditioned nor unconditioned; that is, neither existent nor nonexistent. “Foolish people give rise to deluded thoughts; all noble ones are free from existence and nonexistence”—deluded ordinary beings cling through deluded thoughts and fall into annihilation and eternalism, existence and nonexistence, and the like, without knowing it. All noble ones, however, have cut off deluded thoughts and attachments and are thus free from existence and nonexistence.

[At that time, the World-Honored One again addressed Great Wisdom Bodhisattva Mahāsattva: “Great Wisdom, emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature pervade all the sūtras of all Buddhas. All sūtras expound this meaning. Yet all sūtras distinguish and expound it in accordance with the hopes and inclinations of sentient beings, thereby revealing its meaning; true noble wisdom does not reside in words. It is like a thirsty deer imagining water: a mirage bewilders a herd of deer, and the deer, attached to that appearance, conceive it to have the nature of water, though there is no water there. Likewise, all dharmas spoken of in the sūtras are taught in order to give joy to foolish people; true noble wisdom does not reside in words. Therefore, rely on the meaning and do not cling to words.”]

Sūtra means scripture. The Buddha told Great Wisdom Bodhisattva that all the scriptures spoken by the Buddhas universally teach emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature. This meaning is taught not only in this sūtra; every sūtra teaches it.

The realm of noble wisdom is originally beyond words. The many scriptures accord with the hopes and inclinations of sentient beings and, according to their capacities, explain matters distinctly to them, skillfully revealing the meaning of emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature.

Sentient beings cling to words and sentences like thirsty deer pursuing a mirage. A mirage is not water, yet a herd of deer is deluded by it, imagines it to be water, and frantically pursues it. Thus all Buddhadharma is like yellow leaves used to stop a child from crying, intended to give rise to joyful minds in ignorant sentient beings. None of Buddhadharma resides in language and letters. Therefore, one should rely on the meaning rather than on words: “Therefore, rely on the meaning and do not cling to words.”

Summary of This Section:

So that all great bodhisattvas might swiftly realize unsurpassed perfect enlightenment, Great Wisdom Bodhisattva asked the Buddha to explain the meaning of “emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the

characteristics of inherent nature." The Buddha explained the seven kinds of emptiness, then explained non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the characteristics of inherent nature. Finally, the Buddha pointed out: "Rely on the meaning and do not cling to words."

As the Diamond Sūtra says: "There is no fixed dharma called unsurpassed perfect enlightenment, nor is there any fixed dharma that the Tathāgata can teach. Why is this? The dharmas taught by the Tathāgata cannot be grasped or spoken of; they are neither dharmas nor non-dharmas." Layman Fu's verse says: "Bodhi is beyond words; from the beginning, no one has attained it. One must rely on the principle of the twofold emptiness to realize the body of the Dharma King. Any mind that clings is deluded; only nonattachment is called true. If one realizes neither dharma nor non-dharma, one roams freely beyond the six sense objects."

VIII. The Nature of the Tathāgata-Garbha

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva Mahāsattva said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, the World-Honored One has taught in the sūtras that the Tathāgatagarbha is intrinsically pure and manifests the thirty-two marks. It enters the bodies of all sentient beings and, like a precious jewel of great value wrapped in soiled clothing, the treasury of the Tathāgata is permanent and unchanging. Yet it is wrapped in the soiled clothing of the aggregates, realms, and sense-fields, and is sullied by greed, desire, anger, ignorance, unreal delusive thoughts, and the toil of worldly dust. How is it, World-Honored One, that the teachings expounded by all Buddhas are the same as the non-Buddhists' assertion of a self, saying that there is a Tathāgatagarbha? World-Honored One, non-Buddhists also say that there is an eternal creator, apart from qualities, all-pervading and indestructible. World-Honored One, what they assert is a self."]

Sūtra means a scripture; thus, the World-Honored One's sūtras are Buddhist scriptures. The Buddhist scriptures say that the Tathāgatagarbha is intrinsically pure and can manifest the pure and majestic thirty-two marks. The Tathāgatagarbha is permanent and unchanging, and enters the bodies of all sentient beings. The Tathāgatagarbha is like a precious jewel of great value, while the sentient beings' five aggregates, six sense-fields, eighteen realms, and so forth are like soiled clothing. This is like a precious jewel of great value wrapped in soiled clothing. That is to say, the Tathāgatagarbha is contaminated by greed, desire, anger, ignorance, unreality, delusive thoughts, and worldly dust and toil. This is what all Buddhas teach.

The term "guṇa" was mentioned earlier in "III. Delusive Assertions of Existence and Nonexistence." Guṇa carries the meaning of "characteristic" or "attribute." "Apart from guṇa" means "beyond the characteristics manifested by things." "There is an eternal creator, apart from guṇa, all-pervading and indestructible" means that,

beyond the characteristics manifested by things, there is another “eternal creator” that is everywhere present and will not perish.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks the Buddha: Why do all Buddhas speak of the Tathāgatagarbha? Is this not the same as the non-Buddhists’ assertion of “a creator god” and “a divine self”? Non-Buddhists say that there is an eternal creator, apart from guṇa, all-pervading and indestructible. The “eternal creator” of which they speak is the god of “a creator god” and the self of “a divine self.” They assert that there is a self.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “What I call the Tathāgatagarbha is not the same as the self asserted by non-Buddhists. Mahāmati, it is sometimes spoken of as emptiness, signlessness, wishlessness, ultimate reality, dharma-nature, dharmakāya, nirvāṇa, freedom from intrinsic nature, neither arising nor ceasing, original quiescence, or intrinsic nirvāṇa. Having spoken of the Tathāgatagarbha in such expressions, the Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Awakened One, teaches the gateway of the Tathāgatagarbha—the realm free from delusive thoughts and devoid of anything whatsoever—in order to dispel ordinary people’s fear of the statement of no-self. Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas of the future and present should not conceive of it or cling to it as a self-view.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “The Tathāgatagarbha of which I speak is not the same as the ‘self’ asserted by non-Buddhists.”

The Buddhas speak of the Tathāgatagarbha in many expressions. At times they call it “emptiness”; at times, “signlessness”; and they also use such expressions as “wishlessness,” “ultimate reality,” “dharma-nature,” “dharmakāya,” “nirvāṇa,” “freedom from intrinsic nature,” “neither arising nor ceasing,” “original quiescence,” and “intrinsic nirvāṇa.” All these expressions refer to the Tathāgatagarbha.

The Buddhas speak of the Tathāgatagarbha in order to dispel sentient beings’ fear, for sentient beings cling to self-view and fear no-self. Great bodhisattvas should not fear no-self, should not hold self-view, and should not take the Tathāgatagarbha taught by the Buddhas as self-view.

[“For example, potters use human effort, water, a wooden wheel, cords, and other skillful means to make various vessels from a lump of clay. The Tathāgatas are likewise: on the basis of the no-self of dharmas, free from all characteristics of delusive thoughts, they employ various wisdoms, skillful means, and expedients. At times they speak of the Tathāgatagarbha, and at times they speak of no-self. For this reason they speak of the Tathāgatagarbha; it is not the same as the self asserted by non-Buddhists. This is what is meant by speaking of the Tathāgatagarbha.”]

For example, in making pottery, one uses human effort, water, a wooden wheel, cords, and other expedient means to make various vessels from a lump of clay. The Tathāgatas, on the basis of the no-self of dharmas and free from all delusive thoughts, either speak of the Tathāgatagarbha through various wisdoms, skillful means, and expedients according to sentient beings' differing capacities, or directly proclaim no-self. The Tathāgatagarbha is no-self and differs from the self asserted by non-Buddhists. This is why the Buddhas, the Tathāgatas, speak of the Tathāgatagarbha.

["In order to guide and lead those non-Buddhists who mistakenly conceive of a self, the Tathāgatagarbha is taught, so that they may leave behind delusive thoughts of an unreal self-view, enter the realm of the three gates of liberation, and hope swiftly to attain unsurpassed complete perfect awakening. Therefore, the Tathāgatas, the Worthy Ones, the Perfectly Awakened Ones, speak in this way of the treasury of the Tathāgata. If it were not so, it would be the same as the self asserted by non-Buddhists. Therefore, Mahāmati, in order to be free from non-Buddhist views, one should rely upon the no-self Tathāgatagarbha."]

In order to guide and lead non-Buddhists who mistakenly conceive of a self, the Buddhas teach the Tathāgatagarbha, enabling them to leave behind the delusive thoughts of an unreal and false self-view, enter the realm of the three gates of liberation, and hope swiftly to realize unsurpassed complete perfect awakening. This is why the Buddhas, the Tathāgatas, proclaim the Tathāgatagarbha. If this were not so—if it were not for the purpose of teaching "no-self"—would it not be the same as the divine self asserted by non-Buddhists? Therefore, in order to be free from the non-Buddhists' self-view, one should rely on the no-self Tathāgatagarbha taught by the Buddhas.

Let us explain the "three gates of liberation." The three gates of liberation—emptiness, wishlessness, and signlessness—are established on the basis of the three natures. On the basis of the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment, the gate of liberation of emptiness is established; on the basis of the nature of dependence on others, the gate of liberation of wishlessness is established; and on the basis of the nature of absolute reality and perfection, the gate of liberation of signlessness is established.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]

Having finished explaining the no-self Tathāgatagarbha, the Buddha again proclaimed the meaning of no-self in verse form. The verses enumerate many kinds of non-Buddhist self-view:

[The continuity of persons and aggregates; conditions and atoms; creation by a supreme sovereign; mind-measurement and delusive thought.]

“The continuity of persons and aggregates”: persons refers to the “personal self.” The continuity of the aggregates means the continuity of the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—which is the “dharma-self.”

“Conditions and atoms; creation by a supreme sovereign”: conditions means that the “continuity of persons and aggregates” is the illusory dependent arising of conditions, with no substantial intrinsic nature to be found. That is, there is no personal self and no dharma-self. Earlier, in “I. The Arising and Ceasing of the Consciousnesses,” several non-Buddhist views were listed: “the supreme subtle principle, the person, the sovereign, time, or atoms.”

Here, “atoms” corresponds to “time or atoms”; “supreme” corresponds to “the supreme subtle principle”; “sovereign” corresponds to “the sovereign”; and “creation” corresponds to “the person.” Why does “creation” correspond to “the person”? This was mentioned earlier in both “V. Eternity and Inconceivability” and “VI. Establishment and Slander.” Readers may wish to refer back to those sections.

The personal self, the dharma-self, and non-Buddhist erroneous views are all “mind-measurement and delusive thought”: all are incorrect conclusions measured out by the deluded mind, all products of delusive thought.

Outline of This Section:

This section explains the fundamental difference between the “Tathāgatagarbha” taught by the Buddha and the “divine self” asserted by non-Buddhists: the Buddhas use “Tathāgatagarbha” to teach no-self, while non-Buddhists mistakenly conceive of a “divine self” and cling to the existence of a self. Their fundamental difference lies in self and no-self.

From “I. The Arising and Ceasing of the Consciousnesses” to this point, the Buddha has used the five dharmas, three natures, eight consciousnesses, and twofold no-self as a framework to explain the ultimate principles of the Buddhadharma in depth and detail. The discussion of practice now begins.

IX. The Four Great Practices

[At that time, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Mahāmati, contemplating sentient beings of the future, again petitioned the World-Honored One: “May the World-Honored One explain the great skillful means for uninterrupted cultivation, as practiced by the bodhisattva mahāsattvas.”]

Here, “uninterrupted” means neither discontinuous nor mixed. Not discontinuous means continuous and unceasing; not mixed means to penetrate deeply into a single gate. Observing sentient beings of the future, Mahāmati Bodhisattva requested methods of practice that are uninterrupted and unmixed for their sake. These methods are the great skillful means by which the great bodhisattvas cultivate.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “When bodhisattva mahāsattvas accomplish four dharmas, they attain the great skillful means of cultivation. What are the four? They are: skillfully discerning the manifestations of one’s own mind; contemplating that external natures are without nature; being free from views of arising, abiding, and ceasing; and attaining the joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization. When bodhisattva mahāsattvas accomplish these four dharmas, they attain the great skillful means of cultivation.”]

Skillful means have many gates. “Great skillful means” means skillful means of special importance, more significant than other expedient means. The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that there are four great skillful means: (1) skillfully discerning the manifestations of one’s own mind; (2) contemplating that external natures are without nature; (3) being free from views of arising, abiding, and ceasing; and (4) attaining the joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization. Accomplishing these four dharmas constitutes the great skillful means by which the great bodhisattvas cultivate.

[How do bodhisattva mahāsattvas skillfully discern the manifestations of their own minds? They contemplate in this way the limits of the three realms as mind-only. Free from self and what belongs to self, without movement or wavering, free from coming and going, they see that, through the perfuming of beginningless false habitual tendencies, the various material activities and bonds of the three realms, the establishment of body and possessions, appear as deluded thoughts enter in. This is what is meant by bodhisattva mahāsattvas skillfully discerning the manifestations of their own minds.]

What does it mean to “skillfully discern the manifestations of one’s own mind”? It means to discern well that all dharmas are illusory manifestations of one’s own mind. All dharmas are not outside the mind; none has real existence, and all are empty and unobtainable. This is the contemplation of emptiness. Fenqi means a boundary or limit. The three realms arise from deluded thought, and deluded thought cannot exceed the bounds of one’s own mind.

When one knows that there are no dharmas outside the mind, one is free from “self” and from “what belongs to self”; attachment to both person and dharmas is relinquished. What appearances of movement, coming, or going could then remain?

Yet, because of the long perfuming of beginningless false and deluded thoughts, there are the various bonds of material activities in the three realms. “Material activities” refers to the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness.

Among sentient beings in the three realms—the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm—their five aggregates differ in various ways. Consider the first five consciousnesses within the aggregate of consciousness: beings in the desire realm possess eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousnesses; devas in the form realm possess only the three consciousnesses of eye, ear, and body, having no need for nose or tongue consciousness.

Because of bondage to the various material activities of the three realms, phenomena such as one’s own body and the resources required by it appear. In fact, all such establishments arise from deluded thoughts. If one realizes that deluded thoughts are without nature, the three realms are suddenly empty. What has been explained above is the first great skillful means in the cultivation of great bodhisattvas: skillfully discerning the manifestations of one’s own mind.

[How do bodhisattva mahāsattvas skillfully contemplate that external natures are without nature? They contemplate all natures as like a mirage or a dream, arising from the habitual causes of beginningless false and deluded thoughts. In this way, bodhisattva mahāsattvas skillfully contemplate that external natures are without nature. This is what is meant by bodhisattva mahāsattvas skillfully contemplating that external natures are without nature.]

What does it mean to “contemplate that external natures are without nature”? Since all dharmas are illusory manifestations of one’s own mind, they are unreal like a mirage and nonexistent like a dream. Yet, due to beginningless habitual tendencies of false and deluded thought, one mistakenly clings to dharmas as existing outside the mind. Since deluded thought is without nature, dharmas outside the mind are likewise without nature. What is without nature is provisional; thus, “contemplating that external natures are without nature” is the contemplation of provisional existence. “External natures are without nature” means that dharmas outside the mind have no real nature. Great bodhisattvas skillfully contemplate in this way that dharmas outside the mind have no real nature. This is the second great skillful means in the cultivation of great bodhisattvas: contemplating that external natures are without nature.

[How do bodhisattva mahāsattvas skillfully free themselves from views of arising, abiding, and ceasing? They see all natures as like illusions and dreams: neither self, other, nor both together has a nature that arises; all enter within the limits of one’s own mind. Therefore, they see that external natures are without nature. They see

that consciousness does not arise and that conditions do not accumulate. They see that deluded thoughts arise dependently, and that all dharmas within and beyond the three realms are unobtainable. Seeing them to be free from inherent nature, all views of arising are extinguished. Knowing the nature of all dharmas to be like illusion, they attain the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas. Having attained the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas, they are free from views of arising, abiding, and ceasing. This is what is meant by bodhisattva mahāsattvas skillfully discerning freedom from views of arising, abiding, and ceasing.]

What does it mean to "be free from views of arising, abiding, and ceasing"? Dharmas produced by causes and conditions do not arise from themselves, from another, from both together, or without cause; therefore, they are said to be unborn. What is unborn does not abide, and what does not abide does not cease. This is freedom from views of arising, abiding, and ceasing. What arises through causes and conditions is free from arising, abiding, and ceasing; it is empty and unobtainable, merely provisionally named.

The myriad dharmas are all empty, yet provisional names are not absent. They are at once empty and provisional; this is called the Madhyamaka view. "All natures are like illusions and dreams; neither self, other, nor both together has a nature that arises"—all dharmas in the three realms arise dependently from mind, like illusory images and dream states. "Both together" means "in combination." "Neither self, other, nor both together has a nature that arises" means that they do not arise from self, from other, or from both together.

"All enter within the limits of one's own mind"—they cannot exceed the bounds of one's own mind. No real dharma has ever arisen outside the mind; therefore, they do not arise from self. "Therefore, they see that external natures are without nature"—because they do not arise from self, dharmas outside the mind have no real nature to be obtained. Dharmas outside the mind are "other" dharmas beyond one's own mind; because external natures are without nature, they do not arise from other.

"They see that consciousness does not arise and that conditions do not accumulate"—inwardly, one sees that mental consciousness does not arise; outwardly, there is no accumulation of sense objects and conditions. Since neither inward nor outward can be obtained, they do not arise from both together. "They see that deluded thoughts arise dependently, and that all dharmas within and beyond the three realms are unobtainable"—all dharmas within and beyond the three realms are unobtainable and arise dependently from deluded thoughts. Deluded thought is the cause of dependent arising; therefore, they do not arise without cause.

“Seeing them to be free from inherent nature, all views of arising are extinguished”—when one clearly sees that all dharmas lack an inherent nature of their own, all views of arising—such as arising from self, from other, from both together, or without cause—cease. “Knowing the nature of all dharmas to be like illusion, they attain the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas”—when one realizes that the inherent nature of all dharmas is like illusion, one attains the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas.

Alternatively, to realize directly that all dharmas are like illusion is itself the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas. “Having attained the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas, they are free from views of arising, abiding, and ceasing”—after attaining this forbearance, one is free from such views. “This is what is meant by bodhisattva mahāsattvas skillfully discerning freedom from views of arising, abiding, and ceasing”—this is the third great skillful means in the cultivation of great bodhisattvas: freedom from views of arising, abiding, and ceasing.

Taking the preceding three contemplations as the cause, one attains the fruition of the “joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization” explained below.

.:[How do bodhisattva mahāsattvas attain the joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization? They attain the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas, abide on the eighth bodhisattva bhūmi, attain freedom from the characteristics of mind, intellect, consciousness, the five dharmas, the three natures, and the two kinds of non-self, and attain the mind-born body.]

What does it mean to “attain the joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization”? It means attaining the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas, realizing the eighth-bhūmi bodhisattva stage, becoming free from the characteristics of mind, intellect, consciousness, the five dharmas, the three natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of non-self, and attaining the mind-born body. This is the fourth great skillful means in the cultivation of great bodhisattvas: attaining the joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization.

[“World-Honored One, what causes and conditions give rise to the mind-born body?” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The mind-born body is so called because thought travels swiftly and without obstruction. Just as thought passes through a stone wall without obstruction, so at an immeasurable distance in another place, because one does not forget what one has previously seen and the stream of one’s own mind is uninterrupted, one is born in a body without obstruction. Mahāmati, such mind-born bodies are attained simultaneously.

“The mind-born bodies of bodhisattva mahāsattvas are adorned with the wondrous characteristics of sovereign spiritual powers born from the power of illusory samādhi. Bodies of the noble lineage are simultaneously produced. Like thought,

they arise without obstruction. In accordance with the realm of the original vows one remembers, they accomplish sentient beings and attain the joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization.”]

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: What causes and conditions give rise to the so-called mind-born body? Yi means thought or intention. Thought has three characteristics: first, swiftness; second, unobstructedness; and third, omnipresence. The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “The mind-born body is so called because thought travels swiftly and without obstruction”—the mind-born body is as swift as thought, and thus is called the mind-born body.

“Just as thought passes through a stone wall without obstruction, so at an immeasurable distance in another place, because one does not forget what one has previously seen and the stream of one’s own mind is uninterrupted, one is born in a body without obstruction”—just as thought can enter a stone wall, so can the mind-born body enter a stone wall without obstruction.

For example, when one recollects an object previously seen in a place exceedingly far away, thought after thought continues in an unbroken stream, and one can arrive there at once without obstruction. “Such mind-born bodies are attained simultaneously”—mind-born bodies of this kind appear simultaneously in different places, as in the phrase “countless transformation bodies.” Therefore, thought is said to be omnipresent.

“The mind-born bodies of bodhisattva mahāsattvas are adorned with the wondrous characteristics of sovereign spiritual powers born from the power of illusory samādhi”—the sovereign spiritual powers and wondrous characteristics of illusory samādhi are the “thought” that gives rise to the mind-born body. “Bodies of the noble lineage are simultaneously produced”—the bodies of the noble lineage that are simultaneously produced are the mind-born bodies produced by “thought.”

“Like thought, they arise without obstruction”—the arising of the mind-born body is unobstructed, just as the arising of thought is unobstructed. “In accordance with the realm of the original vows one remembers, they accomplish sentient beings and attain the joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization”—in accordance with the great original vows made to liberate sentient beings extensively, they accomplish sentient beings, enabling them also to realize the joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization.

[Thus bodhisattva mahāsattvas attain the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas, abide on the eighth bodhisattva bhūmi, transform and relinquish the characteristics of mind, intellect, consciousness, the five dharmas, the three natures, and the two kinds of non-self, and attain the mind-born body and the joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization. This is what is meant by bodhisattva

mahāsattvas accomplishing the four dharmas and attaining the great skillful means of cultivation. You should study in this way.]

Great bodhisattvas attain the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas, realize the eighth bodhisattva bhūmi, transform and relinquish the characteristics of mind, intellect, consciousness, the five dharmas, the three natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of non-self, attain the mind-born body, and accomplish the joyful ease of the noble wisdom of self-realization. These are the four great skillful means in the cultivation of great bodhisattvas. Great bodhisattvas should cultivate and study in this way.

Summary of This Section:

This section begins with Mahāmati Bodhisattva contemplating sentient beings of the future and asking on their behalf about methods of practice that are uninterrupted and unmixed. In other words, the four great skillful means of cultivation taught by the Buddha were taught for sentient beings of the future—that is, for sentient beings in this latter age, such as ourselves.

The four great skillful means of practice embody supramundane cause and effect. The first three—"properly discerning the manifestations of one's own mind" (contemplation of emptiness), "contemplating that external natures are without inherent nature" (provisional contemplation), and "being free of views of arising, abiding, and ceasing" (Middle Way contemplation)—are the causes; the fourth, "attaining the bliss of the noble wisdom of self-realization," is the fruition. Cultivate the causes and realize the fruition, attain the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas, and attain the mind-born body. Great bodhisattvas should study and practice in this way.

10. Causes and Conditions of All Dharmas

At that time, the Mahāsattva Mahāmati Bodhisattva again petitioned the World-Honored One: "I only pray that you will explain the characteristics of the conditions and causes of all dharmas. By awakening to the characteristics of conditions and causes, I and the other bodhisattvas may leave behind all deluded views that things inherently exist or do not exist, as well as deluded views of gradual arising and simultaneous arising."

The preceding passage discussed "attaining the forbearance of the unborn dharmas." Unborn dharmas are dharmas produced by causes and conditions; therefore, Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks the Buddha to explain the characteristics of the conditions and causes of all dharmas. "The characteristics of conditions and causes" means the manifest features of "conditions" and "causes." "Deluded views

that all things inherently exist or do not exist" means believing either that all dharmas possess an inherent nature or that all dharmas lack an inherent nature. Both are deluded views.

"Gradual and simultaneous arising" refers to "gradual arising" and "simultaneous arising." Simultaneous arising means sudden arising. Both gradual and sudden arising are deluded views, because whatever is produced by causes and conditions is unborn. If one can awaken to and understand the manifest features of "conditions" and "causes," one can leave behind deluded views of existence and nonexistence, suddenness and gradualness, and so forth. Therefore, Mahāmati Bodhisattva requests that the World-Honored One explain the characteristics of the conditions and causes of all dharmas for the assembly.

The Buddha told Mahāmati: "All dharmas have two kinds of conditional characteristics: external and internal. External conditions are clay, a potter's wheel, cord, water, wood, and human labor—the various supporting conditions by which a pot is produced. The arising of a clay pot, woven felt, a grass mat, a sprout from a seed, clarified butter from curds, and so forth through supporting conditions is likewise so. This is called the successive transformation and production of external conditions."

The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva that there are two kinds of conditional characteristics: external conditions and internal conditions. What are external conditions? They are the many supporting conditions. For example, the formation of a clay pot requires many supporting conditions, such as clay, a potter's wheel, cord, water, wood, and human labor.

Consider also woven felt, grass mats, sprouts, and clarified butter from curds: felt depends on threads, mats on grass, sprouts on seeds, and clarified butter on curds. Among the various supporting conditions, some are primary and some secondary; the primary condition may also be called the cause. For example, in making a clay pot, the clay is the cause, while the potter's wheel, cord, water, wood, and human labor are conditions. Because of the preceding cause and subsequent conditions, the clay pot is successively produced. Thus it is said that "external conditions successively transform and produce."

"What are internal conditions? Ignorance, craving, karma, and other dharmas receive the name 'conditions.' From them arise the dharmas of the aggregates, realms, and sense bases; they receive the name 'arisen from conditions.' They are without distinction, yet foolish ordinary people engage in deluded thought. This is called internal conditional dharmas."

What are internal conditions? Internal conditions refer to such dharmas as ignorance, craving, and karma, which receive the name "the twelve links of

dependent origination." From the twelve links of dependent origination arise such dharmas as the five aggregates, six sense bases, and eighteen realms. Because they arise from conditions, they are called dependent arising. In fact, the twelve links of dependent origination, the five aggregates, six sense bases, eighteen realms, and so forth are all internal conditions and are originally without distinction. To suppose that they differ is merely the deluded thought of foolish ordinary people. This is what is meant by internal conditions.

It can be seen that external conditions concern objects, while internal conditions concern mind. Or, external conditions concern the dependent recompense, while internal conditions concern the primary recompense.

"Mahāmati, there are six kinds of causes: the cause that will produce, the continuing cause, the reciprocal cause, the acting cause, the manifesting cause, and the conditional cause."

Having explained the two kinds of conditions, the text next explains the six kinds of causes: the cause that will produce, the continuing cause, the reciprocal cause, the acting cause, the manifesting cause, and the conditional cause.

The six kinds of causes are explained below. In fact, conditions are causes, and causes are conditions. Before discussing the six causes, let us first list six kinds of conditions: causal conditions, object conditions, immediately preceding conditions, dominant conditions, discriminating conditions, and sequential conditions. The first four of these six conditions are extensively found in treatises such as the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra, where they are called the "four conditions."

The fifth, "discriminating conditions," derives from the phrase "conditions return to discrimination" in the discussion of the eight returns and the discernment of seeing in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra. The sixth, "sequential conditions," is another translation of "immediately preceding conditions." It is listed here as the sixth because "immediately preceding conditions" emphasizes continuity, whereas "sequential conditions" emphasizes order. That is, "immediately preceding conditions" emphasizes the connection between what comes before and after, while "sequential conditions" emphasizes their order.

"The cause that will produce is this: once a cause has been made, internal and external dharmas arise." What is the cause that will produce? Where a thought arises, a cause of birth and death is made, and there will certainly be a future result. Thus it is said, "Once a cause has been made, internal and external dharmas arise." As stated above, the external is the object and the internal is the mind.

The cause that will produce may correspond to causal conditions.

“The continuing cause is this: once grasping has occurred, the seeds of the aggregates of internal and external dharmas arise.”

What is the continuing cause? Because there is grasping, there is continuity. As stated earlier, “once a cause has been made, internal and external dharmas arise.” Because of grasping, the seeds of the corresponding aggregates of mind and objects arise continuously. Seeds are again causes, while the manifestation of seeds is results. Cause after cause and result after result continue without interruption; all of this is due to grasping.

The continuing cause may correspond to object conditions.

“The reciprocal cause is this: by forming an uninterrupted characteristic, continuity arises.” What is the reciprocal cause? Cause after cause and result after result continue without interruption. Uninterrupted characteristics of wholesome and unwholesome karma arise in continuous succession. Thus it is said, “By forming an uninterrupted characteristic, continuity arises.”

The reciprocal cause may correspond to immediately preceding conditions.

“The acting cause is this: it performs acts of increase, like a wheel-turning king.”

What is the acting cause? It is like a wheel-turning king: having already obtained good karmic results, he applies himself even more vigorously to doing good for the people. This is called “increase,” and in the future good will certainly increase upon good.

The acting cause may correspond to dominant conditions.

“The manifesting cause is this: once an object of deluded thought has arisen, its appearance manifests what can act and what is acted upon, as a lamp illuminates forms.”

What is the manifesting cause? It means that all objects of deluded thought manifest appearances of agent and object. They are like a lamp illuminating things: plainly visible and clearly distinguishable.

The manifesting cause may correspond to discriminating conditions.

“The conditional cause is this: when cessation occurs, it brings about the interruption of continuity. The nature free from deluded thought arises.”

What is the conditional cause? It means that when deluded thoughts are extinguished, they must be eliminated in a certain sequence; one must use delusion to counter delusion. Delusion awaits what is free from delusion, and therefore it is

called the conditional cause. Thereupon, the nature free from deluded thought arises. The conditional cause may correspond to sequential conditions.

“Mahāmati, foolish ordinary people are deluded by their own imagined characteristics. Things do not arise gradually, nor do they arise simultaneously. Why not? If they arose simultaneously, there would be no distinction between agent and object of action, and thus no characteristic of a cause could be obtained. If they arose gradually, no causal characteristic could be established; therefore gradual arising does not arise, just as one who has not begotten a child has no name of father.”

The dharmas of the two conditions and six causes discussed above are neither said to arise gradually nor to arise suddenly and simultaneously; rather, they are originally unborn. To suppose that gradual or sudden arising truly exists is the calculating delusion of foolish ordinary people. Why is it said that they do not arise simultaneously? If they arose simultaneously, there would be no distinction between agent and object of action, and thus no characteristic of a cause could be obtained.

If the acting cause and the result produced were to arise suddenly and simultaneously, “what can act” and “what is acted upon” could not be distinguished. This would contradict the six causes discussed above; therefore it is said that no characteristic of a cause could be obtained. Why is it said that they do not arise gradually? If they arose gradually, no causal characteristic could be established; therefore gradual arising does not arise, just as one who has not begotten a child has no name of father.

If a preceding cause and subsequent result arose gradually, then before the later result had arisen, could the preceding one be called a “cause”? For example, if I do not yet have a child, can I be called a father? In this way, the characteristic of “cause” is lost. Therefore, there is not gradual arising, but rather non-arising. Thus it is said, “No causal characteristic can be established; therefore gradual arising does not arise.”

“Mahāmati, gradual arising, continuity, and expedient means are not so; they are only deluded thought. Causes, grasping, sequence, dominant conditions, and the like give rise to the notions of arising and what arises. Mahāmati, gradual arising does not arise, because of attachment to the imagined nature of deluded thought. Neither gradual nor simultaneous arising occurs, because they are experiences manifested by one’s own mind. Individual characteristics and common characteristics—the external nature of things—is without nature.”

If one believes that the dharmas of the two conditions and six causes arise gradually, continuously, and through expedient means according to a definite order, this is not so. To believe that arising truly exists is merely deluded thought. Why

does such deluded thought arise? It is because one observes such conditions as causes, grasping, sequence, and dominant conditions, and mistakenly takes “what produces” and “what is produced” to be truly existent.

The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva that gradual arising does not truly arise; it is non-arising. To mistake it for truly existing arising is attachment to the characteristics of the imagined nature of deluded thought. It is the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment—the imagined nature of deluded thought—at work; it is attachment to appearances. Gradual arising and sudden simultaneous arising have never truly arisen. They are only manifestations of one’s own mind, experiences of one’s own mind, and functions of one’s own mind. When one examines the individual and common characteristics of arising, the nature of these external appearances cannot be found to have any inherent reality.

“Mahāmati, neither gradual nor simultaneous arising occurs apart from what is manifested by one’s own mind. Because people do not awaken and give rise to deluded thought, characteristics appear to arise. Therefore, one should leave behind views of gradual and simultaneous arising in regard to the characteristics of causes, conditions, actions, and expedient means.”

Dharmas are originally unborn. Neither gradual arising nor sudden simultaneous arising truly exists; both are illusory appearances manifested by consciousness, and apart from mind there is no dharma. Only foolish ordinary people, deluded and unaware, generate deluded thoughts on their own, mistake the false for the real, and take illusory images as reality. Therefore, although one may carry out affairs skillfully in accordance with conditions and does not exclude phenomenal appearances, one should know that they are originally unborn and illusory. One should not maintain views of their real existence, but should leave behind such views as gradual arising and sudden arising.

At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses: “All things are unborn; nor do they cease through causes and conditions. Yet amid that birth and cessation, thoughts of causes and conditions arise.”

All dharmas are originally unborn. Since they are unborn, they likewise do not cease. Yet foolish ordinary people falsely perceive arising and ceasing amid what is without arising or ceasing, and thus give rise to thoughts of causes and conditions.

“It is not to deny cessation and renewed arising, or the continuity of dependent arising; it is solely to cut off the deluded conditions of foolish ordinary people’s ignorance and deluded thought.”

The Buddha speaks of “the continuity of dependent arising” because foolish ordinary people have always mistakenly clung to the view that dharmas cease and then arise

again. Such cessation is annihilationism. Therefore, the Buddha teaches them dharmas produced by causes and conditions, which continue without ceasing, in order to refute their annihilationist view. This is only to cut off their deluded attachment; it does not mean that arising and ceasing through causes and conditions truly exist. If one believes that dharmas produced by causes and conditions truly exist, that is ignorance, delusion, and deluded thought.

[The dharmas of existence, nonexistence, and dependent arising are all unborn. Deluded and turned by habitual tendencies, the three realms of existence appear from this.]

The World-Honored One speaks of existence, nonexistence, and dependent arising; all these are teachings of the unborn Dharma. Yet sentient beings are foolish and deluded, turned by their habitual tendencies, and mistakenly cling to the existence of desire, form, and emptiness. Thus the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm appear. The three realms that appear in accordance with the principle of dependent arising do not truly exist outside the mind; they are originally unborn.

[In truth, there are no conditions for birth, nor is there any cessation. Regard all conditioned dharmas as flowers in empty space.]

In truth, there is no dependent arising, no birth, and no cessation. All conditioned dharmas that are seen—such as dependent arising, birth, and cessation—are false and unreal. Sentient beings take what is false to be real. It is like flowers that do not originally exist in empty space but are mistakenly seen there because of an eye disease.

[The grasping and the grasped: abandon deluded views. Neither already arisen nor yet to arise; nor are there causes and conditions. Nothing whatsoever exists; all these are merely verbal expressions.]

“The grasping and the grasped” refers to the grasper and what is grasped. With regard to the grasper and the grasped, one should abandon deluded views. What are such deluded views? They are “already arisen,” “yet to arise,” and “causes and conditions.” “Already arisen” means creating causes now; “yet to arise” means receiving results in the future; and “causes and conditions” means dharmas arising through causes and conditions—that is, the law of cause and effect.

These are merely illusory manifestations of consciousness; none truly exists. Therefore it is said, “Neither already arisen nor yet to arise; nor are there causes and conditions.” All appearances are not truly real. In teaching these matters to beginning students, the Buddha merely responds to their capacities, dispels their coarse deluded views, and provisionally employs names and verbal expressions.

Overview of This Teaching:

All appearances are false. Everything is created by mind; outside the mind, no real dharma exists. That is to say, all things and their governing principles do not truly exist. If the myriad dharmas—that is, all things—are empty, does cause and effect—the principles governing the myriad dharmas—remain nonempty? “Neither already arisen nor yet to arise; nor are there causes and conditions. Nothing whatsoever exists; all these are merely verbal expressions.”

The inviolable law of cause and effect is in fact the law governing the operation of consciousness; outside the mind, not the slightest real dharma can be found. What forms do these laws governing the operation of consciousness—the law of cause and effect—take? This is what Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked about as “the characteristics of the causal conditions of all dharmas.” In response to Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question, the Buddha expounded the two conditions and six causes. He explained them one by one and refuted them one by one; having explained them, he refuted them completely. Finally, he concluded that they are “merely provisional names and verbal expressions,” thereby leading to Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s next question: the essential teaching on the characteristics of verbal conceptualization.

11. Verbal Discrimination

[At that time, the Mahāsattva Mahāmati again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, I only pray that you will explain the essential import of the characteristics of conceptual discrimination in speech. World-Honored One, if the other bodhisattva mahāsattvas and I can thoroughly understand this essential import, we will be able to penetrate the two meanings of speech and what is spoken, swiftly attain unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment, and, through the two approaches of speech and what is spoken, purify all sentient beings.”]

Above it was said, “All things are without inherent existence; these are all speech.” Yet ordinary beings always give rise to deluded thoughts on the basis of speech and cannot penetrate the principles within speech. This is what is meant by “the characteristics of conceptual discrimination in speech.”

Then what does “essential import” mean here? “Sūtra” carries the sense of a path; thus, “essential import” means the “path of mind,” namely, the principles expressed through speech. Put simply, Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s request, “I only pray that you will explain the essential import of the characteristics of conceptual discrimination in speech,” asks the Buddha to elucidate “language and principle.”

Why did Mahāmati Bodhisattva ask about “the essential import of the characteristics of conceptual discrimination in speech”? It was because “if the other bodhisattva mahāsattvas and I can thoroughly understand the essential import of the characteristics of conceptual discrimination in speech, we will be able to penetrate the two meanings of speech and what is spoken, swiftly attain unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment, and, through the two approaches of speech and what is spoken, purify all sentient beings.” To “thoroughly understand” means to be well able to comprehend.

To thoroughly understand the essential import of the characteristics of conceptual discrimination in speech is to be skilled in using speech as a tool for expressing principle. One then penetrates both the words that express and the meaning expressed, swiftly realizes bodhi, and enables all sentient beings likewise to understand the two approaches of “speech” and “what is spoken,” thereby allowing them also to become purified.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I shall explain it to you.” Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “Excellent, World-Honored One. Yes, I respectfully receive your instruction.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “There are four kinds of characteristics of conceptual discrimination in speech: speech based on appearances, speech in dreams, speech based on attachment to past conceptual discriminations, and speech based on beginningless conceptual discrimination.”

“Speech based on appearances arises from attachment to the appearances of form produced by one’s own conceptual discrimination. Speech in dreams arises from recollection of previously experienced objects; upon awakening, it arises from the object’s lack of inherent nature. Speech based on attachment to past conceptual discriminations arises from recollection of deeds formerly done by enemies. Speech based on beginningless conceptual discrimination arises from the habitual tendencies of one’s own seeds, due to beginningless false attachments. These are called the four kinds of characteristics of conceptual discrimination in speech.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that there are four kinds of characteristics of conceptual discrimination in speech: speech based on appearances, speech in dreams, speech based on attachment to past conceptual discriminations, and speech based on beginningless conceptual discrimination. All four are the deluded thoughts of sentient beings. Speech based on appearances “arises from attachment to the appearances of form produced by one’s own conceptual discrimination.” The appearances of form produced by one’s own conceptual discrimination are the object aspect of the eighth consciousness.

Conceptually assessing and clinging to the object aspect is the function of the perceiving aspect of the eighth consciousness. Put simply, this is attachment to appearances. Speech based on appearances is speech that discriminates among and clings to appearances of form; that is, speech attached to existence. Speech in dreams "arises from recollection of previously experienced objects; upon awakening, it arises from the object's lack of inherent nature." Recalling previously experienced objects generates dream scenes.

"Upon awakening, the object lacks inherent nature" means that, once awake, one knows that no such object truly exists; hence it is said to lack inherent nature. Speech in dreams is speech arising from "upon awakening, the object lacks inherent nature." Put simply, it is speech that falls into emptiness.

Speech based on attachment to past conceptual discriminations "arises from recollection of deeds formerly done by enemies." In the past, an enemy may have harmed me; later, recalling this gives rise to anger and resentment. Such speech is speech based on attachment to past conceptual discriminations. Put simply, it is speech that follows one's thoughts as they turn.

Speech based on beginningless conceptual discrimination "arises from the habitual tendencies of one's own seeds, due to beginningless false attachments." "Past" means error. False attachment carries the meaning of taking what is false to be true. Beginningless false attachment means taking the false for the true throughout immeasurable kalpas. These are habitual tendencies that one has planted oneself. Speech arising from such habitual tendencies is speech based on beginningless conceptual discrimination.

Objects are originally false, yet one takes them as true and is carried along by them. Put simply, this is speech carried along by circumstances. One must leave behind these four kinds of deluded speech—speech attached to existence, speech that falls into emptiness, speech that follows the turn of thought, and speech carried along by circumstances—before true principle can be revealed.

[At that time, the Mahāsattva Mahāmati again, on the basis of this meaning, urged the World-Honored One, saying: "I only pray that you will further explain the objects manifested by conceptual discrimination in speech. World-Honored One, where, why, how, and from what cause does the conceptual speech of sentient beings arise?"]

Having heard the Buddha explain the four kinds of deluded speech, Mahāmati Bodhisattva further asked the Buddha to explain "the objects manifested by conceptual discrimination in speech." Specifically, he asked, "Where, why, how, and from what cause?" That is: From where does the conceptual speech of sentient

beings arise? For what reason does it arise? By what process does it arise? And what causal relationship gives rise to it?

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The head, chest, throat, nose, lips, tongue, gums, and teeth combine, and sound issues forth.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that the conceptual speech of sentient beings arises from eight places: the head, chest, throat, nose, lips, tongue, gums, and teeth. “Gums” means the gingiva. This answers the question, “Where?” Why can sentient beings give rise to conceptual speech? Because these eight places combine; that is, because these eight parts function together properly.

This answers the question, “Why?” How does the conceptual speech of sentient beings arise? “It issues forth.” What issues forth? Naturally, breath. When the eight places combine and breath surges forth, there is sound. This answers the question, “How?” Is the causal relationship by which sentient beings give rise to conceptual speech that conceptual discrimination is the cause and speech its result? Please consider the passage below:

[Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, are speech and conceptual discrimination different or not different?” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Speech and conceptual discrimination are neither different nor not different. Why is this so? Because the characteristic is produced from that cause. Mahāmati, if speech and conceptual discrimination were different, conceptual discrimination should not be the cause. If they were not different, speech could not reveal meaning; yet it does reveal it. Therefore, they are neither different nor not different.”]

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked the Buddha: Are speech and conceptual discrimination the same or different? The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: Speech and conceptual discrimination are neither the same nor different. Why is this so? Because “the characteristic is produced from that cause.” “That cause” means conceptual discrimination as the cause. “The characteristic is produced” means that the characteristic of speech arises.

This answers the preceding question, “From what cause?” The Buddha then further answered Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question about “different” and “not different”: If speech and conceptual discrimination were different, conceptual discrimination should not be the cause.

Why? Because “such a cause produces such a result.” If conceptual discrimination is the cause, could it produce a different result? If speech and conceptual discrimination were the same, language could not reveal principle. Why? Because principle and language are two different things. If they were the same, would language not be able to reveal only the same thing? Yet language does reveal

principle; therefore, they are “not not different”—that is, they are not the same. In summary, speech and conceptual discrimination are neither different nor not different.

[Mahāmati again said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, is speech itself ultimate truth? Or is that which is spoken ultimate truth?” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Speech is not ultimate truth, nor is that which is spoken ultimate truth. Why is this so? The bliss of the noble ones in ultimate truth is entered through speech; that is ultimate truth. Speech itself is not ultimate truth.”]

The “speech” spoken of in this passage does not refer to the preceding four kinds of “deluded speech,” but to the Buddha’s teaching. “What is spoken” refers to the principle revealed by that teaching. In other words, speech is the teaching that expresses, while what is spoken is the principle expressed.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked the Buddha which of these two is ultimate truth. The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “Speech is not ultimate truth, nor is that which is spoken ultimate truth.” Neither is ultimate truth. Why? Although the bliss of the noble ones in ultimate truth is entered through hearing the Buddha’s speech, the bliss of the noble ones in ultimate truth itself is ultimate truth; speech is not ultimate truth. This bliss is the bliss among the four virtues of the dharmakāya: permanence, bliss, self, and purity. The Buddha next explains that the bliss of the noble ones in ultimate truth is a wonder attained for oneself.

[“Ultimate truth is attained through the self-realization of noble wisdom; it is not the object of realization of speech and conceptual discrimination. Therefore, speech and conceptual discrimination do not reveal ultimate truth. Speech arises and ceases, moves and wavers, and comes into being through a succession of causes and conditions. Whatever arises through a succession of causes and conditions does not reveal ultimate truth. Mahāmati, because the appearances of self and other lack inherent nature, the appearances of speech do not reveal ultimate truth. Furthermore, Mahāmati, because one enters according to the direct realization manifested by one’s own mind, the various appearances and the supposed external nature are without inherent nature; speech and conceptual discrimination do not reveal ultimate truth. Therefore, Mahāmati, you should leave behind all characteristics of conceptual discrimination in speech.”]

The bliss of the noble ones in ultimate truth is attained through the self-realization of the Tathāgata’s noble wisdom; it is not a realm realized by speech and conceptual discrimination. Therefore, speech and conceptual discrimination do not reveal ultimate truth. The Buddha then further explains from three perspectives—dependent arising, relativity, and appearances—why speech and conceptual discrimination do not reveal ultimate truth. First, dependent arising: “Speech arises

and ceases, moves and wavers, and comes into being through a succession of causes and conditions."

"Whatever arises through a succession of causes and conditions does not reveal ultimate truth." Ultimate truth neither arises nor ceases, neither moves nor wavers; it is limpid, constant, and quiescent, and does not belong to the conjunction of causes and conditions. Speech, however, arises and ceases, moves and wavers; it is a linguistic appearance arising from conceptual discrimination as its cause and the eight places as its conditions. Therefore, speech does not reveal ultimate truth.

Second, relativity: "Because the appearances of self and other lack inherent nature, the appearances of speech do not reveal ultimate truth." Ultimate truth transcends relativity; it is truly constant and beyond opposition, without appearances of self and other. Speech, however, involves questions and answers, with self and other set in opposition. The appearances of self and other have no true inherent nature. Therefore, speech does not reveal ultimate truth.

Third, appearances: "Because one enters according to the direct realization manifested by one's own mind, the various appearances and the supposed external nature are without inherent nature; speech and conceptual discrimination do not reveal ultimate truth." Ultimate truth is the direct realization manifested by one's own mind, without form or appearance. Speech, however, has various linguistic appearances, and dharmas apprehended as external to mind have no inherent nature. Therefore, speech and conceptual discrimination do not reveal ultimate truth.

Finally, the Buddha admonished Bodhisattva Mahāmati: "You should relinquish all deluded appearances of speech." What are the deluded appearances of speech? They are precisely the four mentioned at the outset: attachment to existence, falling into emptiness, being carried along by thoughts, and being swayed by circumstances. To relinquish all deluded appearances of speech is not to attach to existence, not to fall into emptiness, not to be carried along by thoughts, and not to be swayed by circumstances.

[At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:]
[All natures lack self-nature;
Nor is there any speech.
The profound meaning of emptiness within emptiness
Cannot be understood by ordinary people.
The self-nature of all natures,
And dharmas of speech, are like shadows.

The realm of self-realized noble wisdom—
This is the ultimate reality that I teach.]

“All natures lack self-nature” means being free from appearances conditioned by mental objects; “nor is there any speech” means being free from the appearances of speech. When the way of language is cut off and the activity of mind ceases, this is emptiness in the ultimate sense, namely, “the profound meaning of emptiness within emptiness.” Ordinary beings cannot understand this profound meaning of emptiness within emptiness and thus fall into forms of existence, mistakenly believing that all dharmas possess an inherent reality that can be apprehended. In fact, no dharma possesses an inherent reality that can be apprehended, nor does speech; all are illusory and insubstantial, like shadows. Only the self-realization of the Tathāgata’s noble wisdom is ultimate reality. This ultimate reality is the true meaning taught by the Tathāgata.

Summary of This Section:

This section emphasizes the noble joy of ultimate truth. It cannot be expressed in speech; rather, it is the realm of the Tathāgata’s noble wisdom and self-realization. When the World-Honored One held up a flower and Kāśyapa smiled, this was called a special transmission outside the teachings; it is the true lineage of the Buddhadharma. Teachings are verbal teachings. A special transmission outside the teachings is the direct transmission of the Buddha’s mind-seal by means other than speech.

Speech without speaking is true speech. This true speech without speaking is what is meant by “the realm of self-realized noble wisdom—the ultimate reality that I teach.” This section also discusses the four kinds of deluded appearances of speech, with the aim of teaching us not to attach to existence, not to fall into emptiness, not to be carried along by thoughts, and not to be swayed by circumstances. From the three perspectives of the arising, relativity, and manifestations of deluded speech, this section explains that deluded speech does not reveal ultimate truth. It admonishes us to relinquish all deluded appearances of speech.

12. Transcending the Four Propositions

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, I pray that you will explain freedom from one and other, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence—what is not practiced by any non-Buddhist path, but is practiced by the noble wisdom of self-realization; freedom from the imagined particular and shared characteristics, and entry into the supreme meaning of reality.”

“May the successive stages of the bhūmis, progressively advancing upward in the marks of increasing purity, accord with entry into the marks of the Tathāgata stage, without exertion and through the power of original vows. Like a many-colored maṇi jewel, whose realm of manifestations is boundless, all dharmas are distinctions manifested and approached by one’s own mind. May I and the other bodhisattva-mahāsattvas be free from such imagined views of the self-nature and the particular and shared characteristics, swiftly attain unsurpassed perfect awakening, and enable all sentient beings to be replete and fulfilled with every happiness.”]

To be free from the four propositions and cut off the hundred negations is the first gateway by which a bodhisattva enters the Way. This passage gives five examples of “four propositions,” listed below: The four propositions of “one and other”: one, other, both other and not other, neither other nor not other. The four propositions of “both and neither”: both, neither, both both and neither, neither both nor neither.

The four propositions of “existence and nonexistence”: existence, nonexistence, both existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence. The four propositions of “neither existence nor nonexistence”: not existent, not nonexistent, both not existent and not nonexistent, neither not existent nor not nonexistent. The four propositions of “permanence and impermanence”: permanent, impermanent, both permanent and impermanent, neither permanent nor impermanent.

Look at and . If the fourth proposition of , “neither existence nor nonexistence,” is expanded, it becomes . One and other, both and neither, permanence and impermanence, and so forth can likewise be expanded. The fourth proposition of can also be expanded, yielding “neither neither existent nor neither neither nonexistent.” Continuing in this way, one may arrive at more than a hundred “nots”—the hundred negations. Is this not all mere speculative argument? Yet non-Buddhist paths cannot get free of these.

If is regarded as an expansion of —that is, if is included within —then this passage speaks of four propositions. The first is one and other. For example, do all sentient beings possess only one eighth consciousness, or are there many, each different from the others? The second is both and neither. Both means that all possess it; neither means that not all possess it.

For example, do all sentient beings have the eighth consciousness, or may some have it and some not? The third is existence, nonexistence, neither existence, and neither nonexistence. For example, does the eighth consciousness truly exist, or does it not exist at all? Perhaps it is not truly existent, or perhaps it is not nonexistent? The fourth is permanence and impermanence. For example, does the

eighth consciousness abide eternally without ceasing, or is it impermanent and subject to extinction? One should be free from these four speculative propositions.

Regarding the “hundred negations,” ancient masters provided another detailed calculation, as follows: the four propositions, together with “root, derivative, the three times, arisen, and not yet arisen,” add up to one hundred propositions. None is real; hence they are called the “hundred negations.” For example, the four propositions of existence and nonexistence are the “root four propositions.” Those expanded from the four propositions of existence and nonexistence are all “derivative four propositions.”

They can be expanded into four sets of derivative four propositions, listed below: Four propositions within “existence”: existent existence, existent nonexistence, existent both existence and nonexistence, existent neither existence nor nonexistence. Four propositions within “nonexistence”: nonexistent existence, nonexistent nonexistence, nonexistent both existence and nonexistence, nonexistent neither existence nor nonexistence. Four propositions within “both existence and nonexistence”: both-existent-and-nonexistent existence, both-existent-and-nonexistent nonexistence, both-existent-and-nonexistent both existence and nonexistence, both-existent-and-nonexistent neither existence nor nonexistence. Four propositions within “neither existence nor nonexistence”: neither-existent-nor-nonexistent existence, neither-existent-nor-nonexistent nonexistence, neither-existent-nor-nonexistent both existence and nonexistence, neither-existent-nor-nonexistent neither existence nor nonexistence.

The four sets of “derivative four propositions” make sixteen propositions. Each of the three times—past, present, and future—has these sixteen propositions, making forty-eight. Each of these forty-eight has “arisen” and “not yet arisen,” making ninety-six. Adding the “root four propositions” makes exactly one hundred propositions.

Ha ha! Are you dizzy from all these turns? Yet the ancients were not confused; the thought of ancient philosophers is beyond what we modern people can attain. Nevertheless, these are all speculative arguments. Non-Buddhist paths cannot get free of them, but we should be free of them. Let us continue with the sūtra passage:

“What is not practiced by any non-Buddhist path, but is practiced by the noble wisdom of self-realization.” What is practiced? This freedom. All non-Buddhist paths cannot get free of the four propositions and hundred negations, whereas the noble wisdom of self-realization is free from them. “Free from the imagined particular and shared characteristics, and entering into the supreme meaning of reality.” “Free from the imagined particular and shared characteristics, and entering into the supreme meaning of reality.”

—“One and other” differs from “existence and nonexistence”; each has its particular characteristic. Yet both have the four propositions and hundred negations; these constitute their shared characteristic. All these are products of imagination and should be relinquished. Only by being free from such imaginings can one enter into the supreme meaning of reality.

“The successive stages of the bhūmis, progressively advancing upward in the marks of increasing purity, accord with entry into the marks of the Tathāgata stage, without exertion and through the power of original vows.”—The grounds are grounds of mind. From the Ground of Joy, through the Ground Free from Defilement, the Ground of Radiant Light, and so on, up to the Ground of Dharma Clouds, the completion of the ten bhūmis is what is meant by “the successive stages of the bhūmis, progressively advancing upward in the marks of increasing purity.”

Thereupon one realizes equal enlightenment and wondrous enlightenment; this is what is meant by “accord with entry into the marks of the Tathāgata stage.” “Without exertion and through the power of original vows” means that the successive bhūmis and the marks of the Tathāgata stage are realized through the power of original vows without deliberate effort. In other words, this is an unconditioned dharma. “Like a many-colored maṇi jewel, whose realm of manifestations is boundless.”—It is like a maṇi jewel, in which numerous colors appear according to their reflections.

The immeasurable and boundless realms of cultivation likewise appear naturally in accordance with the mind. “All dharmas are distinctions manifested and approached by one’s own mind.”—All dharmas are distinctions manifested by one’s own mind; outside the mind there are no dharmas. “May I and the other bodhisattva-mahāsattvas be free from such imagined views of the self-nature and the particular and shared characteristics, and swiftly attain unsurpassed perfect awakening.”

“And enable all sentient beings to be replete and fulfilled with every happiness.”—Mahāmati Bodhisattva says: I and the other great bodhisattvas are free from the four propositions and cut off the hundred negations. We vow to swiftly attain unsurpassed perfect awakening in order that all sentient beings, too, may have every happiness, every fulfillment, and every completeness. In other words, we vow to “swiftly open wisdom and attain Buddhahood, liberate sentient beings, and seek no other fruition.” This is why I ask you about being free from such propositions as one and other, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, and permanence and impermanence.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Excellent, excellent! You are able to ask me about such a matter, bringing much happiness and benefit and taking pity on all devas and human beings. Listen carefully, listen carefully, and ponder it well. I shall explain and distinguish it for you.” Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: “Excellent, World-Honored

One. Yes, I respectfully receive your instruction." The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "Foolish ordinary people, not knowing the measure of their own minds, grasp at inner and outer natures. Relying on the self-natures of one and other, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, they habitually give rise to imagined attachments."]

The Buddha praised Mahāmati Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent! You ask such a question out of pity for all devas and human beings, to bring them happiness and to benefit them. This is very good." The Buddha then told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: "Listen attentively, listen attentively. Reflect carefully, and I shall now explain and distinguish this for you."

Mahāmati Bodhisattva said: "Excellent, World-Honored One. We are listening attentively to your instruction."

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: Ordinary people are foolish and do not know that the world before them is not truly existent. Mistakenly believing that all things have their own real natures, they falsely grasp at inner and outer natures and arbitrarily generate discriminations. They then fabricate such speculative propositions as one and other, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, and permanence and impermanence, in order to explain these inner and outer self-natures. This occurs because they have habitual tendencies of imagined attachment from former lives, which bring about such errors. To explain this further, the Buddha next gives seven analogies:

[It is like a herd of deer, driven by thirst, who see the shimmering heat of springtime and conceive it to be water. Deluded, they run toward it, not knowing it is not water. So too, foolish people, perfumed by beginningless false imaginings, have their minds burned by the three poisons and delight in the realm of material forms. Seeing arising, abiding, and ceasing, they grasp at inner and outer natures, fall into conceptions of one and other, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, and falsely perceive and grasp.]

The first analogy is thirsty deer chasing shimmering heat. It is like a herd of thirsty deer, always seeking water to drink. When the spring sun shines upon the earth, it looks like water from afar; this is called shimmering heat. Seeing it, the thirsty deer take it for water. Not knowing that it is not water, they race about wildly in pursuit of it.

Because foolish ordinary people have been steeped in false imagined attachments since beginningless kalpas, these have become stubborn habitual tendencies. The three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance burn their minds, and they delight in

being immersed in material realms. Seeing arising, abiding, and ceasing in material realms—for example, that the physical body grows old and dies—they fabricate such speculative propositions as one and other, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, and permanence and impermanence. They vainly attempt to find a way permanently to grasp and retain material realms. This is also like thirsty deer chasing shimmering heat: the error lies in taking what is unreal to be real.

[It is like a city of gandharvas: foolish people without wisdom conceive it to be a city, as the appearances of their beginningless habitual attachments arise. It is not a city, yet it is not not a city. So too, non-Buddhist paths, through their beginningless false habitual attachments, rely on views of one and other, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, and cannot understand that these are manifestations of their own minds.]

The second analogy is the city of gandharvas. A city of gandharvas is a mirage. A mirage is only an image; there is not truly such a city, and thus it is “not a city.” Although it has no substantial entity, the image is not absent, and thus it is “not not a city.” Foolish ordinary people lack wisdom and think that the city truly exists.

Non-Buddhist paths are the same. Because of beginningless false habitual attachments, they seek dharmas outside the mind and mistakenly take the impermanent world before their eyes to be truly existent. Having taken it as truly existent, yet seeing that it is impermanent and changes and disintegrates moment by moment, they fabricate such speculative propositions as one and other, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, and permanence and impermanence. They vainly try to explain the contradiction in taking the false for the real. All this is caused by their inability to understand that these are manifestations of their own minds.

[For example, someone dreams of men and women, elephants, horses, carriages, pedestrians, cities, towns, gardens, forests, mountains, rivers, bathing pools, and all kinds of splendid adornments, and enters among them. Upon awakening, he continues to recollect them. Mahāmati, what do you think? Is such a man wise and clever for not relinquishing his recollection of what he dreamed? Mahāmati said to the Buddha, “No, World-Honored One.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Ordinary beings are likewise devoured by wrong views. With the intelligence of non-Buddhist paths, they do not know that all is the dreamlike manifestation of their own mind; they rely on views of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence.”]

The third analogy is that of clinging to the recollection of a dream. “Wise and clever” means quick-witted and intelligent. For example, someone dreams of all kinds of men and women riding elephants, horses, or carriages, or traveling on foot, as well as cities, gardens, mountains, rivers, bathing pools, and other pure and splendid scenes. He himself enters among them. After awakening from the dream, he still clings to the recollection of the dreamscape.

The Buddha asked Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “Can a person who clings to the recollection of a dream be considered wise and clever?” Mahāmati Bodhisattva replied: “No.” The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “Ordinary beings who cling to the recollection of dreams in this way have already been devoured by their own incorrect views.”

The little cleverness of non-Buddhist paths is the same. They do not know that the world before their eyes is merely an illusory manifestation of their own mind, unreal like a dream. Yet they take it to be truly existent. This inevitably gives rise to all kinds of contradictions, so they fabricate speculative theories such as “sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence” to explain it.

[For example, a portrait is neither tall nor short, yet foolish ordinary people form notions of tallness and shortness regarding it. So too will future non-Buddhist paths, filled with the habitual tendencies of wrong views, rely on views of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, thereby destroying themselves and destroying others. As for my teaching of the unborn, which is free from existence and nonexistence, they too call it “nonexistence.” They slander cause and effect, uproot the roots of goodness, and destroy pure causes. Those who seek supreme attainment should keep far away from them. Speaking in this way, having fallen into the deluded views of existence and nonexistence regarding self, other, and both, they further fall into assertion and slander. Because of these wrong views, they will fall into hell.]

The fourth analogy is that of tallness and shortness in a portrait. “Tallness and shortness” means height. A portrait of a person cannot indicate whether that person’s stature is tall or short. Yet foolish ordinary people mistakenly take the portrait for the actual person and make mistaken judgments about height: if it is painted large, they say the person is tall; if it is painted small, they say the person is short.

Future non-Buddhist paths will be the same: their wrong views will blaze fiercely and their habitual tendencies will fill them. Relying on speculative theories such as “sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither

existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence," they destroy others and elevate themselves—though in fact they destroy themselves. They embellish their own claims and slander all else. They even slander the teaching of the unborn, which is free from existence and nonexistence, calling it baseless nonsense.

They deny cause and effect, uproot the roots of goodness, and destroy pure causes. Those who truly seek liberation should stay away from them. Speaking in this manner, after falling into the deluded views of "self, other, and both" and "existence and nonexistence," they fall still further into assertion and slander. Holding such poisonous views, they establish false doctrines and slander the true Dharma; they are bound to fall into hell.

Here, "self, other, and both" may be understood in this way: "self and other" means elevating oneself and slandering others. "Both" means, "If you enter your Dharma gate, you will destroy your own Dharma tradition." This sūtra passage speaks of "future non-Buddhist paths." The future of that time is precisely our present. Have we not already seen the situation the Buddha has just described?

[For example, someone with diseased eyes sees hanging hairs and tells everyone, "Look at these." Yet those hanging hairs are ultimately neither existent nor nonexistent, because they are seen and not seen. Non-Buddhist paths are likewise given to deluded perception and expectation. Relying on views of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, they slander the true Dharma and lead themselves and others into ruin.]

The fifth analogy is that of hanging hairs seen by diseased eyes. Diseased eyes are eyes afflicted with cataracts. Because of the eye disease, one sees hairs hanging before one's eyes and says to everyone, "Come and look at these hairs!" Yet in fact these hairs are ultimately neither existent nor nonexistent. Since there are in fact no hanging hairs, they are said to be "not existent."

Yet the illusory image that he mistakenly sees is not nonexistent, and so it is said to be "not nonexistent." "Because they are seen and not seen" means that, since these hanging hairs do not actually exist, they ought not to be seen. Owing to eye disease, however, one mistakes illusion for reality; this is because of the deluded perception of what is not seen. Non-Buddhist paths are the same: they have deluded perception and expectation. "Rare" means few: healthy eyes are many, diseased eyes few. "Expectation" means seeing.

Here, "perception and expectation" means "what is seen by diseased eyes." It can also mean seeking and hoping, that is, grasping. Non-Buddhist paths cling to mistaken and perverse views and rely on speculative theories such as "sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor

nonexistence, permanence and impermanence." They slander the true Dharma and lead themselves and others into ruin. Not only do they themselves fall into wrong views, but they lead others into wrong views as well.

[For example, a ring of fire is not a ring, yet foolish people imagine it to be a ring; the wise do not. Non-Buddhist paths are likewise given to wrong views, deluded perception, and expectation. Relying on notions of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, they give rise to the notion that all things possess an inherent nature.]

The sixth analogy is that of a fire-ring that is not a ring. When a torch is lit and whirled about, it appears as a ring. Most people know that there is actually no ring; it is only a torch in motion. But a few foolish people without wisdom believe that there is a ring. Non-Buddhist paths are the same. With wrong views, deluded perception, and expectation, they cling to mistaken and perverse views and rely on speculative theories such as "sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence." "All things possess an inherent nature" means mistakenly conceiving all unreal illusory appearances to possess a real nature.

[For example, water bubbles resemble maṇi jewels. Ignorant little children take them for maṇi jewels, grasp at them, and chase after them. Yet those water bubbles are neither maṇi jewels nor not maṇi jewels, because they can and cannot be grasped. Non-Buddhist paths are likewise perfumed by the habitual tendencies of wrong views and deluded thought. Where there is nothing at all, they speak of arising as existent; when conditions exist, they speak of cessation.]

The seventh analogy is that of water bubbles and maṇi jewels. Children blow bubbles for amusement. As the bubbles float about, they are brilliantly colored and resemble maṇi jewels. Foolish children take them to be jewels and chase after them, wanting to catch them. "Yet those water bubbles are neither maṇi jewels nor not maṇi jewels, because they can and cannot be grasped" means that they are water bubbles, not maṇi jewels; therefore, they are said to be "not maṇi jewels."

But they look very much like maṇi jewels and unlike anything else; anything else would not be a maṇi jewel—that is, it would be not a maṇi jewel. Because they do not resemble anything else, they are said to be "not not maṇi jewels." Water bubbles cannot be grasped—this is "not grasping." Yet one attempts to grasp this "not grasping"—this is "grasping and not grasping." One can never catch them, because of this "grasping and not grasping." Non-Buddhist paths are the same: perfumed by the habitual tendencies of wrong views and deluded thought, they falsely claim that an actual arising exists where there is nothing at all, and condition themselves on

this “existence.” When they cannot grasp it, they further falsely claim that there is “cessation.”

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, having established the three means of valid cognition and the five-member argument, they claim to have attained the noble wisdom of self-realization, free from the matters of the two self-natures. Yet they fabricate and cling to the notion that things possess an inherent nature.]

The three means of valid cognition are direct perception, inference, and erroneous cognition. The word “means” has the sense of measurement, as when one uses scales to determine an object’s weight. We will now use the great tidal bore of the Qiantang River as an example, in conjunction with the three kinds of objects and the three natures, to give a brief explanation of these three means of cognition.

When you hear that the Qiantang tidal bore is magnificent and surging, an image of its magnificent waves arises in your mind. This is called an “object that is a mere image”: it is only an independently imagined image.

When you watch a live television broadcast of the Qiantang tidal bore, it is no longer an independently imagined image. The image already carries the essential appearance of the Qiantang tidal bore; this is called an “object with substance.” When you are personally present and see it with your own eyes, hear it with your own ears, and directly experience the grandeur of the Qiantang tidal bore, this is called an “object as it is.”

In relation to the three natures, an “object that is a mere image” corresponds to the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment; an “object with substance” corresponds to the nature of dependence on others; and an “object as it is” corresponds to the nature of absolute reality and perfection. In relation to the three means of cognition, an “object as it is” corresponds to direct perception, an “object with substance” to inference, and an “object that is a mere image” to erroneous cognition.

Erroneous cognition is an incorrect conclusion. Śākyamuni, the World-Honored One, criticized the erroneous cognition of non-Buddhist paths. For beginners, he employed inference as an expedient teaching; ultimately, he revealed direct perception—the Tathāgata’s noble wisdom of self-realization, the supreme ultimate truth.

The five-member argument consists of thesis, reason, example, application, and conclusion. This is the specific method of inference. Simply put, the “thesis” is the proposition; the “reason” is the supporting evidence; the “example” is an analogy; the “application” is synthesis and logical fit; and the “conclusion” is the summary and final conclusion.

If the “reason” and “example” cannot elucidate the “thesis”—that is, if the “thesis” cannot fit with the “reason and example”—then there can be no “conclusion”; in other words, the conclusion cannot be established. For example, non-Buddhist paths say, “Sound is permanent.” This establishes a “thesis,” namely, that “sound has a permanent nature.”

What is their “reason”? They say it is “being produced”: when something is made, sound arises. What is their “example”? They cite striking a bell. The body of the bell has empty space within it; striking the bell is an act of production, and striking it produces the sound of the bell. Yet this plainly does not fit; it is not reasonable. If the bell did not have empty space within it and were a solid lump of metal, producing an action would not cause it to emit a bell sound.

If empty space is also a necessary condition, then empty space is not something produced. Thus “thesis, reason, and example” plainly do not fit, and the conclusion cannot be established.

In response to the false claims of non-Buddhist paths, the Buddhadharma says, “Sound is impermanent.” It establishes “impermanence” as its thesis and likewise takes “being produced” as its reason: when there is an action, there is sound; when there is no action, there is no sound; therefore sound is impermanent. Thesis and reason thus accord. As for the example, striking a bell is again used: whether or not the bell has empty space within it, when it is struck there is sound, and when it is not struck there is no sound.

When the body of a bell has empty space within it, striking it produces the sound of a bell; when it has no empty space within it, striking it produces a different sound. This further demonstrates the impermanence of sound. The “thesis, reason, and example” all correspond, so the conclusion is established. In addition, he means by “correspond” that the premise is appropriate. It is because non-Buddhists posit permanence that the Buddhadharma speaks of impermanence on this premise. Given this premise, positing impermanence is entirely appropriate. Without this premise, the Buddhadharma would not gratuitously establish a doctrine of impermanence.

Ha ha! Some people say, “All these twists and turns are making my head spin!” Yet this is how the philosophers of ancient India spoke. The Buddha lived in that era and also used this linguistic format to expound the Buddhadharma, “responding to sentient beings’ minds in accordance with what they are able to understand.”

Let us next consider the scripture: “Having established the three means of valid cognition and the five-part syllogism, one attains the noble wisdom of the Tathāgata’s self-realization and is free from the two self-natures.” The Buddhadharma uses such methods as the three means of valid cognition and the

five-part syllogism to establish, in each case, correct views in response to the various erroneous views of non-Buddhists.

Once these have been established, one thereby realizes the noble wisdom of the Tathāgata's self-realization and is free from the two self-natures of pervasive discrimination and dependence on others. The noble wisdom of the Tathāgata's self-realization is the nature of absolute reality and perfection; it is anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. "And then one imagines and clings to it as having self-nature."

What does this sentence of the scripture mean? It means that even the noble wisdom of the Tathāgata's self-realization is unobtainable—"no wisdom and no attainment." If, after being free from the two self-natures of pervasive discrimination and dependence on others, one takes the nature of absolute reality and perfection to be truly existent and attainable, this too is deluded attachment.

The Diamond Sūtra says: "Subhūti, what do you think? Did the Tathāgata obtain anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi from Dīpaṃkara Buddha through any dharma?" "No, World-Honored One. As I understand the meaning of the Buddha's teaching, the Buddha did not obtain anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi from Dīpaṃkara Buddha through any dharma." The Buddha said, "So it is, so it is."

"Subhūti, in truth there is no dharma through which the Tathāgata obtained anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. Subhūti, if there had been a dharma through which the Tathāgata obtained anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi, then Dīpaṃkara Buddha would not have given me the prediction: 'In a future life you shall become a Buddha named Śākyamuni.'"

"Precisely because there is in truth no dharma through which anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi is obtained, Dīpaṃkara Buddha gave me the prediction, saying: 'In a future life you shall become a Buddha named Śākyamuni.' Why is this so? Tathāgata means the suchness of all dharmas. If anyone says that the Tathāgata obtained anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi, Subhūti, in truth there is no dharma through which the Buddha obtained anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. Subhūti, in the anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi obtained by the Tathāgata, there is neither reality nor unreality."

[Mahāmati, the transformations of mind, intellect, and consciousness; what appears from one's own mind; the cessation of all deluded thoughts of grasping and what is grasped; and the noble wisdom of self-realization at the Tathāgata stage. Practitioners do not conceive of these as having self-nature or lacking self-nature.]

Let us first discuss "Practitioners do not conceive of these as having self-nature or lacking self-nature." To "conceive of self-nature" is to regard something as having real self-nature; to "conceive of no self-nature" is to regard it as having no real self-nature. "Not conceiving of these as having self-nature or lacking self-nature" is what

the Diamond Sūtra means by “there is neither reality nor unreality.” Of what does one not conceive in terms of self-nature or no self-nature?

One does not conceive of “mind, intellect, and consciousness” in terms of self-nature or no self-nature. Mind, intellect, and consciousness broadly refer to the eight consciousnesses.

One does not conceive of “the transformations of body and mind” in terms of self-nature or no self-nature. Transformation of the body, for example, means transforming the physical body into a rainbow body. Transformation of the mind refers to transforming consciousness into wisdom.

One does not conceive of “what appears from one’s own mind” in terms of self-nature or no self-nature—that is, one does not think: Is what appears from one’s own mind existent or nonexistent?

One does not conceive of “the cessation of all deluded thoughts of grasping and what is grasped” in terms of self-nature or no self-nature. This means that all the many deluded thoughts of the grasper and the grasped have ceased.

One does not conceive of “the noble wisdom of self-realization at the Tathāgata stage” in terms of self-nature or no self-nature. This is what the Diamond Sūtra means by: “In the anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi obtained by the Tathāgata, there is neither reality nor unreality.”

[Mahāmati, if practitioners give rise to the marks of grasping at these states as having self-nature or lacking self-nature, they thereby grasp at a life span and at self and person.]

If practitioners give rise to marks of grasping at the foregoing states as real or unreal, they are then attached to self, person, sentient being, and life span. “Life span” is what is meant by “long cultivation.”

[Mahāmati, if one teaches the self-nature and the individual and shared characteristics of those things, all this is taught by transformation Buddhas, not by the Dharma-body Buddha. Moreover, all verbal teachings arise from the hopes and views of foolish ordinary people. They are not discriminatively expounded for those who establish and enter the dharma of self-nature, attain the noble wisdom of self-realization, and abide blissfully in samādhi.]

The Tathāgata’s teaching includes both ultimate and provisional teachings. “Provisional” means skillful expedient means. The Buddha may also expediently speak of such dharmas as self-nature and characteristics, but all such theories are expedient teachings spoken by transformation Buddhas, not true teachings spoken by the Dharma-body Buddha. Transformation Buddhas speak expedient teachings

because the hopes and views of foolish ordinary people arise. That is, ordinary people are ignorant and their capacities and conditions are not yet mature.

They can only be given expedient teachings. These expedient teachings are not discriminatively expounded for "those who establish and enter the dharma of self-nature, attain the noble wisdom of self-realization, and abide blissfully in samādhi." Such persons are great bodhisattvas, great beings of the Dharma body.

The expedient teachings spoken by transformation Buddhas likewise use linguistic forms resembling the tetralemma, aiming to free sentient beings from deluded attachment so that they may realize what appears in the immediate measure of their own minds. But the tetralemma of non-Buddhists is conditioned by habitual views, and they cannot know what appears in the immediate measure of their own minds. For this reason, the Buddha next gives five analogies:

[For example, the shadow of a tree appears in water. It is neither a shadow nor not a shadow, neither the form of a tree nor not the form of a tree. Thus non-Buddhists, conditioned by habitual views, engage in deluded conceptual attachment based on notions of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, and cannot know what appears in the immediate measure of their own minds.]

The first analogy is the tree shadow in water. The Buddha says that this tree shadow in water is "neither a shadow nor not a shadow," and that this tree form is "neither the form of a tree nor not the form of a tree," in order to show that it is what appears in the immediate measure of one's own mind, with no real object to be obtained. Yet non-Buddhists, conditioned by habitual views, engage in deluded conceptual attachment based on such proliferating theories as sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, and do not know that this is what appears in the immediate measure of their own minds.

[For example, a clear mirror manifests all forms and images in accordance with conditions, yet has no deluded thought. It is neither an image nor not an image; yet, seeing images and non-images, foolish people with deluded thoughts form conceptions of images. Thus, through the appearance of images from their own minds, non-Buddhists with mistaken views engage in deluded conceptual attachment based on views of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence.]

The second analogy is a clear mirror manifesting images. Consciousness, in accordance with conditions, gives rise to and manifests all forms and images without deluded thought, just as a mirror reflects all images without leaving a trace. Foolish

people see images, while the Buddha says they are not images. Foolish people see non-images, while the Buddha says they are not non-images. In their deluded thinking, foolish people even take non-images as images. Because of their habitual propensity for mistaken views, non-Buddhists have images appear from their own minds, yet they engage in deluded conceptual attachment based on views of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence. In other words, non-Buddhists cling to characteristics and argue their case with great confidence.

[For example, when wind and water combine, sound arises. It has neither self-nature nor no self-nature. Thus non-Buddhists' deluded thoughts based on mistaken views rely on views of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence.]

The third analogy is wind and water producing sound. When wind blows across the water's surface, wave upon wave resounds. This results from the conjunction of wind and water: the sound has no real self-nature, yet the sound of the waves is not absent. Therefore, the Buddha says that the sound of the waves has neither self-nature nor no self-nature. But non-Buddhists, in their deluded thoughts based on mistaken views, adhere to the sound of the waves through views of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence.

[For example, in a place on the earth without grass or trees, heat-haze flows like a river and surges like great billows and clouds. It has neither self-nature nor no self-nature, because one does not crave it or not crave it. Thus foolish people, conditioned by beginningless false habitual tendencies, engage in deluded conceptual attachment based on arising, abiding, and ceasing; sameness and difference; both and neither; existence and nonexistence; neither existence nor nonexistence; permanence and impermanence. Their conditioning upon the gateway of self-abiding phenomena is likewise like those heat-haze waves.]

The fourth analogy is heat-haze waves. In a place on the earth without grass or trees, heat-haze seems to flow like a river, with great billows and clouds surging forth. This is the "sun-haze" discussed earlier. Sun-haze is not water, yet it looks like water; therefore, the Buddha says that sun-haze has neither self-nature nor no self-nature. The wise do not crave this illusory appearance of "neither self-nature nor no self-nature," knowing that it is not water.

Foolish people crave this water, like the thirsty deer chasing the heat-haze described earlier.

Such ignorant ordinary people, conditioned by beginningless false habitual tendencies, engage in deluded conceptual attachment. They manipulate theories of arising, abiding, and ceasing, as well as theories of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, using these theories to condition themselves upon the gateway of self-abiding phenomena. This too is like mistaking heat-haze for water.

What is the "gateway of self-abiding phenomena"? It is such phenomenal appearances as arising, abiding, and ceasing that appear from one's own mind. "Their conditioning upon the gateway of self-abiding phenomena is likewise like those heat-haze waves" means that, although they already know these are appearances from their own minds, they turn around and condition themselves upon their own minds. This too is taking the false for the real.

[For example, someone activates a contrivance by means of a spell, causing a piśāca spirit—which is not counted among living beings—to combine with it by expedient means, so that it moves about like clouds. Foolish ordinary people engage in deluded conceptual attachment, taking it to come and go. Thus non-Buddhists, with the hopes of mistaken views, engage in proliferating conceptual attachment and make unreal constructions based on views of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence.]

The fifth analogy is a contrivance activated by a spell. Some people can make wooden figures that walk. Such a wooden figure is not a living being; it can move because its maker commands a piśāca spirit, which causes the wooden figure to move. Ignorant ordinary people engage in deluded conceptual attachment, thinking that the wooden figure can truly come and go. Non-Buddhists are the same: prompted by the hopes of mistaken views, they take the false for the real. Relying on views of sameness and difference, both and neither, existence and nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, they engage in deluded conceptual calculation and establish all kinds of unrealistic proliferating theories.

[Mahāmati, therefore, those who wish to attain the reality of the noble wisdom of self-realization should abandon deluded thoughts based on such mistaken views as arising, abiding, and ceasing; sameness and difference; both and neither; existence and nonexistence; neither existence nor nonexistence; permanence and impermanence.]

The Buddha told Bodhisattva Mahāmati: "In summary, if one wishes to directly realize the Tathāgata's noble wisdom of self-realization, one should keep far from

the deluded views and imaginings of ‘arising, abiding, and ceasing,’ and of ‘one and different, both and neither both, existent and nonexistent, neither existent nor nonexistent, permanent and impermanent.’”

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]
[Like illusions, dreams, reflections of trees in water, dangling hairs, and shimmering heat-hazes—thus contemplate the three existences, and one will ultimately attain liberation.]

The three existences are existence in the desire realm, existence in the form realm, and existence in the formless realm. The three existences are the three realms. The three realms are not truly existent; they are like illusions, dreams, reflections of trees in water, dangling hairs seen by diseased eyes, and shimmering heat-hazes. Only by viewing the three realms in this way can one ultimately attain liberation.

[Like a thirsty deer imagining water, its confused mind is disturbed and agitated; it takes a mirage for water, though in truth there is no water there.]

The confused mind of sentient beings is like a thirsty deer chasing a mirage. The deer mistakes the mirage for water, but in fact it is not water.

[Thus the seeds of consciousness, stirred into movement, perceive objects; deluded ordinary people give rise to imaginings, as though their eyes were obscured by a cataract.]

When the seeds of the eight consciousnesses encounter conditions and become active, the realm of manifest movement arises. Deluded ordinary beings see these objects, give rise to imaginings, and take them to be truly existent. It is like diseased eyes obscured by cataracts, falsely seeing images.

[Throughout beginningless birth and death, one clings to and appropriates a self-nature. Like using a wedge in reverse to dislodge a wedge, abandon greedy appropriation.]

Since beginningless time, we have appropriated birth and death and clung to it as truly existent. Such attachment is like a wedge nailed firmly into a wall—how entrenched these habitual tendencies of attachment are! If one wishes to transcend birth and death, one must go against oneself, knock out the wedge, abandon craving, and abandon appropriation.

[Like magical spells and mechanical contrivances, floating clouds, dreams, lightning, and shimmering heat-hazes: contemplate them thus and attain liberation, forever cutting off the three continuities.]

The three continuities are the continuity of the world, the continuity of sentient beings, and the continuity of karmic results. These “three continuities” are in fact birth and death. View birth and death as illusory and unreal: like a wooden puppet, which is not a person; like floating clouds, indistinct and drifting; like a dream, unreal; or like lightning, vanishing in an instant. Only then can one transcend birth and death.

[There is no making there, just as with shimmering heat-hazes and empty space. To know all dharmas in this way is to have no knowing.]

“No making” means non-contrivance. All dharmas are unconditioned; like shimmering heat-hazes and empty space, they cannot be grasped. To know all dharmas in this way is to have no knowing. No knowing is true knowing.

[Verbal teachings are merely provisional names; they too have no characteristics. If one gives rise to deluded imaginings about them, the aggregates move like dangling hairs.]

Expedient verbal teachings are also provisional names; no true characteristic can be obtained from them. If one gives rise to deluded imaginings and attachment regarding expedient verbal teachings, it is like ghosts driving wooden puppets or diseased eyes seeing dangling hairs: one mistakes the false for the true.

[Like painted images, dangling hairs, illusions, dreams, cities of gandharvas, fire-wheels, and shimmering heat-hazes: what does not exist appears as sentient beings.]

The appearances of sentient beings are like the varying heights of painted images, dangling hairs seen by diseased eyes, a mirage city, a firebrand whirled into a circle, or waves of heat haze. Sentient beings have no inherent existence; they are only illusory appearances manifested by consciousness.

[Permanent and impermanent, one and different, both and neither both as well: from beginningless time these erroneous notions have continued, as the foolish imaginings of deluded ordinary people.]

Discursive speculations such as “one and different, both and neither both, existent and nonexistent, neither existent nor nonexistent, permanent and impermanent” are the continuing influence of erroneous habits from beginningless time; they are the deluded imaginings of ignorant ordinary beings.

[In a bright mirror, water, clear eyes, and a marvelous maṇi jewel, many colors appear, yet in truth nothing is there.]

It is like images in a mirror, reflections in water, people seen in the eye, or colors reflected by a jewel: all the various forms and appearances are in fact entirely nonexistent.

[All natures appear like paintings and shimmering heat-hazes; the many colors that appear are like dreams, with nothing truly there.]

Not only are material forms thus; the nature of material forms—"all natures"—is also thus. Like the varying heights of painted images or the waves of a heat haze, the natures manifested through the many forms are like dreams and illusions, entirely nonexistent. Take a stone, for example: its nature is hardness. This hardness too is entirely nonexistent; it is only an illusory manifestation of consciousness.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, the Tathāgata teaches the Dharma apart from such four propositions: namely, one and different, both and neither both, existent and nonexistent, neither existent nor nonexistent, permanent and impermanent. Apart from existence and nonexistence, assertion and denial, and discrimination, he integrates ultimate truth, dependent arising, the path, cessation, and liberation. The Tathāgata teaches the Dharma with this as foremost—not on the basis of a self-nature, a sovereign creator, causelessness, atoms, time, or the continuity of inherent nature.]

The Buddha again told Bodhisattva Mahāmati: "The Tathāgata teaches the Dharma apart from the four propositions of 'one and different, both and neither both, existent and nonexistent, neither existent nor nonexistent, permanent and impermanent'; apart from the two extreme erroneous views of existence and nonexistence; apart from assertion and denial; and apart from deluded discrimination."

What the Tathāgata teaches does not depart from ultimate truth, but accords with the causes and conditions of sentient beings, explaining according to their kinds the path of quiescent liberation. This is foremost in the Tathāgata's teaching. It is not the doctrine of a spiritual self, not the doctrine that Mahādeva created the world, not causelessness, not the theory that minute genetic elements evolved over long periods, nor the theory of hereditary continuity through inherent nature. Free from all such theories, the Tathāgata teaches the Dharma for sentient beings.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, in order to purify the obstacles of afflictions and cognitive obscurations, the Tathāgata, like a merchant leader, progressively establishes the one hundred and eight statements of nonexistence and skillfully distinguishes the characteristics of the various vehicles and stages.]

First, let us explain "the obstacles of afflictions and cognitive obscurations." The obstruction of afflictions is the obstruction of delusion, while the obstruction of

cognitive obscurations is the obstruction of awakening and wisdom. Next, let us explain “the one hundred and eight statements of nonexistence.” Nonexistence means the Dharma of no characteristics. The one hundred and eight statements of nonexistence are one hundred and eight Dharma gates of no characteristics.

The Buddha again told Bodhisattva Mahāmati: In order to purify the obstacles that great bodhisattvas encounter with respect to delusion and awakening, the Tathāgata progressively established one hundred and eight Dharma gates of no characteristics. He explained to bodhisattvas the different aspirations of the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, and the distinctions among the mental characteristics of the various bodhisattva stages. It is like a merchant leader who skillfully guides merchants in trade.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, there are four kinds of dhyāna. What are the four? They are the dhyāna practiced by ordinary people, dhyāna that examines meaning, dhyāna that relies on suchness, and the Tathāgata’s dhyāna.]

The Buddha again told Bodhisattva Mahāmati: There are four kinds of dhyāna: the dhyāna practiced by ordinary people, dhyāna that examines meaning, dhyāna that relies on suchness, and the Tathāgata’s dhyāna.

[What is the dhyāna practiced by ordinary people? It is the practice of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and followers of non-Buddhist paths, who contemplate the individual and general characteristics of the absence of a personal self, bones, impermanence, suffering, and impurity, taking attachment and conceptualization as foremost. In this way, they do not depart from these characteristics in contemplation; they proceed from one stage to the next, without eliminating the appearances. This is called the dhyāna practiced by ordinary people.]

What is the dhyāna practiced by ordinary people? It refers to the meditation methods practiced by śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and followers of non-Buddhist paths. For example, in the contemplation of bones, they contemplate the true nature of the individual and general characteristics of the absence of a personal self. They visualize a person as a skeleton: the person is impermanent, suffering, and impure. They make conceptual attachment to a skeleton their foremost concern.

They continue sitting in meditation and visualizing a skeleton in this way, without undertaking other contemplations. They proceed step by step, without eliminating the appearance. “Proceeding step by step” means contemplating in sequence; for example, first contemplating the toes as bones and then gradually extending upward. “Without eliminating the appearance” means rigidly clinging to a skeleton and not eliminating the appearance of the skeleton. This is the dhyāna practiced by ordinary people.

[What is dhyāna that examines meaning? Having understood that the individual and general characteristics of the absence of a personal self, and the self and other posited by non-Buddhist paths, are both without inherent nature, one contemplates the absence of a dharma-self. The meanings and characteristics of those stages progressively advance. This is called dhyāna that examines meaning.]

What is dhyāna that examines meaning? This is the practice cultivated by bodhisattvas at the initial gate. First, let us explain "both are without inherent nature." It means that both are unreal and both have been relinquished. What has been relinquished? The individual and general characteristics of the absence of a personal self, and the self and other of non-Buddhist paths.

After relinquishing these, one contemplates the absence of a dharma-self; that is, one goes beyond the absence of a personal self and then contemplates the absence of a dharma-self. The Supplementary Notes on the Verses on the Eight Consciousnesses says: "At the stage of utmost joy, the two discriminative obstructions are absent; the innate attachments of the sixth and seventh consciousnesses are removed stage by stage." "Discriminative" means discriminative attachment to self. The two obstructions are the obstruction of afflictions and the obstruction of what is known. "Utmost joy" means the first bhūmi, the Ground of Joy.

"The innate attachments of the sixth and seventh consciousnesses" are the innate attachment to self latent in the sixth and seventh consciousnesses. A first-bhūmi bodhisattva has already eliminated discriminative attachment to self and removed the obstruction of afflictions and the obstruction of what is known. Yet to eliminate innate attachment to self, one must pass through the process from the second to the seventh bhūmi, eliminating it at each stage. This is what the sūtra calls "the meanings and characteristics of those stages progressively advance." This is dhyāna that examines meaning.

[What is dhyāna that relies on suchness? It is deluded imagination, the twofold absence of self, and deluded imagination; at the place of suchness, no deluded imagination arises. This is called dhyāna that relies on suchness.]

What is dhyāna that relies on suchness? This is the practice cultivated by bodhisattvas of perfect and sudden awakening. In "deluded imagination, the twofold absence of self, and deluded imagination," the first "deluded imagination" refers to the two attachments to self and dharmas. Through "the meanings and characteristics of those stages progressively advance," one reaches the state of the twofold absence of self. Yet if one grasps this twofold absence of self as truly existent, that too is deluded imagination. In "dhyāna that relies on suchness," suchness means reality as it is. At the place of suchness, no deluded imagination

arises; even the twofold absence of self cannot be grasped. This is dhyāna that relies on suchness, cultivated by bodhisattvas from the eighth bhūmi onward.

[What is the Tathāgata's dhyāna? It is entering the Tathāgata stage, attaining the three blissful abidings that are characteristics of the noble wisdom of self-realization, and accomplishing inconceivable deeds for sentient beings. This is called the Tathāgata's dhyāna.]

What is the Tathāgata's dhyāna? It means entering and realizing the Buddha stage, attaining the Tathāgata's noble wisdom of self-realization, and accomplishing the three blissful abidings. The three blissful abidings are the nirvāṇa of the three virtues. The three virtues are the virtue of dharmakāya, the virtue of prajñā, and the virtue of liberation. Each of these three virtues possesses the four qualities of permanence, bliss, self, and purity.

The three virtues are transformed from the three defilements of suffering, delusion, and karma; this is called "transforming the three defilements into the three virtues." "Transforming" means conversion. First, transform the body of suffering into the virtue of dharmakāya. This means that, with respect to the impermanent body of arising and ceasing, if one can contemplate that the five aggregates are originally empty and neither arise nor cease, it becomes dharmakāya.

As Chan Master Linji said: "The pure light in a single thought of your mind is the Buddha of the Dharma body within your own house."

2. Transforming afflictions into the virtue of prajñā. This means that if one can observe that the afflictions arising from consciousness are empty in essence and that their inherent nature is unreal, they become wisdom. As Chan Master Linji said: "The non-discriminating light in a single thought of your mind is the Buddha of the reward body within your own house."

3. Transforming karmic bonds into the virtue of liberation. Liberation means freedom. This means that if one can observe that the actions performed by body and speech are empty in nature, there will be no appearance of bondage; one will be free in relation to all dharmas and thereby attain liberation. As Chan Master Linji said: "The non-differentiating light in a single thought of your mind is the Buddha of the manifestation body within your own house."

"To accomplish inconceivable deeds for sentient beings": inconceivable deeds are the wondrous functioning of non-contrivance. To accomplish inconceivable deeds for sentient beings means to give rise to functioning directly from one's present reality and bring sentient beings to accomplishment. This is Tathāgata Chan.

At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses: The meditation practiced by ordinary people / Meditation that observes the meaning of appearances / Meditation that engages suchness / The pure meditation of the Tathāgata Like the forms of the sun and moon / Like a deep and perilous red lotus / Like empty space when the fire has gone out / These are what practitioners contemplate / Such various appearances / Are the meditations of non-Buddhist paths and their powers / They also fall into the realms / Of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas

Botoumo means a red lotus. Non-Buddhists mistakenly cling to a spiritual self and cultivate on this basis. When they enter samādhi, they may contemplate the forms of the sun and moon, bright, pure, and shining, or see red lotuses in the sea, and take these to be real. “Deep and perilous” means that the deeper one’s practice becomes, the more dangerous it is. “Practitioners” refers to followers of the Lesser Vehicle.

Followers of the Lesser Vehicle lose heart and extinguish their aspirations. They contemplate suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and nonself; seeing things as empty as space, without anything in them, or as fire extinguished when the fuel is spent, they take the emptiness of all things to be nirvāṇa. The various appearances mentioned above are states of meditative absorption belonging either to non-Buddhists or to śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

Abandon all these / Then there is nothing whatsoever / The Buddhas in all Buddha-lands / With inconceivable hands / At one time touch the crowns of their heads / In accordance with them, they enter the appearance of suchness

One should abandon all the appearances mentioned above. When practitioners see these various appearances arise, they should not grasp at them. If they become attached to them, they fall into the erroneous meditation of non-Buddhists or into the states of the two vehicles. Abandoning these various appearances, one sees that not a single dharma can be obtained. Even if “the Buddhas in all Buddha-lands, with inconceivable hands, at one time touch the crowns of their heads and, in accordance with them, enter the appearance of suchness,” this too is nothing whatsoever.

Outline of This Chapter:

Freedom from the four propositions and the severing of a hundred negations is the outline of this chapter. This chapter not only emphasizes remaining free from the four propositions, but also discusses the three means of valid knowledge, the five-part syllogism, and the four kinds of meditation.

The meditation practiced by ordinary people: cultivated by followers of the Lesser Vehicle and non-Buddhists. The difference is that non-Buddhists cling through

deluded thought and adhere to existence, whereas those of the two vehicles lose heart and extinguish their aspirations, inclining toward emptiness. Its principal content is “the absence of a personal self.”

Meditation that observes the meaning of appearances: cultivated by bodhisattvas at the initial gate of the Mahāyāna. Its principal content is “the absence of a self in phenomena.”

Meditation that engages suchness: cultivated by bodhisattvas of the complete and sudden Mahāyāna. Its principal content is that no deluded thoughts arise in the realm of suchness.

The pure meditation of the Tathāgata: one has already entered the ground of the Tathāgata. Its principal content is “accomplishing inconceivable deeds for sentient beings.”

The Song of Enlightenment says: “Upon sudden awakening, one understands Tathāgata Chan; the six perfections and myriad practices are complete within its essence.” This is precisely “accomplishing inconceivable deeds for sentient beings.” “The true nature of ignorance is itself Buddha-nature; this illusory, empty body is itself the Dharma body.” Transforming the body of suffering into Buddha-nature is the virtue of the Dharma body. “The awakened Dharma body contains not a single thing; the self-existing nature at its source is the naturally genuine Buddha.” Transforming afflictions into awakening is the virtue of prajñā. “The five aggregates are like floating clouds, empty in their coming and going; the three poisons are like water bubbles, illusorily appearing and disappearing.” Transforming delusion and karma so that they are empty and unreal is the virtue of liberation.

13. Mahāparinirvāṇa

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva Mahāsattva again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, when parinirvāṇa is spoken of, what dharma is meant by nirvāṇa?”]

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked, “What exactly does the World-Honored One mean by ‘parinirvāṇa’? What kind of dharma is called nirvāṇa?”

Non-Buddhists mistakenly take the “spiritual self” to be nirvāṇa; followers of the Lesser Vehicle take the extinguishing of mind and aspiration to be nirvāṇa; and the Buddhas directly realize ultimate nirvāṇa. Although these three are all called nirvāṇa, their actual meanings differ greatly. To prevent their being confused, Mahāmati Bodhisattva posed this question.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The transformation of all habitual tendencies of self-nature—storehouse consciousness, mind, consciousness, views, and habits—is called nirvāṇa. The nirvāṇa of all Buddhas and of myself is the realm in which the nature of things is empty.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: Transformation is nirvāṇa. What is transformed? All habitual tendencies of self-nature are transformed. These habitual tendencies include “storehouse consciousness, mind, consciousness, views, and habits.”

“Storehouse consciousness, mind, and consciousness” refer to the eight consciousnesses. Their transformation means transforming consciousness into wisdom. Specifically, the sixth consciousness is transformed into wondrous observing wisdom; the seventh consciousness into the wisdom of equality; the eighth consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom; and the first five consciousnesses into the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done.

The transformation of views means transforming wrong views into right view; simply put, it means eliminating deluded thoughts. The transformation of habits means transforming habitual tendencies into wondrous functioning; simply put, it means breaking attachment. “The nirvāṇa of all Buddhas and of myself is the realm in which the nature of things is empty”: the nirvāṇa realized by all Buddhas and by myself has no attainable nature of nirvāṇa either. This is why it is called “the realm in which the nature of things is empty.”

Just as the Diamond Sūtra says: “If there had been any dharma by which the Tathāgata attained unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment, Dīpaṃkara Buddha would not have bestowed upon me the prediction, ‘In a future life, you shall become a Buddha named Śākyamuni.’ Yet because there was in truth no dharma by which to attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment, Dīpaṃkara Buddha bestowed this prediction upon me, saying: ‘In a future life, you shall become a Buddha named Śākyamuni.’”

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, nirvāṇa is the realm of self-realization by noble wisdom, free from deluded thoughts of annihilation and eternalism, existence and nonexistence. Why is it not eternal? Because deluded thoughts of individual characteristics and shared characteristics are cut off; therefore, it is not eternal. Why is it not annihilation? Because noble ones of the past, future, and present attain self-realization; therefore, it is not annihilation.]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: The realm of self-realization by noble wisdom is nirvāṇa. Both annihilation and permanence are deluded thoughts. Nirvāṇa is neither annihilation nor permanence. “Nature” means having nature,

while “non-nature” means lacking nature. Nirvāṇa is neither existent nor nonexistent.

Why is it said not to be permanent? Because the deluded thoughts of individual characteristics, arising from individual karma, and shared characteristics, arising from collective karma, which have continued throughout innumerable kalpas, are all cut off; therefore, it is not permanent. Why is it said not to be annihilation? Because noble ones of the past, present, and future alike realize this realm of self-realization by noble wisdom; therefore, it is not annihilation. Simply put, because ordinary emotional attachments are cut off, it is not permanent; because one sees one’s intrinsic nature, it is not annihilation.

[Mahāmati, nirvāṇa neither decays nor dies. If nirvāṇa died, it would again undergo the continuity of birth. If it decayed, it would fall into the characteristics of the conditioned. Therefore, nirvāṇa is free from decay and death; thus it is the refuge of practitioners.]

Nirvāṇa neither decays nor dies. If it could die, it should also be born; that would be the continuity of birth and death, not nirvāṇa. If it could decay, it would also come into formation; that would be the conditioned cycle of formation, duration, decay, and emptiness, not nirvāṇa. Therefore, nirvāṇa neither decays nor dies. Thus, nirvāṇa is the ultimate destination of Mahāyāna practitioners.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, nirvāṇa is neither abandonment nor attainment, neither annihilation nor eternalism, neither the meaning of oneness nor the meaning of multiplicity. This is called nirvāṇa.]

In sum, nirvāṇa has nothing that can be abandoned and cannot be attained. It is neither annihilation nor eternalism; it is neither merely the single meaning of emptiness nor the meaning of the manifold existence of all things. Rather, it is the self-realized noble wisdom of the Tathāgata, provisionally called nirvāṇa.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, the nirvāṇa of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas consists in recognizing individual characteristics and shared characteristics, while not becoming familiar with or approaching sense objects. Their views are not inverted, and deluded thoughts do not arise. They take this to be the realization of nirvāṇa.]

The nirvāṇa discussed above is that realized by all Buddhas, the Tathāgatas. The so-called “nirvāṇa” of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is not like this. What, then, is their nirvāṇa? It is “recognizing individual characteristics and shared characteristics, while not becoming familiar with or approaching sense objects; having views that are not inverted, and not giving rise to deluded thoughts.”

Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are earnest in their wish to leave suffering behind. Regarding the individual and shared characteristics of the five aggregates, twelve sense bases, and eighteen elements, they generate contemplation of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and non-self. This is "recognizing individual characteristics and shared characteristics." Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas extinguish their aspirations; they take no pleasure in becoming familiar with or approaching the realms of the six sense objects. This is "not becoming familiar with or approaching sense objects." Having views that are not inverted means cutting off delusions of view.

Deluded thoughts not arising means cutting off delusions of thought. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas extinguish suffering and its origination and realize true emptiness. They take the path of true emptiness to be the realization of nirvāṇa—that is, they take nirvāṇa to be something that can be realized. This is the partial nirvāṇa of true emptiness realized by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, there are two kinds of attachment to characteristics of self-nature. What are the two? They are attachment to the characteristics of self-nature in language and attachment to the characteristics of self-nature in things. Attachment to the characteristics of self-nature in language arises from attachment to the beginningless habitual tendencies of false language. Attachment to the characteristics of self-nature in things arises from failing to awaken to the distinctions manifested by one's own mind.]

Earlier, it was said that transforming "all habitual tendencies of self-nature" is nirvāṇa. The "two kinds of characteristics of self-nature" discussed here are precisely the two kinds of characteristics within all habitual tendencies of self-nature: names and characteristics, and the characteristics of things. "Characteristics of self-nature in language" means names and characteristics; "attachment to the characteristics of self-nature in language" means deluded attachment to names and characteristics. "Attachment to the characteristics of self-nature in things" means deluded attachment to the characteristics of things.

Sentient beings are originally in nirvāṇa, yet because of these two kinds of deluded attachment, they cannot realize nirvāṇa. From where do these two kinds of deluded attachment arise? "Attachment to the characteristics of self-nature in language arises from attachment to the beginningless habitual tendencies of false language." Deluded attachment to names and characteristics originates in "attachment to the beginningless habitual tendencies of false language." "Beginningless" is easy to understand.

What is meant by "attachment to the habitual tendencies of false language"? Language cannot be separated from names and characteristics, nor from the

recognition and appropriation of names and characteristics. False means unreal; spurious means untrue. Habitual tendencies are habits. Calculating means deluded thought; attachment means clinging.

Attachment to the habitual tendencies of false language means the habit of deluded attachment to names and characteristics, which are themselves unreal. This habit has existed since beginningless time. Is this not beginningless ignorance? Intrinsic nature is originally luminous, yet one deludedly gives rise to a thought that apprehends this luminosity. In other words, the habitual tendency of deluded attachment to names and characteristics arises from beginningless ignorance. "Attachment to the characteristics of self-nature in things arises from failing to awaken to the distinctions manifested by one's own mind."

First, let us explain "distinctions." Distinctions means boundaries and delimitations—that is, the range something reaches, with the sense of limits and differences. "Distinctions manifested by one's own mind" means that all sorts of ranges and differences are illusory manifestations of one's own mind. Is this not the teaching that there are no dharmas outside the mind? Outside the mind, there is no so-called "objective world."

Not awakening means being unable to know. In other words, the habitual tendency of deluded attachment to the characteristics of things arises from being unable to know that there are no dharmas outside the mind. How, then, can sentient beings break through beginningless ignorance and know that there are no dharmas outside the mind? Please read on.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, the Tathāgata establishes bodhisattva mahāsattvas by means of two kinds of spiritual powers, enabling them to pay homage to all Buddhas and hear and receive the meaning of questions. What are these two kinds of spiritual powers? They are the spiritual power of samādhi and proper absorption, through which all bodies, faces, and speech are manifested, and the spiritual power of empowerment by hand.]

In order to enable sentient beings to break through beginningless ignorance and know that there are no dharmas outside the mind, the Tathāgata established the bodhisattva Dharma realm through two kinds of spiritual powers. In the bodhisattva Dharma realm, the great bodhisattvas pay homage to all Buddhas and hear and receive the meaning of questions. What are these two kinds of spiritual powers? The power of samādhi and the power of empowerment. Through the blessings of these two spiritual powers, sentient beings break through beginningless ignorance and know that there are no dharmas outside the mind.

Samādhi means proper absorption. "The spiritual power of samādhi and proper absorption, through which all bodies, faces, and speech are manifested," means, "In

whatever form one should be liberated, that form is manifested in order to teach the Dharma." This is Exoteric Buddhism. "Empowerment by hand" is a distinctive feature of Esoteric Buddhism. Clearly, this refers to Esoteric Buddhism. Through the two spiritual powers of Exoteric Buddhism and Esoteric Buddhism, the Tathāgata establishes the bodhisattva Dharma realm and blesses practitioners, enabling them to break through beginningless ignorance and know that there are no dharmas outside the mind. That is, they are enabled to open, reveal, awaken to, and enter the Buddha's knowledge and vision.

[Mahāmati, when bodhisattva mahāsattvas first enter the bodhisattva stages, they abide in the Buddha's spiritual power—namely, they enter the bodhisattva Mahāyāna illuminating samādhi. Having entered this samādhi, all Buddhas throughout the worlds of the ten directions manifest all bodies, faces, and speech for them through their spiritual powers, as in the case of Vajragarbha Bodhisattva Mahāsattva and other bodhisattva mahāsattvas endowed with such characteristics and virtues.]

First, consider this phrase: "as in the case of Vajragarbha Bodhisattva Mahāsattva." The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says: "At that time, Vajragarbha Bodhisattva Mahāsattva, receiving the Buddha's majestic spiritual power, entered the bodhisattva samādhi of the light of great wisdom. Immediately, in worlds of the ten directions, beyond as many worlds in one direction as motes of dust in ten billion Buddha lands, there were Tathāgatas named Vajragarbha."

In the same sequence, as many Buddhas as motes of dust in ten billion Buddha lands all manifested their bodies, each named Vajragarbha. It was likewise so in all worlds of the ten directions. With one voice they praised him, saying: "Excellent! Excellent! Vajragarbha, you are able to enter this bodhisattva samādhi of the light of great wisdom. All the Buddhas, as numerous as motes of dust in the worlds of the ten directions, bearing the same name, bestow upon you their majestic spiritual power."

Now consider this phrase: "enter the bodhisattva Mahāyāna illuminating samādhi." In comparison with the passage from the Avataṃsaka Sūtra cited above, it is clear that "enter the bodhisattva Mahāyāna illuminating samādhi" means "enter the bodhisattva samādhi of the light of great wisdom," or, more simply, "enter luminous samādhi." Earlier it was said, "The Tathāgata establishes bodhisattva mahāsattvas by means of two kinds of spiritual powers."

Here, "bodhisattva mahāsattvas, when they first enter the bodhisattva stages, abide in the Buddha's spiritual power" means that bodhisattvas abide in the Buddha's "spiritual power of samādhi and proper absorption, through which all bodies, faces, and speech are manifested." That is, the vows of the bodhisattvas resonate with the

Buddha's power of blessing; mind seals mind, and minds mutually accord. This is what is called "entering luminous samādhi."

Note! The luminous samādhi spoken of here far transcends the meditative states entered through seated meditation. After entering such luminous samādhi, all the Buddhas of the ten directions, through the power of their spiritual powers, manifest to the bodhisattva every kind of body, countenance, and speech. It is like Vajragarbha Bodhisattva described in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, and like the many other great bodhisattvas who have likewise attained such accomplishment.

Mahāmati, this is what is called the first bhūmi of a bodhisattva mahāsattva. Through the spiritual power of proper attainment in bodhisattva samādhi, accomplished by accumulating wholesome roots over hundreds of thousands of kalpas, one proceeds through the successive bhūmis, thoroughly understands the characteristics of the antidotes and what they counteract, and reaches the ultimate, arriving at the Dharma Cloud bhūmi.

Dwelling in a wondrous palace of great lotuses and seated upon a jeweled lion throne of great lotuses, surrounded by a retinue of bodhisattva mahāsattvas of the same rank, with their bodies adorned by necklaces of many jewels, like golden campaka flowers, radiant as the sun and moon, they are consecrated on the crown of the head by the hands of the Supreme Ones coming from the ten directions, upon the seat in the great lotus palace. It is like the consecration of the crown prince of a sovereign wheel-turning king, or of the son of Śakra, lord of the devas. This is called the spiritual power of the bodhisattva's hand-consecration.

A first-bhūmi bodhisattva receives from the Buddhas the spiritual power of proper attainment in this bodhisattva samādhi, "accomplished through the accumulation of wholesome roots over hundreds of thousands of kalpas." This means that first-bhūmi bodhisattvas must accumulate wholesome roots over hundreds of thousands of kalpas before they can receive such mindful protection and empowerment from the Tathāgatas. "One proceeds through the successive bhūmis, thoroughly understands the characteristics of the antidotes and what they counteract, and reaches the ultimate, arriving at the Dharma Cloud bhūmi."

This means that bodhisattvas advance upward from the first bhūmi and gradually realize each of the bhūmis above it. They thoroughly understand all the methods of antidote and the characteristics of the afflictions they counteract, and realize the tenth bhūmi—the Dharma Cloud bhūmi.

"Dwelling in a wondrous palace of great lotuses and seated upon a jeweled lion throne of great lotuses, surrounded by a retinue of bodhisattva mahāsattvas of the same rank, with their bodies adorned by necklaces of many jewels, like golden campaka flowers, radiant as the sun and moon."

This means that tenth-bhūmi bodhisattvas dwell in wondrous palaces of great lotuses and sit upon jeweled lion thrones of great lotuses. Great bodhisattvas of the same rank, forming their retinue, surround them to hear the Dharma. Their bodies are adorned with necklaces of many jewels and are as radiant as the color of gold and campaka flowers, like the sun and moon. (Campaka, also called yellow magnolia, bears white flowers.

) “The hands of the Supreme Ones come from the ten directions and consecrate them on the crown of the head upon the seat in the great lotus palace. It is like the consecration of the crown prince of a sovereign wheel-turning king, or of the son of Śakra, lord of the devas. This is called the spiritual power of the bodhisattva’s hand-consecration.” At that time, the Buddhas come from the ten directions and personally consecrate them on the crown of the head upon the seats in the great lotus palaces where they are seated. It is like the crown prince of a sovereign wheel-turning king receiving the royal consecration and succeeding to the throne, or the son of Śakra receiving consecration and thereby gaining sovereignty in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. This is the “spiritual power of hand-consecration” received by great bodhisattvas from the Buddhas.

Mahāmati, these are called the two kinds of spiritual power of bodhisattva mahāsattvas. If bodhisattva mahāsattvas abide in these two kinds of spiritual power, they see the Tathāgatas face to face. If they do not do so, they cannot see them.

What has been explained above is that great bodhisattvas receive the Buddha’s empowerment through two kinds of spiritual power. If great bodhisattvas abide in the empowerment of these two kinds of spiritual power, they can see the Tathāgatas face to face. If they do not abide in this spiritual power, they cannot see them.

Furthermore, Mahāmati, all the practices involving discriminative wisdom, samādhi, spiritual powers, and other dharmas possessed by bodhisattva mahāsattvas all abide in the Tathāgata’s two kinds of spiritual power. Mahāmati, if bodhisattva mahāsattvas could expound the Dharma apart from the Buddha’s spiritual power, then all ordinary beings should likewise be able to expound it. Why is this so? Because they do not abide in spiritual power. Mahāmati, when the Tathāgata enters a city, mountains, rocks, trees, musical instruments, city walls, and palaces all naturally emit musical sounds through the majestic spiritual power of the Tathāgata. How much more so sentient beings! The deaf, blind, and mute, along with those suffering innumerable pains, are all liberated. The Tathāgata possesses such innumerable spiritual powers to benefit and bring peace and happiness to sentient beings.

Moreover, all the various kinds of discriminative wisdom, the many meditative states of samādhi, and the many spiritual powers of supernatural attainment possessed by great bodhisattvas are all due to abiding in the Tathāgata's two kinds of spiritual power. If great bodhisattvas could expound the Dharma after leaving the Buddha's spiritual power, then all ordinary beings should also be able to expound it.

But why can ordinary beings not expound the Dharma? It is because they cannot abide in the Tathāgata's spiritual power. When the Tathāgata enters a city, the mountains, rocks, trees, various musical instruments, city walls, and palaces in it are moved by the majestic spiritual power of the Tathāgata and naturally emit musical sounds. If even insentient things are thus, how much more so sentient beings? Through receiving the Tathāgata's empowering spiritual power, the many sufferings of deafness, blindness, muteness, and the like can all be liberated. The Tathāgata possesses such immeasurable spiritual powers, benefiting sentient beings and bringing them peace and happiness.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, for what causes and conditions does the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One, bestow spiritual power upon bodhisattva mahāsattvas when they abide in proper attainment in samādhi, and at the time of the consecration of the stage of further progress?" The Buddha told Mahāmati: "It is to free them from the afflictions of Māra's deeds, to prevent them from falling into the meditation of the śrāvaka stage, to enable them to attain the Tathāgata's stage of self-awakening, and to advance the Dharma they have attained."

Therefore, the Tathāgatas, Worthy Ones, Perfectly Awakened Ones, all establish bodhisattva mahāsattvas through their spiritual power. If they did not establish them through spiritual power, they would fall into the deluded thoughts of erroneous views of non-Buddhist paths and the śrāvakas, fulfilling the hopes of the many Māras, and would not attain unsurpassed perfect awakening. For this reason, all the Tathāgatas embrace bodhisattva mahāsattvas through their spiritual power.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva again asked the Buddha: When great bodhisattvas abide in proper attainment in samādhi, the Tathāgata bestows spiritual power upon them (the spiritual power of proper attainment in samādhi is the power to manifest every kind of body, countenance, and speech); and when they are consecrated at a stage of further progress, the Tathāgata bestows spiritual power upon them (the spiritual power of hand-consecration). For what causes and conditions are these two kinds of spiritual power bestowed? The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that there are four causes and conditions for the Tathāgata's empowerment of great bodhisattvas through these two kinds of spiritual power: "It is to free them from the afflictions of Māra's deeds, to prevent them from falling into the meditation of the śrāvaka stage,

to enable them to attain the Tathāgata's stage of self-awakening, and to advance the Dharma they have attained."

First, "to free them from the afflictions of Māra's deeds"—that is, to free them from Māra's deeds and from afflictions.

Second, "to prevent them from falling into the meditation of the śrāvaka stage"—that is, to enable bodhisattvas to be broad-minded and not fall into the state of mind of the Lesser Vehicle.

Third, "to enable them to attain the Tathāgata's stage of self-awakening"—that is, to enable bodhisattvas to realize the noble wisdom of the Tathāgata's self-awakening.

Fourth, "to advance the Dharma they have attained"—that is, to advance the noble wisdom of the Tathāgata's self-awakening attained by bodhisattvas.

For these four causes and conditions, all the Tathāgatas empower great bodhisattvas through the two kinds of spiritual power. Without such empowerment, bodhisattvas can easily fall into the rut of erroneous views of non-Buddhist paths, give rise to many deluded thoughts, or remain confined to the states realized by the Lesser Vehicle. This is precisely what the many Māras hope for—that bodhisattvas will not attain unsurpassed perfect awakening. Therefore, all the Tathāgatas empower great bodhisattvas through the two kinds of spiritual power.

At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:

The spiritual power of the Honored One among humans;
His great vows are all pure.
The consecration of samādhi:
The first bhūmi and the tenth bhūmi.

The Tathāgata, honored among humans, has spiritual power; his great vows of compassion are all pure. From the first bhūmi to the tenth bhūmi, bodhisattvas receive proper attainment in samādhi and hand-consecration. Here, "samādhi and consecration" refers to the two kinds of spiritual power: samādhi means samādhi, and consecration refers to the spiritual power of hand-consecration.

Summary of This Section:

This section principally discusses the types and meaning of nirvāṇa, as well as such matters as the establishment of the bodhisattva dharma realm through the two kinds of spiritual power.

Ordinary people commonly take destruction and extinction to be nirvāṇa; non-Buddhist paths cling to a divine self, primordial matter, and the like as nirvāṇa; and the two vehicles take the annihilation of the body and the extinction of wisdom to be nirvāṇa. All these are merely deluded conceptualizations. Free from these errors is the great parinirvāṇa of true permanence, true bliss, true self, and true purity. Empowerment through the two kinds of spiritual power consists of empowerment through samādhi speech and empowerment through hand-consecration. The Buddha establishes the bodhisattva dharma realm through these two kinds of spiritual power. Bodhisattvas of both the first and tenth bhūmis must rely on the Buddha's empowering power in order to attain accomplishment.

14. Differentiating Dependent Arising

[At that time, the bodhisattva mahāsattva Mahāmati again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, when the Buddha teaches dependent arising, he is teaching causes and conditions, not the Way of self-nature. World-Honored One, non-Buddhists also teach causes and conditions, claiming that the supreme principle, Īśvara, time, and atoms give rise to the various natures. But are the World-Honored One's teachings of causes and conditions, arising, and the various natures a siddhānta involving distinctions, or a siddhānta without distinctions?"]

First consider "not the Way of self-nature." Here, "self" refers to self-nature, and "Way" refers to the fundamental Way of the Buddhadharma. Fundamentally speaking, self-nature is neither caused by conditions nor naturally existent. When the Buddha teaches the Dharma of dependent arising, he does not teach a "Way" of self-nature that is apart from causes and conditions. This is what is meant by "not the Way of self-nature."

Next, consider "a siddhānta involving distinctions" and "a siddhānta without distinctions." Here, "distinctions" refers to differentiation—that is, differentiating among sentient beings of different capacities and teaching them different expedient dharma gates in a graduated sequence. We have previously mentioned the "four siddhāntas": the worldly siddhānta, the siddhānta for each individual, the remedial siddhānta, and the siddhānta of the supreme meaning. Here, "a siddhānta involving distinctions" refers to the first three, while "a siddhānta without distinctions" refers to the siddhānta of the supreme meaning.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks the Buddha: When the World-Honored One teaches the Dharma of dependent arising, he teaches that all dharmas arise in dependence on causes and conditions, but does not teach that these dharmas are illusory manifestations of self-nature, nor does he teach the fundamental Way of "not arising from causes and conditions." Non-Buddhists likewise speak of causes and

conditions, claiming that all dharmas arise from a supreme principle, Īśvara, temporal atoms, and so forth.

Then, is the World-Honored One's teaching of dependent arising—that dharmas arise from causes and conditions, that when this exists, that exists, and that the various dharmas have their natures—an expedient teaching adapted to the capacities of beings, a "siddhānta involving distinctions"? Or is it the "siddhānta without distinctions" of the supreme meaning?

["World-Honored One, non-Buddhists also speak of existence, nonexistence, and arising from existence. The World-Honored One likewise speaks of nonexistence, existence, arising, and cessation after arising. As the World-Honored One teaches, ignorance conditions formations, continuing up to old age and death. This is the World-Honored One's teaching of causelessness, not a teaching of causes. The World-Honored One establishes and says, 'When this exists, that exists,' but does not establish gradual arising. If we consider the non-Buddhists' teaching of a supreme principle, it is not inferior to the Tathāgata's. Why is this so? World-Honored One, non-Buddhists teach causes from which what arises does not arise dependently on conditions. The World-Honored One teaches: considering a cause, there is an affair; considering an affair, there is a cause. Thus causes and conditions are confused, continuing in mutual succession without end."]

Here, "existence" refers to a "teaching of causes." "Nonexistence" refers to a "teaching of causelessness." "Arising from existence" means arising from "existence," with a process of before and after; this is "establishing gradual arising." Mahāmati Bodhisattva says: Non-Buddhists also speak of arising through causes and of causeless arising. The World-Honored One likewise speaks of causeless arising, arising through causes, arising, and cessation after arising.

For example, the World-Honored One teaches the twelve links of dependent origination: all dharmas arise from ignorance; ignorance conditions formations, formations condition consciousness, consciousness conditions name-and-form, and so on, until birth conditions old age and death. What has arisen then ceases, yet ignorance itself arises without a cause. Does this not mean that the World-Honored One also teaches causeless arising rather than arising through causes?

The World-Honored One further teaches, "When this exists, that exists," rather than that the various causes and conditions arise one after another in gradual sequence. Viewed in this way, it may seem that the non-Buddhists' teaching is superior and that the Tathāgata's teaching is not the most sublime Dharma. Why is this said? Non-Buddhists claim that such primordial causes as the supreme principle and Īśvara do not arise from conditions, yet these primordial causes produce the various dharmas.

Now consider what the World-Honored One teaches: “Considering a cause, there is an affair”—when one examines the cause of dependent arising, namely ignorance, there is an affair within the cause: the originally luminous self-nature and the event of a single deluded thought mistakenly taking that luminosity as real. “Considering an affair, there is a cause”—when one examines the affairs of dependent arising, such as ignorance conditioning formations and formations conditioning consciousness, there is a cause within the affair: the “ignorance” in ignorance conditioning formations, the “formations” in formations conditioning consciousness, and so forth.

When affairs contain causes and causes contain affairs in this way, are causes and conditions not confused? Are the twelve links of dependent origination not a confusion of causes and conditions continuing in mutual succession without end? If, in considering a cause, there is an affair, then unlike the non-Buddhists’ claim that there was originally a supreme principle or Īśvara as the cause, is not the World-Honored One’s teaching a “teaching of causelessness”? If, in considering an affair, there is a cause, extending to the endlessly successive twelve links of dependent origination, is this not a “teaching of confused causes and conditions”?

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “I do not teach causelessness, nor do I teach confused causes and conditions. ‘When this exists, that exists’ means that what grasps and what is grasped are without self-nature, and that one realizes the manifestations of one’s own mind. Mahāmati, if one clings to what grasps and what is grasped, and does not realize the manifestations of one’s own mind, then one takes the external realm to possess or not possess self-nature. They have such faults; this is not the dependent arising that I teach. I always teach that all dharmas arise through the conjunction of causes and conditions, not without causes.”]

The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva: What I teach is not causelessness. The dharmas that arise through causes and conditions follow the law of cause and effect; there is a pattern to follow, and they are not confused.

When one can awaken through the statement, “When this exists, that exists,” one realizes that the grasping body and mind, as well as the grasped external and internal objects, have no real self-nature and are not truly existent. One thereby realizes that all dharmas are illusory appearances manifested by one’s own mind. If, like the non-Buddhists, one conceptually discriminates and clings to what grasps and what is grasped, one cannot realize the manifestations of one’s own mind.

The realm outside the mind seems to exist but does not truly exist; it is an image illusorily manifested by one’s own mind and has no substantial self-nature. They hold such erroneous views, and what they teach is not the Dharma of dependent arising that I teach. I always teach that the conditioned dharmas of the world are

illusory appearances arising from the conjunction of causes and conditions; they do not arise without causes.

[Mahāmati again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, is it not the case that speech has self-nature and that all things have self-nature? World-Honored One, if there were no self-nature, speech could not arise. Therefore, speech has self-nature, and all things have self-nature.”]

Mahāmati Bodhisattva again asks the Buddha: World-Honored One, does speech possess a real self-nature? Does all speech possess a real self-nature? If speech had no real self-nature, speech could not arise. Therefore, speech has a real self-nature, and all speech has a real self-nature.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Speech is made despite the absence of self-nature, as in the worldly expressions ‘rabbit horns’ and ‘turtle hair.’ Mahāmati, it is neither self-nature nor non-self-nature; it is merely speech. If, as you say, speech has self-nature and all things have self-nature, then your argument collapses.”]

The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva: Things without real self-nature, things not truly existent, can nevertheless be spoken of. Such speech exists. For example, rabbit horns and turtle hair are known not to be truly existent, yet one can still speak of them and describe them vividly. In fact, speech is merely speech: speech itself neither possesses real self-nature nor lacks real self-nature. Your conclusion that “speech has self-nature and all things have self-nature” cannot be established.

[“Mahāmati, not all Buddha lands have speech. Speech is itself a fabrication. In some Buddha lands, a glance reveals the Dharma; in some there are fabricated signs; in some, the raising of the eyebrows, the movement of the eyes, laughter, yawning, coughing, recollection of Buddha lands, or bodily movement. Mahāmati, as with a glance, so too in the Fragrant Accumulation World and in the land of Samantabhadra Tathāgata: merely through a glance, bodhisattvas attain the forbearance of the unborn dharmas and the various supreme samādhis. Therefore, it cannot be said that speech has self-nature and that all things have self-nature. Mahāmati, observe the mosquitoes, gnats, insects, and ants in this world. These beings have no speech, yet each accomplishes its tasks.”]

The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva: Speech is not used everywhere; speech itself is also a kind of fabrication. In some Buddha lands, the Dharma is revealed through a glance. Although a glance is likewise a fabricated sign, there may also be the raising of the eyebrows or the movement of the eyes.

In some Buddha lands, laughing, yawning, coughing, mentally recollecting a Buddha land, such as the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, or shaking the head and gesturing with the hands can all express intention and convey information. For

example, in the Fragrant Accumulation World, one awakens to the Way through smelling fragrance.

In the land of Samantabhadra Tathāgata, one awakens to the Way through a glance. By merely glancing, bodhisattvas can attain the forbearance of the unborn dharmas and various supreme states of samādhi. Therefore, one cannot say that "speech has self-nature and all things have self-nature." Consider also the mosquitoes, gnats, insects, ants, and other beings in this world: without speech, they can still effectively accomplish what they need to do. Thus, only through speech does one not speak of the various dharmas. Without speech, Buddhas and sentient beings can likewise accomplish their activities.

[At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:]
[Like empty space, rabbit horns, / And the son of a stone statue: / Though nonexistent, they are spoken of. / Thus self-nature is delusively conceived. / Of dharmas arising from the conjunction of causes and conditions, / Ordinary fools give rise to delusive thoughts; / Unable to know them as they truly are, / They wander in the house of the three modes of existence.]

"Stone statue" refers to an image carved from stone. "The son of a stone statue" means a child born to a stone-carved female image. How could a stone carving give birth? It is a metaphor for something entirely fictitious. "Empty space" is likewise a metaphor for something entirely fictitious. Like empty space, rabbit horns, and the son of a stone statue, these are all wholly fictitious: they exist only as provisional names in speech and do not actually exist.

The natures of all such dharmas are illusorily manifested through deluded conceptual attachment. The dharmas of dependent arising, illusorily manifested through the conjunction of causes and conditions, are in reality devoid of anything whatsoever. Yet ordinary deluded people give rise to deluded conceptual attachment to these illusory dharmas, cling to them as possessing real self-nature, and cannot know as it truly is that all illusory appearances lack real self-nature. Therefore, they revolve in the deluded house of the three modes of existence: desire existence, form existence, and formless existence.

Summary of This Section:

This section compares the causes and conditions taught by non-Buddhists with those taught by the Buddha, clarifying that the Buddha's "dharmas arising from causes and conditions" do not depart from the fundamental principle: they do not arise from themselves, from another, from both, or without cause.

The dharmas arising from causes and conditions taught by the Buddha are, in their very nature, unborn. Their ceaseless arising is itself unborn: ceaseless arising is an illusory appearance, not truly existent; in reality, nothing whatsoever has arisen.

The causes and conditions taught by non-Buddhists, like empty space, rabbit horns, and the son of a stone statue, are objects of deluded conceptual attachment; they mistake the false for the true. Unable to know as it truly is that all dharmas are originally illusory appearances, they revolve for kalpas in the deluded house of the three modes of existence. The Buddha also tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva that not all Buddha lands use language to teach the Dharma and lead bodhisattvas to awaken to the Way. For example, in the Fragrant Accumulation World, one awakens to the Way through smelling fragrance; in the land of Samantabhadra Tathāgata, one awakens to the Way through a glance.

XV. Constant Sound Depends on Illusion

[At that time, the Mahāsattva Mahāmati again said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, for what purpose is the teaching of permanence spoken?” The Buddha told Mahāmati: “It is spoken on account of confusion. Amid that confusion, the noble ones also perceive appearances, yet they are not deluded. Mahāmati, such things as a mirage in springtime, a fire-wheel, hanging hairs, a city of gandharvas, illusions, dreams, and images in a mirror are objects of worldly delusion and not of clear wisdom. Yet they do appear. Mahāmati, that confusion manifests in many ways. It is neither confusion nor the making of impermanence. Why is this so? Because it is apart from both inherent nature and lack of inherent nature.”]

The teaching of permanence refers to the teaching of permanent dharmas. Confusion refers to the teaching of impermanent dharmas. At this point, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again asked the Buddha: “The World-Honored One teaches a Dharma apart from permanence and impermanence, yet in many contexts also speaks of true permanence. Why, then, does he speak of true permanence?” The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “It is to guide ordinary beings away from confusion, so that they will not give rise to deluded notions regarding the appearances of confusion.”

The appearances of confusion seen by ordinary beings can also be seen by all noble ones. Ordinary beings grasp them as truly existent and give rise to deluded notions. Those noble ones who have realized the Way likewise see the confusion, but they are not deluded by its impermanence.

Mahāmati, with regard to illusory appearances such as mirages, fire-wheels, hanging hairs, cities of gandharvas, illusions, dreams, and mirror images, ordinary worldly beings give rise to deluded notions; they are not wise. Yet this does not mean that

these confused and impermanent appearances do not manifest. Mahāmati, these confused and impermanent appearances manifest in many ways.

Although the appearances of confusion manifest in countless changing forms, these appearances are not truly existent: there are no truly existent confused things, nor is there any truly existent production of impermanence ("neither confusion nor the making of impermanence"). Why is this so? Because the appearances of confusion are apart from both inherent nature and lack of inherent nature.

"Inherent nature and lack of inherent nature" are mentioned again. "Inherent nature" means possessing a real nature, while lack of inherent nature means not possessing a real nature. "Inherent nature and lack of inherent nature" thus means "existence and nonexistence." The appearances of confused impermanence belong neither to existence nor to nonexistence. To enable ordinary beings to leave behind the confusion of existence and nonexistence, and to prevent sentient beings from mistaking illusion for reality, the teaching of permanence is spoken.

["Mahāmati, how are they apart from inherent nature and lack of inherent nature? Confusion refers to the various realms of all foolish ordinary beings. It is like the Ganges: hungry ghosts see it and do not see it. Because the nature of confusion manifests elsewhere, it is not without inherent nature. Thus, with regard to this confusion, the noble ones are apart from both delusion and non-delusion. Therefore confusion is permanent, because appearance after appearance is not destroyed. Mahāmati, it is not that the imagined appearances of the various forms of confusion are destroyed; therefore confusion is permanent."]

Mahāmati, why is it said that the appearances of confusion are apart from "inherent nature and lack of inherent nature"? All foolish ordinary beings, through ignorant and discriminating attachment, give rise to various realms. For example, with the waters of the Ganges, hungry ghosts see water from afar but, when near, see a flowing fire.

Yet the waters of the Ganges themselves do not possess a nature of confusion that manifests elsewhere in the eyes of hungry ghosts ("the nature of confusion manifests elsewhere"). They do not become existent because hungry ghosts see them as water from afar, nor do they become nonexistent because hungry ghosts see them differently when near. Therefore, one also cannot say that the Ganges lacks inherent nature ("therefore it is not without inherent nature").

The noble ones, in relation to such appearances of confusion, give rise to non-discriminating wisdom. They neither give rise to deluded views nor to views of non-delusion. Since illusory appearances do manifest, the illusory appearances of confusion are said to be "permanent" ("therefore confusion is permanent"). This is because the various illusory appearances have not been destroyed ("appearance

after appearance is not destroyed") and thus have not ceased to manifest. Mahāmati, it is not because the various illusory appearances of confused impermanence have been destroyed and vanished that noble ones no longer give rise to deluded thoughts. Therefore these appearances of confusion are said to be "permanent." (The teaching of permanence rests on illusion.)

["Mahāmati, how is confusion real? If, on account of causes and conditions, the noble ones do not give rise to a deluded awareness regarding this confusion, this does not mean that they are without awareness of non-delusion. Mahāmati, except that the noble ones have a slight thought regarding this confusion, it is not an object of the marks of noble wisdom. Mahāmati, whatever is held to exist is falsely asserted by foolish ordinary beings; it is not spoken by the noble ones."]

Why is confusion said to be real? All illusory appearances of confused impermanence arise illusorily through causes and conditions and are not truly existent. With regard to this confusion, the noble ones do not give rise to deluded thoughts, but this does not mean that they are unaware of the condition of delusion ("this does not mean awareness of non-delusion").

If noble ones still had even a slight degree of deluded thought concerning confused phenomena, they would not be in the liberating realm of the noble ones' great wisdom. Whatever is regarded as truly existent is the false speech of unwise ordinary beings, not the speech of the noble ones. That is, since the noble ones are not deluded by the appearances of confused impermanence, confusion is real.

["That confusion, through deluded or non-deluded discriminating thoughts, gives rise to two kinds of dispositions: the disposition of the noble ones and the disposition of foolish ordinary beings. The disposition of the noble ones has three distinctions: the Śrāvaka Vehicle, the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, and the Buddha Vehicle. How do foolish ordinary beings, through deluded thoughts, give rise to the disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle? Through attachment to the specific and common characteristics, they give rise to the disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle. This is called giving rise to the disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle through deluded thought."

"Mahāmati, through that very confused deluded thought, they give rise to the disposition of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle: with regard to the specific and common characteristics of that confusion, they do not intimately cling to them, and thus give rise to the disposition of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle. How do the wise, with regard to that very confusion, give rise to the disposition of the Buddha Vehicle? They realize that it is manifested by their own mind; that external inherent nature and lack of inherent nature are not objects of imagined appearances; and thus give rise to the disposition of the Buddha Vehicle. This is called giving rise to the disposition of the Buddha Vehicle through that very confusion."]

In facing confusion, two kinds of dispositions arise according to whether one gives rise to deluded thoughts. Those who give rise to deluded thoughts have the disposition of ordinary beings. Those who do not give rise to deluded thoughts have the disposition of noble persons. The disposition of noble persons has three distinct kinds: the Śrāvaka Vehicle, the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, and the Buddha Vehicle. As the Diamond Sūtra says: “All worthy and noble ones are distinguished by the unconditioned dharma.”

Why do foolish beings, through deluded thought, give rise to the disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle? It is because they imaginatively grasp at confusion. For example, they mistakenly cling to confused appearances such as the five aggregates and mistakenly give rise to aversion and renunciation, thereby giving rise to the disposition of the Śrāvaka Vehicle.

Why does the disposition of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle arise in relation to confused appearances? If one’s imagined attachment to the specific and common characteristics of confusion has loosened somewhat (“not intimate”), yet one still feels aversion toward confusion, then the disposition of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle arises. Why does the disposition of the Buddha Vehicle arise in wise persons in relation to confused appearances? When they understand that confused appearances are images manifested within their own mind, that neither inner nor outer objects possess real nature, and that in facing the various changing images they neither adhere nor withdraw, neither love nor hate, neither grasp nor reject, and give rise to no deluded thoughts, then the disposition of the Buddha Vehicle arises.

[“Furthermore, through the natures of various phenomena, ordinary beings give rise to the disposition of foolish beings through confused thoughts. Those phenomena are neither existent nor nonexistent. This is what is meant by disposition.”]

The natures of various phenomena refer to imaginatively grasping at the many things of confused impermanence according to each thing, thereby making them into natures. Ordinary beings maintain such deluded attachments, taking the false as true, and thereby give rise to the disposition of foolish beings. In fact, the illusory appearances of confusion are neither things that exist nor things that do not exist. With regard to confusion, one may either mistakenly give rise to the deluded view of existence and nonexistence or refrain from taking existence and nonexistence as objects of thought; thereby the above dispositions arise. This is the meaning of disposition.

[“Mahāmati, when one does not give rise to deluded thoughts concerning that confusion, the transformation of the mind, intellect, consciousness, faults, habitual tendencies, and dharmas of inherent nature in the minds of the noble ones is called

suchness. Therefore it is said that suchness is apart from mind. When I speak this statement, I reveal freedom from thought; that is, I speak of freedom from all thoughts."]

Not giving rise to deluded thoughts concerning confusion means that those of the disposition of the Buddha Vehicle, when facing confusion, do not give rise to deluded thoughts such as "existence" and "nonexistence." Because they do not give rise to deluded thoughts, the "mind, intellect, consciousness, faults, habitual tendencies," and so forth all undergo transformation. This transformation is called suchness, that is, true suchness. Or, at the ultimate point of transformation, one recovers the true nature, which is nothing other than suchness.

Therefore it is said that true suchness is apart from mental thoughts ("suchness is apart from mind"). I say this to emphasize freedom from deluded thoughts and to bring into relief freedom from deluded thoughts such as "existence" and "nonexistence" ("revealing freedom from thought"). Thus, the Dharma of freedom from all clinging and deluded thoughts is taught.

Earlier, in "I.3, Mahāparinirvāṇa," it was said: "The transformation of all habitual tendencies of inherent nature, the store consciousness, intellect, consciousness, views, and habits is called nirvāṇa." Here it says: "The transformation of the mind, intellect, consciousness, faults, habitual tendencies, and dharmas of inherent nature is called suchness." Thus, transformation is called both nirvāṇa and true suchness. Nirvāṇa and true suchness are one entity with different names. In fact, this is the transformation of consciousness into wisdom.

[Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, is confusion existent or nonexistent?" The Buddha told Mahāmati: "It is like an illusion, without an appearance that can be grasped. If confusion had an appearance that could be grasped, the nature of grasping could not be extinguished. Dependent arising would then be like the non-Buddhists' assertion of dharmas arising from causes and conditions."]

It was just said that ordinary foolish beings see confusion as existent, while noble wisdom sees it as nonexistent. It was also said that confusion itself is true permanence.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked: "Is confusion 'existent,' as ordinary beings see it, or 'nonexistent,' as noble wisdom sees it?" The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: "Confusion is like an illusion. It does not truly exist and cannot be analyzed or apprehended through concepts such as 'existence' and 'nonexistence.'"

If confusion could be analyzed and apprehended, then the natures such as "existence" and "nonexistence" obtained through such analysis and apprehension

could not vanish. If dependent arising were explained in this way, it would be like the non-Buddhists' view that there is another, imperishable ruler that gives rise to all dharmas.

[Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, if confusion is like an illusion, would it again become the cause of other confusions?" The Buddha told Mahāmati: "Illusion is not the cause of confusion, because it does not give rise to faults. Mahāmati, illusion does not give rise to faults and has no deluded thoughts. Mahāmati, illusions arise from the knowledge of others; they do not arise from one's own deluded thoughts, faults, or habitual tendencies. Therefore they do not give rise to faults. Mahāmati, this is the confused and clinging conception of the minds of foolish ordinary beings, not that of the noble and wise."]

Let us first explain "arise from the knowledge of others." Here, "knowledge" refers to vidyā, that is, the use of mantras. In ancient India, practitioners of magical arts could manifest illusory realms through the use of vidyā. This is what is meant by "arise from the knowledge of others."

The Buddha had just said that confusion is like an illusion, and Mahāmati Bodhisattva then asked: "If confusion is like an illusion, could the illusion give rise to new confusion?" This would be like ignorance giving rise to the three subtle characteristics, and the realm of objects giving rise to the six coarse characteristics.

The Buddha replied: "Illusion is not the cause of confusion. Since it is itself like an illusion, how could it give rise to all kinds of faults? Mahāmati, illusion does not give rise to faults, and illusion itself cannot be said to possess deluded thoughts."

Mahāmati, what is called "illusion" is an illusory realm manifested through the methods of the vidyādharas. It is not truly existent, nor does it arise from "deluded thoughts, faults, and habitual tendencies"; therefore, delusion does not give rise to faults. Mahāmati, to think that delusion gives rise anew to further delusion is a notion produced only by the confusion, conceptual discrimination, and attachment of ignorant ordinary people. It is not the realm of realized sages.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]
[The sage does not see delusion; nor is there any reality in between. If that which lies in between were real, delusion itself would be real. Having abandoned all delusion, if one gives rise to any appearance, that too is delusion—an impurity like a cataract in the eye.]

"The sage does not see delusion"—even amid delusion, one endowed with sage wisdom does not see delusion as truly existent. That is to say, amid delusion one

sees the way of true permanence. “Nor is there any reality in between”—even the way of true permanence amid delusion cannot be called real; it too is unobtainable.

“If that which lies in between were real, delusion itself would be real”—if the true permanence within this midst had some reality that could be grasped, then the appearance of delusion itself would be that reality. “Having abandoned all delusion, if one gives rise to any appearance, that too is delusion—an impurity like a cataract in the eye”—having cast off all delusion, one leaves delusion and reveals truth. Yet if one again grasps at this “truth” and becomes attached to an appearance based on it, this too is delusion. Its impurity is like a cataract in the eye, falsely seeing flowers in empty space. That is to say, within the Dharma of suchness, not even the slightest dharma can be obtained.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, apart from illusion, there is no comparable analogy for seeing all dharmas as like an illusion.]

Earlier, all dharmas were compared to an illusion. Why is illusion used alone as the analogy rather than some other analogy? The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that, here, unless illusion is used as the analogy, no other analogy is sufficiently similar. Hence it is said here, “see all dharmas as like an illusion.”

[Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, is it because of attachment to the various appearances of illusion that you say all dharmas are like an illusion? Or is it because of attachment to different appearances? If, because of attachment to the various appearances of illusion, you say that all natures are like an illusion, World-Honored One, then there are natures that are not like an illusion. Why is this so? Because the various appearances of form are not the cause. World-Honored One, without a cause, can the various appearances of form appear like an illusion? Therefore, it is not attachment to the various appearances of illusion that makes their analogous nature like an illusion.”]

“World-Honored One, is it because of attachment to the various appearances of illusion that you say all dharmas are like an illusion?”—Is it because sentient beings are attached to the various appearances of illusion that you, World-Honored One, say that all dharmas are like an illusion? “Or is it because of attachment to different appearances?”—“Attachment to appearances” means that sentient beings are attached to the various appearances of illusion. “Attachment to different appearances” does not mean that this is because sentient beings are attached to the various appearances of illusion.

This means that dharmas are not said to be like an illusion merely because sentient beings are attached to them; rather, they are inherently like an illusion. Whether beings are attached to them or not, are they not inherently unreal, like an illusory transformation? “If, because of attachment to the various appearances of illusion,

you say that all natures are like an illusion, World-Honored One, then there are natures that are not like an illusion."

—If it is only because sentient beings are attached to them that all dharmas are said to be like an illusion, then, apart from sentient beings' attachment, would all dharmas possess a real nature and cease to be like an illusion? "Why is this so? Because the various appearances of form are not the cause."—Why say this? Because the various appearances of form are not themselves the cause of their being like an illusion.

"Without a cause, can the various appearances of form appear like an illusion?"—Without a cause for their being like an illusion, how can one say that the various appearances of form are unreal like illusory transformations? "Therefore, it is not attachment to the various appearances of illusion that makes their analogous nature like an illusion"—therefore, it is not because sentient beings are attached to the various appearances that all appearances are said to be provisionally existent and similar to an illusion in nature.

This passage asks: Are dharmas said to be like an illusion because sentient beings are attached to them, or are they said to be like an illusion independently of sentient beings' attachment? If the former were the case, then they would not themselves be like an illusion. Since the World-Honored One says that they are like an illusion, it must not be the former case: they are not said to be like an illusion merely because sentient beings are attached to them.

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: "It is not because of attachment to the various appearances of illusion that all dharmas are similarly said to be like an illusion. Mahāmati, all dharmas are unreal and perish swiftly like lightning; therefore, they are like an illusion. Mahāmati, it is like a flash of lightning: it appears for but an instant, and having appeared, immediately ceases. It is not as it appears to ignorant ordinary people. Thus all natures arise from one's own deluded thoughts and their individual and shared characteristics. Observe that they are without nature; do not become attached to manifested forms and appearances."]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva that all dharmas are not said to be provisionally existent and like an illusion in nature because sentient beings are attached to them. Consider all unreal dharmas: they arise and perish as swiftly as a flash of lightning. Therefore, they are said to be like an illusion.

In fact, all false and unreal dharmas are like lightning: they appear in an instant and vanish at once. They do not possess any real nature or any individual or shared characteristics, as ignorant ordinary people falsely imagine. It is because one observes that all dharmas lack a real nature that they are said to be like an illusion. They are not said to be like an illusion because sentient beings are attached to them.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]
[Without illusion there is no analogy for speaking of the nature of dharmas as like an illusion. They are unreal and swift as lightning; therefore they are said to be like an illusion.]

At that time, in order to restate these principles, the Buddha spoke a verse: All dharmas arise dependently and are unreal. Unless illusion is used as an analogy, there is no other analogy that can enable sentient beings who have not attained sage wisdom to understand the nature of dharmas. When I say that the nature of all dharmas is like an illusion, I mean that they are not truly existent and that their arising and ceasing are as swift as lightning. Therefore, all dharmas are said to be like an illusion.

[Mahāmati again said to the Buddha: "As the World-Honored One has said, all natures are unborn and are like an illusion. Would this not mean that the World-Honored One's earlier and later teachings contradict one another? You speak of the unborn nature as like an illusion."]

Mahāmati again raised a difficulty and said to the Buddha: The World-Honored One says that the nature of dharmas is unborn, and also says that it is like an illusion. But does not being like an illusion involve arising? Are these earlier and later teachings not mutually contradictory?

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: "There is no fault of contradiction between my earlier and later statements that the unborn nature is like an illusion. Why is this so? Arising is non-arising; realize the manifestation of one's own mind. Existence is nonexistence; the nature of external objects is no nature; non-arising manifests. Mahāmati, there is no fault of contradiction in my earlier and later statements. Rather, because I destroy the non-Buddhists' theory of arising from causes, I say that all natures are unborn. Mahāmati, assemblies of deluded non-Buddhists wish to make existence or nonexistence the source of arising, rather than the conditions of their own deluded thoughts and various attachments. Mahāmati, I do not hold that arising comes from existence or nonexistence. Therefore, I speak in terms of non-arising."]

"Arising is non-arising"—arising itself is non-arising. "Existence is nonexistence"—existence is not truly existent. "The nature of external objects is no nature"—external objects have no real nature. "Arising from existence or nonexistence"—arising from "existence," or arising from "nonexistence."

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: When I speak of non-arising and also of being like an illusion, there is no contradiction between my earlier and later teachings. Why? When I speak of non-arising, I do so in relation to "arising": arising

itself is non-arising. Although all dharmas manifest the appearance of arising, no real nature can be obtained in them. They are like illusory transformations, yet sentient beings cling to them as truly existent.

I speak of non-arising in order to break sentient beings' deluded attachments and enable them to awaken to the manifestation of their own minds. Although an appearance of "existence" seems to arise, in truth not a single thing can be obtained, and external objects have no real nature. What is called "arising" is in fact the manifestation of non-arising; to be like an illusion is to be unborn.

Mahāmati, there is no fault of mutual contradiction in what I have said before and after. Non-Buddhists fabricate such entities as a supreme principle, a person, and a sovereign self as a first cause, and propound a theory of arising from causes. To refute this theory of causal arising, I say that the nature of all dharmas is unborn.

Various deluded non-Buddhists gather together: some say that all dharmas arise from "existence," while others say that all dharmas arise from "nonexistence." They all maintain that all dharmas do not arise illusorily through the conditions of various deluded thoughts and attachments. Mahāmati, I do not accept the views of existence and nonexistence, nor do I hold that all dharmas arise from existence or nonexistence. Therefore, I use the teaching of non-arising to explain their being like an illusion.

[Mahāmati, I speak of natures in order to embrace birth and death, to destroy the views of nonexistence and annihilation, and to enable my disciples to embrace the various places of rebirth determined by karma. By means of the sound of "nature," I teach the embracing of birth and death.]

Having just explained that all dharmas are unborn and like an illusion, the Buddha further explained to Mahāmati Bodhisattva why he sometimes also speaks of the nature of all dharmas.

Why, then, does the Buddha also speak of the nature of all dharmas? "In order to embrace birth and death"—birth and death are unborn, that is, there is fundamentally no birth and death; birth and death are like an illusion, not real but only an appearance. How, then, should one face this fundamentally nonexistent and illusory "birth and death"? This is what is meant by embracing birth and death.

This requires teaching about the nature of "birth and death." The nature of birth and death is undergoing retribution according to karma—that is, the cause and effect of the three times. "In order to destroy the views of nonexistence and annihilation"—the view of nonexistence is the belief that there is no karmic cause and effect; the annihilationist view is the belief that when a person dies, everything is extinguished

and what was done during life does not continue afterward. This clearly denies karmic cause and effect.

In order to refute these views of nonexistence and annihilation that deny karmic cause and effect, one must speak of the nature of birth and death. “In order to enable my disciples to embrace the various places of rebirth determined by karma”—this is to enable my disciples to understand cause and effect and know that they are reborn according to karma, so that they may enter the ocean of birth and death, extensively cultivate the six perfections and myriad practices, and be reborn in the Buddha-lands and Pure Lands.

The “sound” in “the sound of nature” refers to the sound of the Dharma. “The sound of nature” is the Dharma sound that teaches the nature of all dharmas. “By means of the sound of nature, I teach the embracing of birth and death”—in order to embrace birth and death, the Buddha expounds the nature of all dharmas. In contrast to the aversion to birth and death of practitioners of the two vehicles, the “embracing of birth and death” discussed here should be understood as the broad-mindedness of Mahāyāna bodhisattvas.

As it is said: practitioners of the two vehicles have exhausted their former karma, established the holy life, and completed what had to be done; they abide in the city of nirvāṇa and do not undergo further existence. Mahāyāna bodhisattvas have deep and unwavering faith, resolute vows that do not retreat, and ceaseless diligent practice; they enter the ocean of birth and death in order extensively to liberate sentient beings.

[Mahāmati, I speak of the characteristics of the self-nature of illusion in order to free beings from the characteristics of self-nature. Those who fall into the evil views and expectations of ignorant ordinary people do not know the manifestation of their own minds; they destroy arising as produced by causes and become attached to the characteristics of self-nature based on conditions. I speak of the characteristics of self-nature in dreams and illusions, and of all dharmas, so that ignorant ordinary people will not entertain evil views and expectations, become attached to themselves and others and to all dharmas, or, on the basis of views of the realm as it truly is, formulate erroneous doctrines. Mahāmati, to see all dharmas in the realm as it truly is means to transcend the manifestation of one’s own mind.]

Let us again consider the expression “nature, intrinsic nature, and appearance.” The first character, “nature,” may be understood as a property or a concept. “Intrinsic nature and appearance” refers to the property and appearance inherent in that concept itself. We may now use an example to illustrate “nature, intrinsic nature, and appearance”: the concept of a plane.

What property and appearance does the concept of a plane itself possess? It is absolute flatness. Concepts arise and manifest from one's own mind; this brings us to "the measure manifested by one's own mind." Here, "the measure manifested by one's own mind" refers to the measure that arises and manifests from one's own mind. "Absolute flatness" is the mind's measure of the concept of a plane.

If it is not flat, one hopes that it will be flat—one hopes that it will be absolutely flat. Yet one does not realize that this hope is an erroneous view. Here, "erroneous view" means an incorrect understanding. This brings us to "the hopes of erroneous views."

Before explaining this passage of the sūtra, let us investigate this point: Is "absolute flatness" not correct? Why is "absolute flatness" a "hope of erroneous view"? In fact, absolute flatness does not exist. Is matter not composed of molecules and atoms? Are atoms not atomic nuclei and electrons orbiting their nuclei? How could there be an absolutely flat plane?

The "nature" of a plane—the concept of a plane—and the property and appearance inherent in that concept are no more than the hopes of erroneous views, arising from the mind's illusory grasping and clinging. Thus, "speaking of the characteristic of the nature of illusion" returns us to the beginning of this passage. We will now explain the passage:

"Mahāmati, I speak of the characteristic of the nature of illusion in order that beings may depart from the characteristic of the nature of self-nature"—Mahāmati, I speak of the illusory "characteristic of the nature of self-nature" in order to enable beings to depart from it and thus not be bound by it.

"They fall into the hopes of the marks of foolish people's erroneous views; not knowing the measure manifested by their own minds, they destroy what is produced through causes and become attached to the characteristics of self-nature dependent on conditions"—Foolish ordinary beings cling to appearances and fall into the hopes of erroneous views. They do not know that "the characteristic of the nature of self-nature" is merely a measure arising and manifesting from their own minds. Because this measure is incorrect and overly absolute, it violates dharmas arising from causes and conditions.

In fact, "the characteristic of the nature of self-nature" is no more than grasping, conceptual measuring, and attachment to "the characteristic of self-nature."

"I speak of the self-nature characteristics of all dharmas as like illusions and dreams so that foolish people will not entertain the hopes of erroneous views, become attached to all dharmas as self-produced or other-produced, or regard the dharmas of reality as incorrect theories"—To say that the self-nature characteristics of all dharmas are like dreams and illusions is to prevent foolish people from falling into

the hopes of erroneous views, from grasping all dharmas as arising from oneself, from another, and so forth, and from taking the true dharmas of reality to be incorrect theories. “Mahāmati, seeing all dharmas in the realm of reality means transcending the measure manifested by one’s own mind”—To see all dharmas in the realm of reality is to directly see the true characteristics of all dharmas; this is realization that transcends the measure manifested by one’s own mind.

What, then, are the true characteristics of all dharmas? The Diamond Sūtra says: “What is called the true characteristic is precisely no characteristic; therefore the Tathāgata calls it the true characteristic.”

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:] [The unarisen is made non-nature; existing nature encompasses birth and death. Observe them as like illusions, and do not give rise to false thoughts regarding appearances.]

At that time, in order to restate these principles concisely, the Buddha composed a verse: “The unarisen is made non-nature”—I speak of the unborn in order to refute non-Buddhists’ mistaken view that an erroneous cause is an agent capable of producing birth. The producer of birth that they posit has no real nature that can be found.

“Existing nature encompasses birth and death”—I say that all dharmas possess nature in order to encourage great bodhisattvas to arouse vast resolve, embrace birth and death, and thereby traverse the ocean of birth and death to liberate sentient beings extensively. “Observe them as like illusions; do not give rise to false thoughts regarding appearances”—Observe all dharmas as like illusions, and do not give rise to deluded thoughts and discriminations concerning the appearances of dharmas. If one departs from deluded thoughts, one immediately transcends the measure of mind.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, I shall explain the characteristics of name-bodies, sentence-bodies, and form-bodies. Great bodhisattvas who skillfully contemplate name-bodies, sentence-bodies, and form-bodies, and accordingly enter into the bodies of meaning, sentences, and forms, swiftly attain unsurpassed complete perfect awakening. Having awakened in this way, they awaken all sentient beings.]

The Buddha again told Bodhisattva Mahāmati: “I should also explain to you the characteristics of ‘name-bodies,’ ‘sentence-bodies,’ and ‘form-bodies.’ Great bodhisattvas are able to contemplate name-, sentence-, and form-bodies well; accordingly, they penetrate the meanings of sentences and comprehend form-bodies, thereby swiftly realizing unsurpassed complete perfect awakening. Having awakened in this way, they then enable all sentient beings to awaken in the same way. Self-awakening, awakening others, and the perfection of awakened conduct.”

What, then, are “name-bodies,” “sentence-bodies,” and “form-bodies”? Please read on.

[Mahāmati, a name-body means that, when a name is established in dependence upon a thing, this is called a name-body. A sentence-body means that a sentence has the self-nature of a body of meaning, definite and ultimate; this is called a sentence-body. A form-body means that it displays names and sentences; this is called a form-body. Further, a form-body means length, shortness, height, and lowness. Further, a sentence-body means tracks, such as the tracks traveled by elephants, horses, humans, and beasts; for this reason it is called a sentence-body. Mahāmati, names and forms mean that names are spoken with reference to the four formless aggregates, and are therefore called names; forms are spoken of because their own characteristics appear. These are called name-, sentence-, and form-bodies. One should cultivate and study the distinctions among the characteristics of name-, sentence-, and form-bodies.]

First, let us explain the three bodies of names, sentences, and forms one by one: “A name-body means that, when a name is established in dependence upon a thing, this is called a name-body”—A name is established in dependence upon an object. Different objects have different names. The name so established is called a name-body.

“A sentence-body means that a sentence has the self-nature of a body of meaning, definite and ultimate; this is called a sentence-body”—A sentence that expresses a particular meaning determines that particular meaning and does not ultimately become confused with other meanings. Such a sentence is called a sentence-body. “A form-body means that it displays names and sentences; this is called a form-body”—The form displayed by what names and sentences express is the form-body of those names and sentences.

Second, this is explained through the relation between form-bodies and sentence-bodies: “Further, a form-body means length, shortness, height, and lowness”—Elephants are long, horses short; humans are tall, beasts low. These display various forms. Such forms are called form-bodies.

“Further, a sentence-body means tracks, such as the tracks traveled by elephants, horses, humans, and beasts; for this reason it is called a sentence-body”—A sentence-body is like a path or track. For example, by following the paths and tracks traveled by elephants, horses, humans, and beasts, one can find where those elephants, horses, humans, and beasts are. Through the tracks indicated by a sentence, one can find the meaning expressed by that sentence; therefore, the sentence is called a sentence-body.

Third, this is explained through the relation between name-bodies and form-bodies: “Names and forms mean that names are spoken with reference to the four formless aggregates, and are therefore called names”—Among the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness, when the aggregate of form, which can manifest appearances, is removed, the other four aggregates have no appearance, yet they do have names.

Why, then, does it speak of “names and forms”—that is, both name-bodies and form-bodies? Let us illustrate this with an example. Through an explanation of the aggregate of feeling, a concept of the aggregate of feeling is established. This concept is not confused with the other three aggregates of perception, formations, and consciousness. This concept is a form-body.

“Forms are spoken of because their own characteristics appear”—The aggregate of form can manifest its own appearance; it thus has both a name-body and a form-body. From this we know that there are two kinds of form-body: concepts and appearances. Finally, the passage summarizes and exhorts us to study: “These are called name-, sentence-, and form-bodies. One should cultivate and study the distinctions among the characteristics of name-, sentence-, and form-bodies”—What has just been explained is the three bodies of names, sentences, and forms. Great bodhisattvas should cultivate and study these matters.

Put simply: the Buddhadharma is a name-body. The sound of the Buddha teaching the Dharma while he was alive, and the words of Buddhist sūtras after the Buddha’s parinirvāṇa, are sentence-bodies. Comprehending the true meaning explained by the Buddha and corresponding with the Buddha’s mind is a form-body.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:] [The distinctions among name-bodies, sentence-bodies, and form-bodies are what foolish ordinary people grasp, like elephants sinking into deep mud.]

At that time, in order to restate these principles concisely, the Buddha composed a verse: “The distinctions among name-bodies, sentence-bodies, and form-bodies are what foolish ordinary people grasp, like elephants sinking into deep mud.”

This verse warns us that the distinctions just explained among name-, sentence-, and form-bodies are also matters of language and writing. They are teachings without teaching; one should depart from language and writing and comprehend their true meaning. If foolish ordinary people form views according to the words and conceptually grasp this teaching without teaching, they will become trapped among names and appearances and be unable to free themselves, like an elephant sinking into deep mud. As Yongjia says in the Song of Enlightenment: “Discriminating names and appearances without knowing when to stop, one enters the sea to count sand and only exhausts oneself in vain.”

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, in the future, wise people, having departed from the marks of views of “one, different, both, and neither,” will ask the unwise about the meaning I have penetrated. They will reply, “This is not a proper question.”]

[Are form and the like permanent or impermanent? Are they different or not different? Likewise, regarding nirvāṇa, conditioned activities, characteristics and that which possesses characteristics, guṇa and that which possesses guṇa, maker and that which is made, seer and that which is seen, dust motes and minute dust motes, cultivation and the cultivator—such questions extend one into another. Concerning questions such as these, it is said that the Buddha taught indeterminate matters and suspended discussion; foolish people are incapable of knowing them, because they lack the wisdom acquired through hearing. The Tathāgata, Worthy One, Completely Perfectly Awakened One, calls them indeterminate in order to free such people from fearful statements; he does not teach them as determinate assertions. Moreover, he does not explain them in order to halt non-Buddhist views and disputations.]

The term “guṇa” appeared earlier and was briefly explained as “virtue” or “characteristic.” Guṇa can mean “primordial substance” or “primordial agent”; that upon which one depends in order to act is a virtue or characteristic. In this passage, “guṇa and that which possesses guṇa” may be understood simply as agent and product, or as that which depends and that upon which it depends.

Let us further explain “the Buddha taught indeterminate matters and suspended discussion.” The Buddha has four methods of answering questioners; the four answers are also called the four determinations: (1) a definitive answer—there is a fixed answer, always given in the same way, and one certainly answers; (2) an analytical answer—the same question is answered differently according to the differing capacities of the questioner.

3. Counter-questioning record—this means answering with a counter-question; a counter-question is itself an answer. 4. Setting-aside record—also called an indeterminate record—means not answering; not answering is itself an answer. In this passage, “indeterminate discussion set aside” means responding by means of an indeterminate record—that is, by not answering—in order to stop his endless and fruitless speculative discourse.

“Furthermore, Mahāmati, in the future, wise persons who are free from the views of ‘oneness, difference, both, and neither’ may question those without wisdom on the ultimate meaning that I have realized. They will then reply, ‘This is not a proper question.’” The Buddha further told Mahāmati that, in future times, if wise persons, free from the marks of the four erroneous views of “oneness, difference, both [both one and different], and neither [neither one nor different],” question those without wisdom on the ultimate meaning that I have realized, wishing to break their

attachments and enable them to enter the realm beyond propositions and negations, those people will reply: “This is not a proper question.”

“Are form and the like permanent or impermanent? Are they different or not different? Likewise, nirvāṇa and conditioned activities, marks and that which bears marks, guṇa and that which possesses guṇa, the maker and that which is made, seeing and that which is seen, particles and atoms, cultivation and the cultivator—thus they compare one thing with another.” They will ask whether form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are permanent or impermanent, different or not different. This includes both permanent and impermanent, neither permanent nor impermanent; both different and not different, neither different nor not different.

Turning to other propositions, they raise questions in the same way, as follows: Are unconditioned nirvāṇa and conditioned activities permanent or impermanent? Are they different or not different? Are the one who apprehends marks and the marks apprehended permanent or impermanent? Are they different or not different? Are the dependent maker, called “guṇa,” and that which is depended upon and made, called “that which possesses guṇa,”

permanent or impermanent? Are they different or not different? Are the four great elements that create and the four sense-objects that are created permanent or impermanent? Are they different or not different? Are the six sense faculties that perceive, together with the six sense-objects perceived, permanent or impermanent? Are they different or not different? Are the particles that are analyzed and the atoms into which they are analyzed permanent or impermanent? Are they different or not different? Are the dharma to be cultivated and the practitioner who cultivates permanent or impermanent? Are they different or not different? In this way, they compare and contrast without end, passing from one thing to another without cease.

This is what is meant by “thus they compare one thing with another.”

“When such questions are asked, the Buddha says that they are to be set aside as indeterminate, thereby stopping the discussion. Such matters are not within the understanding of those foolish people, for they lack the wisdom gained through hearing. The Tathāgata, Arhat, Fully Awakened One says they are indeterminate in order to free them from fearful propositions; He does not give them a determinate answer. Moreover, He does not explain them in order to stop the argumentative views of non-Buddhists.” For such fruitless speculative discussions, the Buddha does not answer, thereby bringing their deluded argumentation to a halt.

The Buddha’s profound meaning cannot be understood by such foolish people, because they lack the wisdom gained through hearing the Dharma; if it is explained

too deeply, it may frighten them. The Tathāgata does not explain it to them, lest hearing the Dharma give rise to fear in their minds. Thus, He responds by setting the matter aside as indeterminate rather than answering them. Furthermore, He does not explain it in order to stop the endless speculative discourse of non-Buddhists.

[Mahāmati, non-Buddhists say thus: life is precisely the body, and so forth. These are indeterminate discussions. Mahāmati, those non-Buddhists, in their folly, make indeterminate assertions concerning causes; this is not what I teach. Mahāmati, what I teach is freedom from grasping and what is grasped, so that deluded thoughts do not arise. Why do I stop them? Mahāmati, I stop those who cling to grasping and what is grasped because they do not know that these are manifestations of their own mind.]

With regard to the body composed of the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—non-Buddhists speculate: Is the self identical with the aggregates, or separate from them? Are body and life one, or different? They maintain that life is simply the body, and that when the body dies, life also ends. Statements of this kind all belong to indeterminate discussions.

They are foolish and without wisdom, speculating that things arise without causes; therefore their assertions are called indeterminate discussions. This is certainly not what I teach. What I teach is freedom from producer and produced, grasper and grasped; it is freedom from the duality of subject and object created by deluded discrimination, so that deluded thoughts do not arise.

Why do I not explain this to them, but instead stop them without answering? Because they speculate about and cling to the marks of what grasps and what is grasped, never willing to let them go. They do not know that all dharmas are manifestations of their own mind. Therefore, when they raise questions of this kind, I stop them all without answering.

[Mahāmati, the Tathāgata, Arhat, Fully Awakened One teaches sentient beings by means of four kinds of determinate response. Mahāmati, I continually teach the response of setting matters aside. It is for those whose faculties are not yet mature, not for those whose faculties are mature.]

The four kinds of determinate response are explained in the verses below. The response of setting matters aside is one of them.

The Tathāgata, Arhat, Fully Awakened One teaches sentient beings by means of four kinds of determinate response. I often teach the response of setting matters aside. This is not only to stop those non-Buddhists; it is also taught for those whose faculties are not yet mature, not for bodhisattvas whose faculties are mature.

[Mahāmati, all dharmas are unborn, being free from what is made and from causes and conditions. Because there is no maker, all dharmas are unborn.]

All dharmas are free from maker and made, free from causes and conditions; originally, they are unborn. Since there is fundamentally no maker, I say that “all dharmas are unborn.”

[Mahāmati, why are all entities free from self-nature? Because, when observed through self-realization, their individual and common characteristics cannot be found; therefore, it is said that all dharmas are unborn.]

Why is it said that all dharmas have no self-nature? Because when they are observed through the inner realization of noble wisdom, the individual and common characteristics of all dharmas—their nature and marks—cannot be found at all. Therefore, I say that “all dharmas are unborn.”

[Why can no dharma be brought here or taken away? Because, with respect to individual and common characteristics, when one wishes to bring them here, there is nothing that comes; when one wishes to take them away, there is nothing that goes. Therefore, all dharmas are free from being brought and taken away.]

Why is it said that no dharma can be brought here or taken away? Because individual and common characteristics cannot be found, all dharmas cannot truly be said to come or go. They cannot be brought from anywhere, nor can they be taken anywhere. Therefore, I say that “no dharma can be brought here or taken away.”

[Mahāmati, why do all dharmas not cease? Because the marks of their nature and self-nature are absent, and because all dharmas are unobtainable, all dharmas do not cease.]

Why is it said that all dharmas do not cease? Because all dharmas fundamentally have no nature or marks, there can be no question of their ceasing. All dharmas are unobtainable and are originally unborn; where there is no birth, there is no cessation. Therefore, it is said that “all dharmas do not cease.”

[Mahāmati, why are all dharmas impermanent? Because the arising of marks is characterized by impermanence; therefore, it is said that all dharmas are impermanent.]

Why is it said that all dharmas are impermanent? From the standpoint of phenomena, one sees marks constantly changing, never abiding for long: arising and ceasing at every moment, passing like lightning. This is called “the arising of marks is characterized by impermanence”; therefore, it is said that “all dharmas are impermanent.”

[Mahāmati, why are all dharmas permanent? Because the arising of marks is characterized by non-arising. Since impermanence is permanent, it is said that all dharmas are permanent.]

Why is it said that all dharmas are permanent? From the standpoint of principle, when all marks arise, their very substance is unborn. This is called “the arising of marks is characterized by non-arising.” Since non-arising is permanent, impermanence too is permanent. Therefore, it is said that “all dharmas are permanent.” In other words, impermanence is itself permanence.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]
[There are four kinds of determinate response: direct affirmation, counter-questioning, analytical distinction, and setting matters aside; by these He restrains all non-Buddhists.]

There are four kinds of determinate response: (1) direct affirmation; (2) counter-questioning, also called counter-interrogation; (3) analytical distinction; and (4) setting matters aside, also called setting aside. These have already been explained above. These four kinds of determinate response are used not only to teach the Buddha’s disciples, but also to subdue non-Buddhists.

[Arising from existence and nonexistence—the Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika teachers—all are set aside as indeterminate; thus they set forth their views.]

When the teachings propounded by the Sāṃkhya teachers, who falsely maintain that all dharmas arise from “existence,” and by the Vaiśeṣika teachers, who falsely maintain that all dharmas arise from “nonexistence,” are put to the Buddha, He does not answer them at all. This is because the doctrines of these non-Buddhists cannot depart from falsely construing “existence” and “nonexistence” in order to expound their teachings.

“Sāṃkhya” means “enumeration.” Sāṃkhya teachers are teachers of the Sāṃkhya school. They establish twenty-five principles and regard them as permanent; they belong to those who cling to existence. “Vaiśeṣika” means “distinction” or “excellence.” Vaiśeṣika teachers are teachers of the Vaiśeṣika school. They propound five kinds of “nonexistence”: (1) nonexistence before arising, (2) nonexistence after cessation, (3) mutual nonexistence, (4) nonexistence through nonrelation, and (5) ultimate nonexistence. They belong to those who cling to nonexistence.

[What the Fully Awakened One distinguishes has no self-nature that can be found. Because it is free from speech, it is said to be free from self-nature.]

When viewed through the perfect awakening of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and distinguished through their correct wisdom, the inherent reality of all dharmas cannot be found at all. That is to say, the myriad dharmas have no real self-nature. The “existence” taught by the Sāṃkhya teachers and the “nonexistence” taught by the Vaiśeṣika teachers are neither the truly existent self-nature of dharmas. Because all dharmas are free from the marks of speech, the Tathāgata says that all dharmas are “free from self-nature.”

Summary of This Section:

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked the Buddha why He spoke of true permanence. The Buddha’s answer was that true permanence is explained in reliance on illusion; this is “the word ‘permanence’ based on illusion.” Amid the illusory realm of delusion and confusion, ordinary beings take things to be truly existent and give rise to inverted perceptions. Although sages likewise see the confusion, they are not inverted by its illusory appearances.

The Diamond Sūtra says: “All sages and saints are distinguished by means of the unconditioned Dharma.” Sages also differ in how they respond to the illusory appearances of confusion: the three lineages of the śrāvaka vehicle, the pratyekabuddha vehicle, and the Buddha vehicle.

This section also discusses “collections of names, collections of sentences, and collections of syllables” in order to inspire bodhisattvas to realize the true meaning of the Buddha’s words. It also discusses the four kinds of determinate response—direct affirmation, counter-questioning, analytical distinction, and setting matters aside—showing bodhisattvas the wondrous function and intent of the Buddha’s teaching.

16. Differences Among the Four Fruits

[At that time, the Mahāsattva Bodhisattva Mahāmati again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, I pray that you will explain the general and distinguishing characteristics of the various srotāpannas and those progressing toward srotāpannahood.”

“If a Mahāsattva Bodhisattva thoroughly understands the general and distinguishing characteristics of progress toward srotāpannahood, as well as the expedient characteristics of sakadāgāmins, anāgāmins, and arhats, then, having discerned them, he can teach sentient beings accordingly: the characteristics of the twofold non-self, the purification of the two obscurations, and the characteristics of passing through the various stages. He will thoroughly comprehend them and attain the inconceivable ultimate realm of all Tathāgatas. Like a many-colored maṇi jewel, he

will be able skillfully to benefit all sentient beings. With the realms of all dharmas and inexhaustible bodies and wealth, he will embrace and nurture all."]

The four fruits of the Lesser Vehicle are: the first fruit, srotāpanna; the second fruit, sakadāgāmin; the third fruit, anāgāmin; and the fourth fruit, arhat. Arhatship is the highest fruition of the Lesser Vehicle. Each of the four fruits is preceded by a causal stage. The four causal stages and four fruits together are called the "four paths and four fruits." Progress toward srotāpannahood, also called the path toward srotāpannahood, is the causal stage leading to the first fruit of the Lesser Vehicle.

Bodhisattva Mahāmati asks the Buddha to explain the general and distinguishing characteristics of the "four paths and four fruits." What are general and distinguishing characteristics? Distinguishing means different, while general means the same. Thus, general and distinguishing characteristics are their differences and common features.

Mahāmati is a Mahāyāna bodhisattva. Why, then, does he ask the Buddha to explain the causal stages and fruits of the Lesser Vehicle? It is because "if a Mahāsattva Bodhisattva thoroughly understands the general and distinguishing characteristics of progress toward srotāpannahood, as well as the expedient characteristics of sakadāgāmins, anāgāmins, and arhats, then, having discerned them, he can teach sentient beings accordingly: the characteristics of the twofold non-self, the purification of the two obscurations, and the characteristics of passing through the various stages. He will thoroughly comprehend them and attain the inconceivable ultimate realm of all Tathāgatas."

The twofold non-self means the non-self of persons and the non-self of dharmas. The two obscurations are the obscuration of afflictions and the obscuration of knowledge. "Passing through the various stages" means advancing through the various Mahāyāna bhūmis.

Mahāyāna bodhisattvas cultivate themselves and transform others. In self-cultivation, they proceed directly toward the ultimate fruition of the Mahāyāna; in transforming others, they must broadly understand the teachings of both the Greater and Lesser Vehicles, teaching different dharmas to people of different capacities. This is what is meant by "the Dharma is precious when suited to the recipient." "He can teach sentient beings accordingly" means teaching sentient beings in this way: enabling those who are suited to the teaching to realize the twofold non-self, eliminate the two obscurations, and then advance into the Mahāyāna, until they attain ultimate comprehension and proceed toward Buddhahood, thereby realizing the inconceivable ultimate realm of all Tathāgatas.

"Like a many-colored maṇi jewel, he will be able skillfully to benefit all sentient beings. With the realms of all dharmas and inexhaustible bodies and wealth, he will

embrace and nurture all." Just as a maṇi jewel can reflect all manner of forms and colors, a Mahāyāna bodhisattva can skillfully benefit all sentient beings. A Mahāyāna bodhisattva must comprehend all realms of Dharma practice and, as though possessing inexhaustible bodily forms and wealth, be able to embrace and nurture all sentient beings. For these reasons, Mahāmati, though a Mahāyāna bodhisattva, asks the Buddha to explain the teaching of the Lesser Vehicle's "four paths and four fruits."

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "Listen carefully, listen carefully, and ponder this well. I shall now explain it to you." Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "Excellent, World-Honored One. Yes, I shall listen and receive it." The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "There are three distinctions among srotāpannas and the fruit of srotāpannahood. What are these three? They are inferior, middling, and superior. Those of inferior capacity undergo at most seven births. Those of middling capacity enter parinirvāṇa after three or five births. Those of superior capacity enter parinirvāṇa in that very birth."]

"The Buddha said to Mahāmati: 'Listen carefully, listen carefully, and ponder this well. I shall now explain it to you.' Mahāmati said to the Buddha: 'Excellent, World-Honored One. Yes, I shall listen and receive it.'" This passage is readily understood and needs no explanation. "The Buddha said to Mahāmati: 'There are three distinctions among srotāpannas and the fruit of srotāpannahood.'"

"What are these three?" The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that there are three distinctions among those on the path toward srotāpannahood and those who have attained its fruit. What are these three? "They are inferior, middling, and superior." There are three differences of capacity: inferior, middling, and superior. "Those of inferior capacity undergo at most seven births."

Those of inferior capacity must pass through seven rounds of birth and death, cultivating practice in life after life, before they can pass beyond srotāpannahood and advance successively to the remaining three fruits; this is what is called "seven returns among humans and devas." "Those of middling capacity enter parinirvāṇa after three or five births." Those of middling capacity can advance successively to the remaining three fruits after either three or five births. "Those of superior capacity enter parinirvāṇa in that very birth." Those of superior capacity, having attained the first fruit, advance to the fourth fruit within that same life and swiftly realize true-emptiness nirvāṇa.

["Mahāmati, these three kinds have three fetters: inferior, middling, and superior. What are the three fetters? They are the view of a body, doubt, and attachment to precepts and observances. Through the successive advancement of these three fetters, one attains arhatship."]

A fetter is another name for affliction and may be understood plainly as a “knot in the mind.” Those of inferior, middling, and superior capacities must all untie these three knots in the mind. What are these three knots? They are “the view of a body, doubt, and attachment to precepts and observances.” Because capacities differ as inferior, middling, and superior, these three fetters likewise have inferior, middling, and superior distinctions. Through cultivation, one unties the three fetters and realizes the fruit of srotāpannahood. One then advances successively until attaining the fruit of arhatship.

[“Mahāmati, there are two kinds of view of a body: co-arisen and imagined, just as there are imagined dependent arising and imagined self-nature. For example, based on dependent arising and self-nature, attachment to the self-nature of various imaginings arises.”]

There are two kinds of view of a body: co-arisen view of a body and imagined view of a body, just as there are imagined dependent arising and imagined self-nature. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, imagined dependent arising is called “causal nature,” while imagined self-nature is called “spontaneous nature.”

What arises based on these two kinds of imagining? “Based on dependent arising and self-nature, attachment to the self-nature of various imaginings arises.” Based on these two kinds of imagining, attachment to the self-nature of various imaginings arises.

We already know that the self-nature of imagining is also called “the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment.” Thus, in “attachment to the self-nature of imagining,” does not “attachment” mean precisely what is meant by “that which is grasped”? Does the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment comprise many kinds? Yes. After explaining “the view of a body, doubt, and attachment to precepts and observances,” the text later discusses twelve kinds of imagined self-nature. Let us now return to the two kinds of view of a body. Please read on.

[“Since they are neither existent nor nonexistent, neither existent-and-nonexistent, they are unreal characteristics of imagination. Therefore, foolish ordinary people imagine and become attached to the characteristics of the self-nature of various imaginings. Like shimmering heat or a thirsty deer imagining water, this is the imagined view of a body of a srotāpanna. By embracing the insubstantiality of the non-self of persons, he eliminates the attachments of ignorance accumulated over a long time.”]

This passage discusses the imagined view of a body. The imagined view of a body is attachment to the physical body as “self.” Yet the physical body is neither truly existent nor truly nonexistent. It does not fall within existence and nonexistence; it

does not possess either “true existence” or “true nonexistence.” It is an unreal characteristic of imagination.

“Therefore, foolish ordinary people imagine and become attached to the characteristics of the self-nature of various imaginings.” We have just explained “attachment to the characteristics of the self-nature of various imaginings.” Attachment to the physical body as “self” is a view of a body produced by the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment. It is the imagining of deluded ordinary people and is therefore called the imagined view of a body. “Like shimmering heat or a thirsty deer imagining water.”

“This is the imagined view of a body of a srotāpanna. By embracing the insubstantiality of the non-self of persons, he eliminates the attachments of ignorance accumulated over a long time.” We have already discussed the image of a thirsty deer chasing a mirage, so there is no need to say more here. The imagined view of a body is like a thirsty deer chasing a mirage: it mistakes the false for the real. A srotāpanna cultivates the non-self of persons and knows that the physical body lacks any real nature, thereby eliminating the habitual tendencies of ignorant attachment accumulated over countless eons.

[“Mahāmati, the co-arisen [view of a body] is the view of a body of a srotāpanna. The four aggregates of oneself and others’ bodies lack material characteristics. Material form is produced and is that which is produced; they arise successively as mutual causes and characteristics, and the great elements and material form do not gather together. When a srotāpanna observes that the categories of existence and nonexistence do not appear, the view of a body is eliminated. When this view of a body is eliminated, craving does not arise. This is called the characteristic of the view of a body.”]

This passage discusses the co-arisen view of a body. The physical body is the aggregate of form. Of the five aggregates, after excluding the aggregate of form, there remain the four aggregates of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. “The four aggregates of oneself and others’ bodies” means that both oneself and others possess these four aggregates. These four aggregates have no material characteristics and cannot be called a “body.” They arise simultaneously with the physical body and are therefore called “co-arisen.”

What, then, of the physical body? “Material form is produced and is that which is produced; they arise successively as mutual causes and characteristics, and the great elements and material form do not gather together.” In the arising of the physical body, the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind are what can produce, while the physical body is what is produced. The four great elements

gather and interact in mutual succession, and on this basis they produce the physical body.

Neither the four great elements nor the physical body gathers in a fixed and unchanging form. Rather, they change moment by moment, gathering temporarily and ultimately disintegrating. The five aggregates are simply five kinds of gathering. The preceding passage says that none of these five kinds of gathering can be obtained. We should note the three instances of “therefore” in the preceding passage: “therefore” indicates a reason.

Since none of the five aggregates can be obtained, what is the srotāpanna’s understanding and view of this? “When a srotāpanna observes that the categories of existence and nonexistence do not appear, the view of a body is eliminated. When this view of a body is eliminated, craving does not arise. This is called the characteristic of the view of a body.” The five kinds of gathering—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—cannot be obtained; all manifest as neither “truly existent” nor “truly nonexistent.”

Neither of the two categories, existence and nonexistence, appears; this is what is meant by “the categories of existence and nonexistence do not appear.” Through this observation, the srotāpanna neither clings to existence nor attaches to nonexistence, thereby eliminating the co-arisen view of a body and no longer giving rise to craving for the physical body. This is the srotāpanna’s condition with respect to the view of a body: “This is called the characteristic of the view of a body.”

Earlier it was said: “What are the three fetters? They are the view of a body, doubt, and attachment to precepts and observances.” Now that the view of a body has been explained, doubt and attachment to precepts and observances should be explained next. Please read on.

[“Mahāmati, the characteristic of doubt is this: because one has attained the Dharma and correctly seen its characteristics, and because the imaginings of the first two kinds of view of a body have been eliminated, doubt concerning the Dharma does not arise. One does not form the view that any other teacher is a great master, whether [their teaching is] pure or impure. This is called the elimination of the characteristic of doubt by a srotāpanna.”]

What is meant by the characteristic of doubt? It is that, having attained a correct understanding of the Buddhadharma and eliminated the two kinds of view of a body —co-arisen and imagined—doubt concerning the Dharma is permanently eliminated and does not arise again. One understands what is deviant and what is correct, no longer regarding teachers of other non-Buddhist paths as great masters or being misled by their erroneous theories. One no longer doubts whether the Dharma taught by the Buddha is pure or impure. Once these three doubts are eliminated,

the characteristic of doubt is eliminated. This is how a srotāpanna eliminates the characteristic of doubt: “This is called the elimination of the characteristic of doubt by a srotāpanna.”

[Mahāmati, what is meant by clinging to precepts? Why does a srotāpanna not cling to precepts? Because he clearly sees the suffering inherent in the places of rebirth; therefore, he does not cling to them. Mahāmati, clinging means that foolish ordinary people, determined to undertake and cultivate ascetic practices for the sake of the pleasures enjoyed by the multitudes, seek rebirth. A srotāpanna does not cling to such practices, except when, dedicating them to supreme self-realization and free from deluded thought, he upholds branches of discipline as skillful means for practicing the characteristics of undefiled dharmas. This is called the cessation, in a srotāpanna, of the characteristic of clinging to precepts.]

What is meant by clinging to precepts? It refers to “clinging to rules and prohibitions”: not undertaking various false precepts or useless ascetic practices. Non-Buddhist paths prescribe such ascetic practices as chicken precepts, dog precepts, deaf precepts, and blind precepts, taking them as causes for rebirth in heaven in a future life. They say that once all the sufferings of this life have been exhausted, one will enjoy nothing but happiness in future lives.

Why does a srotāpanna not cling to the various false precepts? Because a srotāpanna clearly sees the various aspects of suffering. These sufferings are not causes of happiness in future lives, and such happiness is not the bliss of nirvāṇa. Therefore, he does not cling to these false precepts.

Deluded ordinary people blindly believe these false teachings. Seeking sensual pleasures in future lives, they resolutely undertake and uphold these useless ascetic practices, believing them to be causes of rebirth in heaven. A srotāpanna does not cling to useless ascetic practices, unless they are dedicated to the Tathāgata’s supreme wisdom of self-realization, undertaken to eliminate deluded thoughts, and used as skillful means for undefiled dharmas. This is the situation meant by a srotāpanna’s cessation of clinging to precepts: “This is called the cessation, in a srotāpanna, of the characteristic of clinging to precepts.”

[A srotāpanna severs the three fetters, and greed and delusion do not arise. If a srotāpanna were to think, “These fetters are no longer present in me,” there would be two faults: he would fall into the view of a body-self, and the various fetters would remain unsevered.]

When a srotāpanna has severed the three fetters of “view of a body-self, doubt, and clinging to precepts,” thoughts of greed and delusion do not arise. If a srotāpanna complacently thinks, “I no longer have the three fetters, such as the view of a body-self; there is no need to sever them further,” this thought contains two errors. First,

it fails to recognize the view of a body-self and has in fact already fallen into it. Second, the view of a body-self is the root, while the other fetters are branches. If the root has not been removed, how can the branches be severed?

[Mahāmati said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, you have spoken of many kinds of craving. Which craving is severed by a srotāpanna?” The Buddha said to Mahāmati, “Delighting in women, becoming entangled in and attached to them, resorting to various means, committing evil deeds of body and speech, enjoying pleasure in the present and receiving suffering in the future—these do not arise in him. Why? Because he has attained the bliss of proper absorption in samādhi. Thus these are severed in him, but not the craving that inclines toward nirvāṇa.”]

Mahāmati Bodhisattva said, “World-Honored One, you have spoken of many kinds of craving. Which kind of craving does a srotāpanna sever?” The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: It is like delighting in women, becoming entangled in and attached to them, and pursuing various means of sensual pleasure, thereby committing evil deeds of body and speech, enjoying pleasure in the present, and receiving suffering in the future. Such sensual pleasures do not arise in a srotāpanna. Why? Because a srotāpanna has attained the bliss of proper absorption in samādhi. Thus, a srotāpanna severs craving for sensual pleasure but has not severed craving that inclines toward nirvāṇa.

The preceding sūtra passage discussed the first fruition, that of the srotāpanna. It now begins to discuss the second fruition, the sakadāgāmin; the third fruition, the anāgāmin; and the fourth fruition, the arhat.

[Mahāmati, what are the characteristics of a sakadāgāmin? They are the sudden illumination of deluded thoughts regarding the appearances of form; the non-arising of the characteristics of arising and views; and clear discernment of the characteristics of the destination of dhyāna. He returns suddenly to this world, reaches the end of suffering, and attains nirvāṇa. Therefore, he is called a sakadāgāmin.]

Let us first explain the terms. “Deluded thoughts regarding the appearances of form”: appearances of form refer to the appearances of the five aggregates, beginning with form. The five aggregates arise from deluded thought and originally have no inherent substance. “The characteristics of arising and views”: the characteristic of arising refers to the various fetters mentioned above, such as the view of a body-self. The characteristic of views refers to the various deluded thoughts of false views. Now consider the two instances of “sudden”: sudden illumination and sudden return. Sudden illumination means being able to understand immediately.

Sudden return means returning immediately, and being able to bring this return to an end. This is much quicker than for a srotāpanna: a srotāpanna undergoes at most seven rebirths, whereas a sakadāgāmin attains nirvāṇa after “one return.” (The Diamond Sūtra says: “A sakadāgāmin is called a once-returner . . .”)

What is a sakadāgāmin like? It is thus: one immediately realizes that deluded thoughts are originally empty and that the five aggregates are not truly existent. Consequently, the various fetters do not arise, false views do not arise, and one clearly discerns the characteristics of the destination of meditative absorption. Returning once more to this world, in this single return one can bring suffering to its end and attain nirvāṇa. This is a sakadāgāmin.

[Mahāmati, what is an anāgāmin? It is one for whom the appearances of form in the past, future, and present, their nature and non-nature, and the faults of arising and views cause deluded thoughts not to arise and the fetters to be severed. This is called an anāgāmin.]

“The appearances of form, their nature and non-nature”: here again we encounter “nature and non-nature.” That is to say, the appearances of the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—are neither existent nor nonexistent; they are merely accumulations of deluded thought. This corresponds to “the sudden illumination of deluded thoughts regarding the appearances of form” in the preceding passage. “The faults of arising and views” corresponds precisely to “the non-arising of the characteristics of arising and views” in the preceding passage. “Causing deluded thoughts not to arise and the fetters to be severed” corresponds to “clear discernment of the characteristics of the destination of dhyāna” in the preceding passage.

What is an anāgāmin like? As stated above, a sakadāgāmin still requires one return, whereas an anāgāmin immediately severs the three divisions of time—past, present, and future. Having severed the future division of time, one need not return to this world again, but can bring suffering to its end and attain nirvāṇa. This is an anāgāmin.

[Mahāmati, an arhat is one who possesses the various dhyānas, samādhis, liberations, powers, and insights, and for whom afflictions, suffering, and deluded thoughts are without inherent nature. Therefore, he is called an arhat.]

Let us first explain the terms. “The various dhyānas and samādhis”: here, “the various dhyānas” refers to worldly meditative absorptions, which one enters and emerges from, such as the four dhyānas and eight meditative attainments. Here, “samādhi” refers to supramundane undefiled meditative absorption, in which there is neither entering nor emerging. “Liberation” has many interpretations. Here, it may simply be understood as “liberation through wisdom.”

Liberation through wisdom is precisely what an arhat possesses. “Powers and insights”: powers have many explanations, including the five powers and ten powers; insights have many explanations, including the five insights and ten insights. Here, they may simply be understood as the three insights and six supernormal powers. These are favorable terms. There are also the unfavorable terms “afflictions, suffering, and deluded thoughts,” which need no further explanation.

One who possesses the favorable qualities described above and has completely eliminated the unfavorable qualities described above is called an arhat.

[Mahāmati said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, you have spoken of three kinds of arhats. Which kind of arhat is meant here? World-Honored One, does this refer to the arhat of the tranquil path of the One Vehicle? To an arhat manifested by bodhisattva mahāsattvas as a skillful means? Or to an arhat transformed by the Buddha?”]

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asked, “The World-Honored One has spoken of three kinds of arhats. Which kind of arhat is being discussed above? Is it the arhat of the ‘tranquil path of the One Vehicle’? Or the arhat whom bodhisattva mahāsattvas manifest as a skillful means? Or the arhat transformed by the Buddha?”

Here, the “One Vehicle” in “the tranquil path of the One Vehicle” refers to the first of the three vehicles—śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas—namely, the Śrāvaka Vehicle.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati, “It refers to the śrāvaka who has attained the tranquil path of the One Vehicle, not to the others. The others practice the bodhisattva conduct or are transformed by the Buddha. Through skillful means and the power of their original vows, they manifest rebirth among the multitudes in order to adorn the Buddha’s retinue. Mahāmati, in the realm of deluded thought they teach various dharmas, speaking of attaining fruition, attaining dhyāna, and meditators entering dhyāna. Thus they manifest the characteristics of attaining fruition through the directly realized measure of their own mind, and this is called attaining fruition.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: The preceding passage refers to the arhat of the “tranquil path of the One Vehicle,” not to the latter two kinds. The latter two are manifestations by bodhisattvas as skillful means, or those transformed by the Buddha.

The latter two do not abide in the tranquil One Vehicle. Rather, without abiding in nirvāṇa and without becoming weary of birth and death, they rely on the power of the original vows of Buddhas and bodhisattvas to manifest rebirth among the multitudes, thereby adorning the Buddha’s retinue. How do they adorn it? “In the

realm of deluded thought, they teach various dharmas." What dharmas do they teach in the realm of deluded thought? "They speak of attaining fruition, attaining dhyāna, and meditators entering dhyāna."

They speak of attaining particular fruitions—just as the four fruitions were discussed—and realizing particular dhyānas. These have not departed from "the realm of deluded thought," and so it is said that they are "all far removed." Though far removed from attainment and realization, this does not hinder skillful manifestations. They manifest the characteristics of attaining fruition through the directly realized measure of their own mind, manifest the characteristics of attaining fruition, and, in the favorable sense explained above, speak of attaining and realizing arhatship.

Then, if attainment and realization are all spoken of in reliance on deluded thought, why manifest them at all? The Diamond Sūtra says, "What is called a composite appearance is in fact inexpressible, but ordinary people are attached to such things." Because they are attached to such things, one uses them as skillful means to guide them. Therefore, such skillful manifestations are necessary. First entice them with the hook of desire; afterward, lead them into the Buddha's wisdom.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, those who wish to transcend dhyāna and the immeasurable and formless realms should depart from the appearances of the directly realized measure of their own mind.]

Let us first explain the terms. "Dhyāna" refers to the first, second, third, and fourth dhyānas. "The immeasurable and formless" refers to the immeasurable realms of infinite space and infinite consciousness, and the formless realms of nothingness and neither perception nor non-perception.

Those who wish to transcend the heavenly realms and directly realize liberation should depart from the appearances of the directly realized measure of their own mind, because even mind cannot be obtained.

[Mahāmati, feeling, thought, and proper absorption are not transcendence of the directly realized measure of one's own mind. Why not? Because there is still the measure of mind.]

Let us first explain the terms. "Feeling" means sensation. "Thought" means reflection. "Proper absorption" means meditative absorption. So long as feeling, reflection, and meditative absorption remain, one may think that one has transcended the directly realized measure of one's own mind—but this is not so. Why not? Because feeling, reflection, and meditative absorption have not departed from mind. The measure of mind still remains, and one has not yet transcended the directly realized measure of one's own mind.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:] [The various dhyānas, the four immeasurables, and the formless samādhis; when all feeling and thought cease, the measure of mind is not found there.]

“The various dhyānas and the four immeasurables” refers to the four meditative absorptions of the form realm: the stage of joy and bliss born of seclusion, the stage of joy and bliss born of concentration, the stage of sublime bliss free from joy, and the stage of purity of equanimity and mindfulness. “The formless samādhis” refers to the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm: infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception. “All feeling and thought cease” refers to the cessation of feeling and perception. “The measure of mind is not found there” means that the nine successive meditative attainments described above all involve grasping at the directly realized measure of one’s own mind, yet in them there is truly not a single dharma to be obtained.

[The fruition of the srotāpanna, the once-returner and the non-returner, and also the arhat—these are confusions of the mind.]

“The fruit of srotāpanna”—that is, the first fruit, srotāpanna. “The once-returner and the non-returner”—“once-returner” means one return, namely the second fruit, sakadāgāmin. “Non-returner,” the fruit of non-returning, is the third fruit, anāgāmin. “And the arhat”—that is, the fourth fruit, arhat. “Their minds are confused by delusion”—the above four fruits all arise from deluded and confused minds that grasp at the appearance of nirvāṇa. They have not left behind conceptual attachment and do not know that birth and death and nirvāṇa are both manifestations of one’s own mind, like dreams, illusions, and flowers in empty space; instead, they mistakenly take nirvāṇa to be real.

The meditator, meditation, and its conditions; severing knowledge and views of the true truth—these are measures of deluded thought. If one awakens to this, one attains liberation.

“The meditator, meditation, and its conditions”—the practitioner of meditative absorption, the meditative absorption being cultivated, and the meditative objects apprehended within that absorption. “Severing knowledge and views of the true truth”—“severing” means eliminating the origin of suffering. “Knowing” means knowing suffering. “Seeing the true truth” means clearly seeing the truths of cessation and the path. This line refers to the contemplation of the four noble truths —suffering, origin, cessation, and path—cultivated in the Lesser Vehicle.

“These are measures of deluded thought”—the contemplation of the four truths cultivated in the Lesser Vehicle, as described above, is a measure manifested by the discriminations of one’s own deluded mind; it has no real nature that can be obtained. “If one awakens to this, one attains liberation”—only if one realizes that

the Lesser Vehicle's four truths have not departed from deluded thought and possess no real nature that can be obtained can one realize ultimate liberation. As the Heart Sūtra says: no suffering, origin, cessation, or path.

Furthermore, Mahāmati, there are two kinds of awakening: awakening through observation, and awakening through the establishment of grasping and attachment to appearances of deluded thought.

Above it says, "If one awakens to this, one attains liberation." There are two kinds of "awakening": one is "awakening through observation," and the other is "awakening through the establishment of grasping and attachment to appearances of deluded thought."

Mahāmati, what is awakening through observation? If one awakens to the characteristics of the intrinsic nature of awareness, discerns their freedom from the four propositions, and finds them unobtainable, this is called awakening through observation. Mahāmati, those four propositions are freedom from one, different, both, and neither; existent, nonexistent, neither existent nor nonexistent; permanent and impermanent. These are called the four propositions. Mahāmati, freedom from these four propositions is called all dharmas. Mahāmati, one should cultivate the observation of all dharmas as free from these four propositions.

What is "awakening through observation"? It is to awaken through the characteristics of nature and intrinsic nature, discern freedom from the four propositions, and clearly realize their unobtainability. Such observation is called awakening through observation. The term "nature and intrinsic nature" appears again; there is no need to explain it repeatedly.

What are the "four propositions"? They are listed below: (1) one, different, both one and different, neither one nor different; (2) both, not both, both both and not both, neither both nor not both; (3) existent, nonexistent, both existent and nonexistent, neither existent nor nonexistent; (4) permanent, impermanent, both permanent and impermanent, neither permanent nor impermanent. To be free from the bondage of these four propositions and observe with wisdom is called "all dharmas." This observation free from the four propositions, this all dharmas, should be cultivated.

Mahāmati, what is awakening through the establishment of grasping and attachment to appearances of deluded thought? It is grasping and attachment to the unreal appearances of deluded thought concerning solidity, moisture, warmth, and movement; to the four great elements; and to tenets, causal characteristics, and analogies—establishing as real what cannot truly be established. This is called awakening through the establishment of grasping and attachment to appearances of deluded thought. These are called the characteristics of the two kinds of awakening.

What is “awakening through the establishment of grasping and attachment to appearances of deluded thought”? It refers to grasping and falsely imputing appearances manifested by one’s own deluded mind. What does one grasp and falsely impute? One grasps and falsely imputes unreal appearances of deluded thought, such as softness and hardness, dryness and moisture, warmth and coldness, movement and stillness, taking these forms to be truly existent.

One grasps and falsely imputes the four material elements of earth, water, fire, and wind, taking these material appearances to be truly existent. One grasps and falsely imputes such modes of reasoning as tenets, causes, and analogies, taking these mental appearances to be truly existent. These are not truly existent and cannot be established, yet they are forcibly established. This is called awakening through the establishment of grasping and attachment to appearances of deluded thought. Simply put, it means taking the false for the real. To understand that these are false and no longer take them for real is also called “awakening.”

These two described above are called the characteristics of the two kinds of awakening.

If a bodhisattva mahāsattva accomplishes these two characteristics of awakening and the characteristics of the selflessness of persons and dharmas, and ultimately knows well the awakening that all skillful means are without inherent existence, then, through observing the stages of practice, they attain the first bhūmi, enter a hundred samādhis, attain differentiated samādhis, see a hundred Buddhas and a hundred bodhisattvas, know the events of a hundred kalpas in each of the past and future, and illuminate a hundred Buddha-lands with their light.

If a great bodhisattva accomplishes these two characteristics of awakening and directly realizes the selflessness of persons and dharmas, they can ultimately understand that all skillful means return to nonexistence. To be able to understand this well is right awakening. With the wisdom of this right awakening, they observe the stages practiced by bodhisattvas and thereby enter the first bhūmi, the Joyful Ground; enter a hundred samādhis; and attain differentiated samādhis. By the power of samādhi, a first-bhūmi bodhisattva can see a hundred Buddhas and a hundred bodhisattvas, know the events of a hundred kalpas in each of the past and future, and illuminate a hundred Buddha-lands with their light.

The Mahāyānasaṃgraha says: When a bodhisattva enters the first bhūmi, they realize ten gates of a hundredfold illumination: first, in the space of a single instant, they realize a hundred samādhis. Second, with the pure divine eye, they see a hundred Buddha-lands. Third, through the power of spiritual powers, they can shake a hundred Buddha-worlds. Fourth, they can travel to a hundred Buddha-

worlds and teach sentient beings. Fifth, they can transform one body into a hundred kinds of bodily forms for sentient beings to see.

Sixth, they can bring a hundred kinds of sentient beings to maturity. Seventh, when beneficial, they can retain their body in the world for a hundred kalpas. Eighth, they can know the events of a hundred kalpas in the past and future. Ninth, they can enter a hundred gates of Dharma illumination with wisdom, penetrating and comprehending them. Tenth, they can contemplate a hundred kinds of retinues with their body.

They know the characteristics of ever higher stages; their great vows are extraordinary; they possess mastery of spiritual powers; they receive the Dharma-cloud empowerment; and they will attain the Tathāgata's ground of self-awakening. They skillfully keep the mind on the ten inexhaustible statements, mature sentient beings, manifest various transformations and luminous adornments, and attain the samādhi of the bliss of noble self-awakening.

A first-bhūmi bodhisattva knows the states of the higher grounds. Their great vows are extraordinary and they possess mastery of spiritual powers. They eventually enter the Dharma-cloud Ground of the tenth bhūmi, receive empowerment from the Buddhas, and then enter the Tathāgata's ground of self-awakening, ultimately attaining Buddhahood. Great bodhisattvas skillfully keep their minds on the ten inexhaustible statements and on the work of liberating sentient beings. Through various transformations and luminous adornments, they enter the bliss of the Tathāgata's noble wisdom and attain this right meditative absorption and experience.

Regarding the "ten inexhaustible statements," the "Ten Grounds" chapter of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra says that, upon the first Joyful Ground, bodhisattvas make ten kinds of vast vows of practice, called the ten gates of vows. These ten great vow-gates are made on the basis of the ten inexhaustible statements. These ten inexhaustible statements derive from the ten statements of exhaustion, expressed as follows: "If these ten statements were exhausted, then my vows would be exhausted."

"But because these ten statements cannot be exhausted, my vows have no end." The ten statements of exhaustion are: first, the exhaustion of the realm of sentient beings; second, the exhaustion of worlds; third, the exhaustion of the realm of space; fourth, the exhaustion of the dharma realm; fifth, the exhaustion of the realm of nirvāṇa; sixth, the exhaustion of the realm of the appearance of Buddhas; seventh, the exhaustion of the realm of Tathāgata wisdom; eighth, the exhaustion of the realm of objects apprehended by mind; ninth, the exhaustion of the realm

entered by Buddha-wisdom; and tenth, the exhaustion of the realm of the transformations of the world, Dharma, and wisdom.

Furthermore, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas should thoroughly understand material form produced by the four great elements. How do bodhisattvas thoroughly understand material form produced by the four great elements? Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas awaken as follows: in ultimate truth, the four great elements do not arise. They observe the non-arising of those four great elements in this way. Having observed thus, they awaken to the limits of discriminating thought concerning names and appearances, the limits of manifestations of their own mind, and the nonexistence of external natures. This is called the limits of deluded thought manifested by mind—the three realms. Observing material form produced by the four great elements, they see that its nature is free from the four propositions, penetrative and pure, free from self and what belongs to self; it abides in the divisions of its own characteristics in accordance with reality, and its non-arisen intrinsic characteristics are established.

The Buddha again said to Bodhisattva Mahāmati: Great bodhisattvas should thoroughly understand “material form produced by the four great elements.” What does it mean to understand material form produced by the four great elements? It is this understanding: one should observe the ultimate truth of the four great elements in this way. The four great elements are without characteristics and utterly unobtainable; they do not exist as something produced by causes. Thus it is said that “the four great elements do not arise.”

After observing this ultimate truth, one can awaken to the fact that all distinctions of names, appearances, and deluded thought are distinctions illusorily manifested by one’s own mind and have no reality. This is called “the limits of deluded thought manifested by mind,” namely the so-called three realms—the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm. That is, the three realms are all distinctions illusorily manifested by one’s own mind.

This is “material form produced by the four great elements.” (“Limits” carries such meanings as distinctions, boundaries, and ranges.) When one observes material form produced by the four great elements as described above, its reality is free from the four propositions of existence and nonexistence, annihilation and permanence. Its reality is penetrating and pure, without attachment or defilement.

Its reality is free from such false dualities as self and what belongs to self. It is thusness, unmoving; real and not false. The true characteristic is without characteristics, yet without no characteristics. The intrinsic characteristics of the various distinctions each abide within their own divisions; all are illusory

manifestations and are originally unborn. Thus the intrinsic characteristics of non-arising—the three realms—are formed.

Mahāmati, how do those four great elements produce material form? The great element of deluded thought as moistening produces the inner and outer water element; the great element of deluded thought as capable produces the inner and outer fire element; the great element of deluded thought as drifting and moving produces the inner and outer wind element; and the great element of deluded thought as material form that divides and cuts produces the inner and outer earth element, together with material form and space. Through attachment to false truths, the five aggregates assemble, and material form produced by the four great elements arises.

It is necessary first to explain the "four great elements." The four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—refer to dispositions and qualities, rather than visible forms or tangible matter. The word "element" is figuratively likened to a "seed." From these seeds, deluded movement—or, in other words, deluded thought—is aroused. The four great elements are the four great elements of deluded thought.

The water element is the great element of deluded thought as moistening; the fire element is the great element of deluded thought as capable; the wind element is the great element of deluded thought as drifting and moving; and the earth element is the great element of deluded thought as material form that divides and cuts. Simply put, the water element is the quality of moistening, the fire element the quality of energy, the wind element the quality of movement, and the earth element the quality of illusorily manifested matter.

How, then, do these four great elements of deluded thought produce the illusory appearance of "produced material form"? The great element of deluded thought as moistening—the water element—produces the illusory appearance of the inner and outer water element. The great element of deluded thought as capable—the fire element—produces the illusory appearance of the inner and outer fire element. The great element of deluded thought as drifting and moving produces the illusory appearance of the inner and outer wind element. The great element of deluded thought as material form that divides and cuts produces the illusory appearance of the inner and outer earth element.

Material form means matter. Where there is matter, there is an inside and an outside of matter. Beyond one kind of matter there may be another kind of matter, or there may be space; hence, "material form and space are together." This "together" means that both matter and space are illusorily manifested by the earth element, so there is no need to list space separately as a great element—the space element.

Yet sometimes the element of space is listed separately, yielding the five great elements: earth, water, fire, wind, and space. Moreover, the “seven great elements” are sometimes spoken of: earth, water, fire, wind, space, seeing, and consciousness. Clearly, the first five of the seven belong to the material world (the domain of form), while the latter two belong to the mental world (the domain of mind).

No matter how many illusory appearances arise, they are all unreal. No actual thing has arisen; all are unborn, all are false, and none is ultimate truth. Yet, because of ignorant and erroneous views, deluded thoughts, and attachment, one takes the false for true. This is what the sūtra calls “attachment to false truth.”

What happens when one attaches to false truth? Then “the five aggregates gather together”: this erroneous view coalesces into the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness.

Form is the physical body that will die; feeling is painful sensation; perception is the deluded thought that the physical body does not perish; formations are the physical body’s unstoppable gradual alteration and dissolution; consciousness is the storehouse of karmic seeds, the root of saṃsāra, which follows karma in being reborn in a new physical body to undergo retribution. Thus, in accordance with the law of cause and effect, the vast sea of suffering of rebirth in the six realms is illusorily manifested. The physical body does not depart from the category of form produced by the four great elements. Form produced by the four great elements is originally unborn, but because of attachment to false truth, physical bodies arise without cease and the sea of suffering is boundless; thus one falls into the view that physical bodies arise—“form produced by the four great elements arises.”

Mahāmati, because consciousness delights in the various realms of traces, there is continuous succession through the other destinies.

The four great elements are originally unborn. Form produced from them is like an illusion or a shadow: it seems to leave traces, yet no actual thing exists; thus it is called a “realm of traces.” The eight consciousnesses delight in various realms of traces: eye consciousness delights in forms, ear consciousness in sounds, nose consciousness in odors, tongue consciousness in flavors, body consciousness in tactile objects, the sixth consciousness in dharma objects, the seventh consciousness in the self, and the eighth consciousness in saṃsāra. Because they delight in the various realms of traces, birth and death continue unceasingly and without interruption in the other destinies—the six destinies or six realms.

Mahāmati, the four great elements, such as earth, and the forms produced from them have the conditions of the four great elements; they are not conditions of those four great elements. Why is this so? Because without nature, form, location, and means of activity, the great elements do not arise. Mahāmati, nature, form,

location, and means of activity arise through combination; they are not formless. Therefore, this is the appearance of form produced by the four great elements. This is the deluded thinking of non-Buddhists, not mine.

The Diamond Sūtra often employs a threefold formula: “what is called,” “is not,” and “is called.” We shall now use this threefold formula to explain the passage’s “form produced by the four great elements,” “conditions of the four great elements,” and “arising through combination.” “The four great elements, such as earth, and the forms produced from them”—this is what is called form produced by the four great elements. “Have the conditions of the four great elements”—this is not form produced by the four great elements.

(The four great elements are originally unborn; only because there are conditions of the four great elements is produced form illusorily manifested. Hence, “is not form produced by the four great elements.”) “They are not conditions of those four great elements”—this is called form produced by the four great elements. “Why is this so?”—why is this said? Why is “not conditions of those four great elements” called “form produced by the four great elements”? Please consider what follows:

“Nature, form, location, and means of activity”—these are what are called the four conditions of the great elements. “Without nature”—this is not the conditions of the four great elements. (The four conditions have no substantial nature to be found; hence, “is not.”) Here, “without nature” is precisely the preceding phrase, “not conditions of those four great elements.” The four conditions are without nature, while the four great elements are originally real; this is then called form produced by the four great elements. “The great elements do not arise”—this is called the conditions of the four great elements. (The great elements are originally unborn and are only illusorily manifested in reliance on conditions; hence, “is called.”)

“Nature, form, location, and means of activity arise through combination”—this is what is called the arising through combination of the conditions of the four great elements. “They are not formless”—this is not arising through combination. (Here, “form” is an abbreviated expression referring to the four conditions of nature, form, location, and means of activity.) Once the four conditions combine, there are no longer four conditions; yet now it says, “they are not formless”—they are not without the four conditions. Thus, this is not arising through combination. “Therefore, this is the appearance of form produced by the four great elements”—this is called arising through combination. (The four great elements are originally unborn; through combination they are illusorily manifested, hence “is called arising through combination.”)

“This is the deluded thinking of non-Buddhists, not mine”—non-Buddhists think deluded thoughts and cling to them, taking the false for true and the illusory for

truly existent. Although they too speak of the four great elements, the four conditions, and combination, this is not what I have taught.

Again, Mahāmati, I shall explain the characteristics of the intrinsic nature of the aggregates. What are the characteristics of the intrinsic nature of the aggregates? They are the five aggregates. What are the five? Form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Of these, the four aggregates other than form are feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Mahāmati, form consists of the four great elements and the forms produced from them, each having distinct characteristics. Mahāmati, it is not that the formless possesses a count of four, like empty space. For example, empty space transcends the characteristics of number and is apart from number, yet deluded thought says that there is one empty space. Mahāmati, in the same way, the aggregates transcend the characteristics of number and are apart from number, apart from nature and non-nature, and apart from the four propositions. Characteristics of number are the speech of foolish ordinary people, not of sages.

This passage explains the characteristics of the intrinsic nature of the aggregates. What are they? It speaks of the five aggregates. Which five? Form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Among the five aggregates, four do not possess the characteristic of form: feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. These are called the four formless aggregates. The aggregate of form includes the four great elements and the forms produced from them.

Each of the four great elements has its own characteristics. The characteristics of the forms they produce are each different, immeasurable and boundless, and cannot be expressed in numerical terms. The four formless aggregates of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness likewise cannot be adequately explained merely as a numerical set of “four.” Their nature is like empty space. Empty space transcends number; it is neither one nor different, and cannot be explained through numerical distinctions.

Yet foolish ordinary people engage in deluded discrimination and say that empty space is one. Just as empty space transcends the characteristics of number, so too do the five aggregates transcend them: they are apart from the characteristics of number, apart from nature and non-nature, and apart from the four propositions. The numerical characteristics of the five aggregates are the speech of foolish ordinary people—or, one may say, speech addressed to foolish ordinary people—not the speech of sages, or speech addressed to sages.

Mahāmati, sages regard the various forms and appearances as like illusions, apart from designations of difference and non-difference. They are also like the illusory body of a person appearing in a dream, apart from difference and non-difference.

Mahāmati, the orientation of noble wisdom, like the illusory manifestation of the aggregates through deluded thought, is called the characteristics of the intrinsic nature of the aggregates. You should eliminate them. Having eliminated them, teach the Dharma of quiescence and cut off all non-Buddhist views in every Buddha-land. Mahāmati, when teaching quiescence, the view of the non-self of dharmas is purified, and one enters the immovable bhūmi.

Having entered the immovable bhūmi, one attains mastery and unobstructed freedom in immeasurable samādhis, attains the mind-born body and the samādhi like illusion, fully comprehends ultimate power, and gains mastery of luminosity, thereby rescuing, gathering in, and benefiting all sentient beings. Just as the great earth bears and nourishes sentient beings, so too do great bodhisattvas universally liberate sentient beings.

The luminous appearances of the sambhogakāya, the majestic appearances of its Buddha-land, and the various forms manifested by sages are likewise illusory manifestations. They are neither one nor different and cannot be explained through numerical distinctions. They are like the illusory body of a person appearing in a dream, where the concepts of “one” and “many” do not exist.

The orientation of noble wisdom, evoked by great vows, is pure, luminous, and majestic. Yet it is likewise no different from the foregoing unreal and illusory manifestation of the five aggregates, and from the foregoing “characteristics of the intrinsic nature of the aggregates.” You must not mistakenly cling to such appearances; you should eliminate such deluded attachment.

After eliminating deluded attachment to the various pure, luminous, and majestic appearances, one teaches the quiescent Dharma of neither arising nor ceasing. Once arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescence manifests; one then further cuts off all the many erroneous non-Buddhist views in every Buddha-land. When teaching the Dharma of quiescence, the right view of the non-self of dharmas becomes pure and complete, and one thereby realizes the immovable bhūmi, the eighth bhūmi.

After entering the immovable bhūmi, one realizes free and unobstructed mastery in immeasurable samādhis, attains the mind-born body and the samādhi like illusion, fully comprehends ultimate power, and gains mastery of luminosity. One can therefore rescue, embrace, and benefit all sentient beings. The great earth, in its deep virtue, bears and nourishes all beings. Great bodhisattvas universally liberate all sentient beings in the same way, like the vast and majestic earth.

Again, Mahāmati, non-Buddhists have four kinds of nirvāṇa. What are the four? They are nirvāṇa based on the non-nature of nature and intrinsic nature; nirvāṇa based on the non-nature of the nature of various characteristics; nirvāṇa of

awareness of the non-nature of the intrinsic nature of particular characteristics; and nirvāṇa based on the cessation of the continuous flow of arising and ceasing of the particular and common characteristics of the aggregates. These are the four kinds of nirvāṇa of non-Buddhists, not the Dharma I teach. Mahāmati, what I teach is the cessation of deluded consciousness; this is called nirvāṇa.

Non-Buddhists have four kinds of nirvāṇa. What are these four? They may be listed briefly as follows. First, nirvāṇa based on the non-nature of nature and intrinsic nature. Put simply, this concerns nature. Second, nirvāṇa based on the non-nature of the nature of various characteristics. This concerns characteristics. Third, nirvāṇa of awareness of the non-nature of the intrinsic nature of particular characteristics. This speaks of both nature and characteristics. Fourth, nirvāṇa based on the cessation of the continuous flow of arising and ceasing of the particular and common characteristics of the aggregates.

The first kind: “nature and intrinsic nature” means the inherent characteristics of a nature. “Non-nature” means having no substantial nature. The inherent characteristics of a nature have no substantial nature; they are nothing more than dependently arisen. To be aware that the inherent characteristics of a nature have no substantial nature is nirvāṇa. The second kind: “various characteristics” means the appearances of all kinds of things.

“Nature and non-nature” means that they both have substantial nature and lack substantial nature; in either case, they are nothing more than dependently arisen. To be aware that appearances themselves both exist and do not exist is nirvāṇa. The third kind says that the appearances and natures of all kinds of things have no substantial nature and are nothing more than dependently arisen.

To be aware that both characteristics and nature have no substantial nature—this awareness is nirvāṇa. (In fact, the presence of such awareness is precisely deluded thought.) These first three kinds do no more than speak of nature and characteristics. Though each makes seemingly conclusive claims, they all do no more than speak of causes and conditions. What they speak of is “the nature of causes and conditions.” Now consider the fourth kind. “The aggregates” refers to the five aggregates.

“Particular and common characteristics” means particular characteristics and common characteristics—that is, shared characteristics and distinct characteristics. “The particular and common characteristics of the aggregates” means the particular and common characteristics of the five aggregates. For example, the aggregate of form and the aggregate of feeling each have their own particular characteristics. The four aggregates together constitute the characteristics of mental dharmas, while the

five aggregates together constitute the characteristics of a living body; these are common characteristics.

“Continuous flow” means the unceasing flow and succession of arising and ceasing: metabolism, emerging and disappearing in turn—in other words, vigorous vitality. “The cessation of continuous flow” means that vitality is extinguished. When vitality is extinguished, this is death. The cessation of emerging and disappearing in turn means that death is the end. This is a typical annihilationist view.

Does death mean that everything is finished? No. One must still undergo karmic retribution according to one’s karma and enter saṃsāra again. The fourth kind is that death itself is nirvāṇa. This non-Buddhist path holds that one is born from nature and, upon death, returns to nature; this return is nirvāṇa. What it speaks of is “natural nature.” The four kinds of nirvāṇa taught by non-Buddhist paths do not go beyond the categories of “causal nature” and “natural nature.” The Śūraṅgama Sūtra repeatedly emphasizes “neither causal nature nor natural nature,” repeatedly refuting the erroneous views of non-Buddhist paths.

The four kinds of nirvāṇa discussed above are taught by various non-Buddhist paths; they are not what I teach. The nirvāṇa that I teach is called nirvāṇa when “the consciousness of deluded thought ceases.” The four kinds of nirvāṇa of non-Buddhist paths are not nirvāṇa at all; they are all deluded conceptions. Only when these various consciousnesses of deluded thought are extinguished can it be called nirvāṇa.

Here, “cessation” does not mean annihilation. It means complete transformation: the thorough elimination of deluded discriminatory thought. When all discriminating consciousnesses cease, the wisdom of suchness arises; this is called “the cessation of the consciousness of deluded thought.” What does “the consciousness of deluded thought” refer to? From the perspective of the five dharmas—name, appearance, discrimination, right wisdom, and suchness—it refers to the third. From the perspective of the three natures—pervasive discrimination and attachment, dependence on others, and absolute reality and perfection—it refers to the first. From the perspective of the eight consciousnesses, it refers to the sixth consciousness.

In this passage, when the Buddha speaks of nirvāṇa, he mentions only the cessation of the sixth consciousness. Does this mean that the eight consciousnesses also cease? Mahāmatī Bodhisattva next asks precisely from this perspective. Please read on.

[Mahāmatī addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, do you not establish the eight consciousnesses?” The Buddha said: “I do establish them.” Mahāmatī addressed the Buddha: “If you establish them, why do you speak of being free from

the mental consciousness, but not from the other seven consciousnesses?" The Buddha told Mahāmatī: "Because of that cause and its object of grasping, the seven consciousnesses do not arise. Mental consciousness arises through discriminative attachment to differentiated objects. Habitual tendencies nurture the storehouse consciousness; together with manas, thoughts of attachment to self and what belongs to self arise through causes and conditions."

"The storehouse consciousness, the cause that does not destroy bodily appearances, arises through grasping at objects manifested by one's own mind; the accumulation of attachment-based consciousness arises, each becoming the cause of the next. It is like the waves of the sea: when the wind of objects manifested by one's own mind blows, they arise and cease. It is likewise. Therefore, when mental consciousness ceases, the seven consciousnesses also cease."]

Mahāmatī asked: "World-Honored One, did you not tell us that there are eight consciousnesses?" The Buddha said: "Yes, I did indeed say that the eight consciousnesses exist." Mahāmatī then asked: "If the eight consciousnesses exist, why do you say only that freedom from the sixth consciousness is nirvāṇa, rather than freedom from the other seven consciousnesses? Surely nirvāṇa requires the complete cessation of all consciousnesses!"

The Buddha replied to Mahāmatī Bodhisattva: "Because of that cause and its object of grasping, the seven consciousnesses do not arise." The sixth consciousness is deluded discrimination and is the cause of the other consciousnesses. Moreover, the sixth mental consciousness grasps at the other consciousnesses, causing consciousness and thought to continue without interruption. So long as consciousness and thought continue unceasingly, saṃsāra does not end and the sea of suffering is not stilled. Thus, if the sixth mental consciousness is extinguished and completely cleared away, the other consciousnesses have no means of arising.

"Mental consciousness arises through discriminative attachment to differentiated objects. Habitual tendencies nurture the storehouse consciousness; together with manas, thoughts of attachment to self and what belongs to self arise through causes and conditions." The sixth mental consciousness is the discriminative attachment that arises in response to various objects. This discriminative attachment becomes habitual tendencies and in turn perfuses the storehouse consciousness—that is, present manifestations again perfuse the seeds.

The seventh, manas consciousness, constantly and thoroughly clings to the perceiving aspect of the eighth consciousness as self. The sixth mental consciousness depends on the seventh, manas consciousness; that is, the two rely on one another and function together. Thus arise the false views of self and what belongs to self, along with all manner of attachment and discrimination. Through

these causes and conditions, the body of the seven consciousnesses successively arises.

“The storehouse consciousness, the cause that does not destroy bodily appearances, arises through grasping at objects manifested by one’s own mind; the accumulation of attachment-based consciousness arises, each becoming the cause of the next. It is like the waves of the sea: when the wind of objects manifested by one’s own mind blows, they arise and cease. It is likewise.” The storehouse consciousness neither arises nor ceases.

What is called deluded discrimination takes the storehouse consciousness as its fundamental cause. Grasping and attaching to the various objects manifested by one’s own mind, the mind of deluded discrimination gathers and arises. Thus, the eighth ālaya consciousness and the preceding seven consciousnesses—especially the sixth mental consciousness—are mutually causal in successive turn. They are like waves arising when wind blows across the great ocean. In this way, the eight consciousnesses are mutually connected, giving rise to one another without cease.

“Therefore, when mental consciousness ceases, the seven consciousnesses also cease.” Because they are mutually connected, and because the deluded discrimination of the sixth mental consciousness is the consciousness most prone to grasping, it is said that when the sixth consciousness ceases, the remaining consciousnesses consequently cease as well.

Therefore, the key to practice lies in eliminating deluded discrimination. Master Sengcan once said: “The supreme Way is not difficult; it only dislikes choosing and rejecting. Do not hate or love, and it will be clear and open.” Genuine realization through practice necessarily breaks through all deluded thoughts and conceptual thinking.

The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is like this: it does not work upon the sixth mental consciousness, but through the mantra secretly acts upon the eighth consciousness, thereby thoroughly breaking through deluded discrimination and realizing original nirvāṇa. Other dharma gates are likewise so: after the necessary hearing and contemplation, one must put understanding into practice and bring conceptual understanding to an end. Only then can one thoroughly overturn old patterns and return home by the direct road.

Moreover, once deluded thought has been broken through, one knows that there was originally no deluded thought to break through. Everything is originally illusory and originally nirvāṇa. The eight consciousnesses can cease precisely because they have never arisen. All mental consciousnesses are fundamentally unobtainable; this arising and that ceasing are all mere empty theorizing.

The World-Honored One next expresses the preceding meaning once more in verse:

[My nirvāṇa is not nature, activity, or characteristics; when the consciousness of deluded thought and objectification ceases, this is my nirvāṇa.]

For ease of understanding, let us first rearrange these four lines: “My nirvāṇa is not nature, activity, or characteristics. When the consciousness of deluded thought and objectification ceases, this is my nirvāṇa.” The first two lines refer to the nirvāṇa of non-Buddhist paths; the latter two are the nirvāṇa taught by the Buddha. These four lines mean: the nirvāṇa I teach is not the nirvāṇa of which non-Buddhist paths speak in terms of nature or characteristics; it is not a nirvāṇa produced by causal or natural nature. Only when the consciousness of the cognitive hindrance established through deluded thought—that is, the sixth consciousness—ceases is there the nirvāṇa I teach.

[That cause and that grasping bring about the body of mental consciousness and the rest; the mind that accords with the cause is the basis upon which consciousness depends.]

“Manas” refers to the mind faculty. “Body” refers to the body of the seven consciousnesses: mistakenly taking the first seven consciousnesses as self and mistakenly taking the object aspect of the eighth consciousness as what belongs to self.

This line means that the sixth mental consciousness is the cause of the other consciousnesses, and that the sixth consciousness is especially adept at grasping, causing deluded thought to continue and saṃsāra not to end. There is also the mind faculty, namely the seventh, manas consciousness, which firmly clings to the perceiving aspect of the eighth consciousness as self, thus forming erroneous cognition. This mistaken cognition also depends upon the sixth consciousness for its expression. The sixth mental consciousness and the seventh, manas consciousness thus arise and function together, forming the body of the seven consciousnesses.

The primary cause of all this is mind, namely the “storehouse consciousness.” Nothing lies outside the mind of this storehouse consciousness; this mind is the basis upon which all consciousnesses depend. If one awakens, one knows that this mind is the great ocean of perfect enlightenment, vast enough to contain all things, with nothing outside it. If one is deluded, it is covered by dust and becomes the ālaya consciousness, storing all the seeds of ignorant habitual tendencies; when conditions are encountered, they manifest, and saṃsāra continues without end.

[When the great flow of water is exhausted, waves do not arise. Likewise, when mental consciousness ceases, the various consciousnesses do not arise.]

Yet this mind, too, is unobtainable. It is like the great ocean: if the flow of water is exhausted, waves will not rise. The nirvāṇa I teach is likewise. If one directly realizes that there is originally no self or what belongs to self, that everything is utterly unobtainable, and that ultimately there is no mind—this is "the great flow of water being exhausted"—then, since all is ultimately unobtainable, what remains to grasp at? One thereby remains forever free from the grasping of deluded attachment. Not grasping or attaching is the true complete cessation of the sixth mental consciousness. Then the various deluded consciousnesses have no means of arising. This is nirvāṇa.

What, then, specifically are these deluded attachments? The World-Honored One next further explains in depth the "natures of deluded thought."

First, we must understand the difference between "the nature of deluded thought" and "deluded thought." I will use an analogy to explain this difference. If fruit represents deluded thought, then apples, watermelons, peaches, pears, and so forth represent the various distinctions among deluded thoughts. The nature of deluded thought is like the properties of fruit: sweetness, bitterness, astringency, and so forth represent the various distinctions among the natures of deluded thought.

Next, let us discuss what deluded thought is and what the nature of deluded thought is. Among the five universal mental factors—contact, feeling, perception, volition, and so forth—perception is one of them. It is also a functional attribute of mind. But once it is qualified by the word "deluded," it becomes something harmful. What is delusion? Delusion is mistaken conceptual attachment to objects encountered through conditions. The imaginings produced by such mistaken conceptual attachment are called deluded thoughts.

Without this "deluded," "perception" immediately becomes wondrous functioning. Thus it is said: "Do not seek the true; simply cease the deluded." Because the objects encountered differ, deluded thoughts occur in countless varieties. We ordinary beings never cease producing them from moment to moment. Why? Because we have this premise of "delusion," which has already become habitual. Although deluded thoughts are innumerable, they may be classified into the twelve categories discussed below.

Now that this has been clarified, let us examine the following sūtra passage:

[Furthermore, Mahāmatī, I shall now explain the general characteristics of the distinctions among the natures of deluded thought. If you skillfully distinguish the general characteristics of the distinctions among the natures of deluded thought, you and the other great bodhisattvas will be free from deluded thought, reach the noble state of self-realization, clearly perceive the paths of penetration of non-

Buddhist traditions, recognize the deluded thoughts of what apprehends and what is apprehended, cut off the various characteristics of dependent arising and the activities of the natures of deluded thought, and no longer give rise to deluded thought.]

“I shall now explain the general characteristics of the distinctions among the natures of deluded thought.” “I shall now explain” means, “I should now explain this to you.” “The natures of deluded thought” means “the respective natures and characteristics of the various deluded thoughts.” “Distinctions” means differences, while “general characteristics” means what they share in common. The sentence means: “I shall further explain to you the differences and common features among the various deluded thoughts.”

“If you skillfully distinguish the general characteristics of the distinctions among the natures of deluded thought” means: if one can skillfully discern the common and differing natures and characteristics of the various deluded thoughts.

“You and the other bodhisattva mahāsattvas will leave behind deluded thoughts, attain the noble wisdom of self-realization, clearly perceive the paths common to non-Buddhists, realize that both what apprehends and what is apprehended are deluded thoughts, sever the various appearances of dependent arising and the activity of the self-nature of deluded thought, and no longer entertain deluded thoughts.” In other words, you and the other great bodhisattvas will be able to leave behind deluded thoughts, perfectly realize the noble wisdom and realm of self-realization, and clearly see the paths common to non-Buddhists. That is, you will be able at a glance to see through the nature and characteristics posited by non-Buddhists, awaken to the fact that both apprehender and apprehended are deluded thoughts, cut off the illusory appearances manifested through the coming together of the causes and conditions of the self-nature of various deluded thoughts, and no longer engage in deluded discrimination.

Next, we begin to explain the common characteristics of distinctions based on the self-nature of deluded thought:

[Mahāmati, what are the common characteristics of distinctions based on the self-nature of deluded thought? They are deluded thought concerning speech, deluded thought concerning what is spoken of, deluded thought concerning characteristics, deluded thought concerning gain, deluded thought concerning self-nature, deluded thought concerning causes, deluded thought concerning views, deluded thought concerning establishment, deluded thought concerning arising, deluded thought concerning non-arising, deluded thought concerning continuity, and deluded thought concerning bondage and non-bondage. These are called the common characteristics of distinctions based on the self-nature of deluded thought.]

The Buddha tells Bodhisattva Mahāmati that there are twelve distinct kinds of the self-nature of deluded thought: deluded thought concerning speech, what is spoken of, characteristics, gain, self-nature, causes, views, establishment, arising, non-arising, continuity, and bondage and non-bondage. These are what are called the common and distinct characteristics of the self-nature of deluded thought. We already know that there are twelve distinct characteristics, but what are their common characteristics? In fact, they are all deluded thoughts and are inherently unobtainable. This is their common characteristic. We shall now explain them one by one.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning speech? It is attachment to various exquisite sounds, singing, and pleasant music. This is called deluded thought concerning speech.]

Deluded thought concerning speech means falsely imagining that various beautiful sounds, singing, melodious music, and the like have a real nature that can be obtained, clinging to them without letting go, and thereby giving rise to a deluded imagination of craving and attachment. This is deluded thought concerning speech.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning what is spoken of? It is the deluded thought of speech that arises in dependence on the self-nature of what is spoken of, which is known by the noble wisdom of self-realization. This is called deluded thought concerning what is spoken of.]

Deluded thought concerning what is spoken of means believing that, just as speech describes them, there truly exist the many phenomena realized by the wisdom of sages. In other words, one believes that what sages realize truly exists, and on the basis of this false conception and attachment gives rise to deluded speech. This is deluded thought concerning what is spoken of.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning characteristics? It is attachment upon attachment to what is spoken of, like a thirsty deer imagining a mirage to be water: one imagines the characteristics of solidity, moisture, warmth, and movement, and falsely imagines that all things have self-nature. This is called deluded thought concerning characteristics.]

Deluded thought concerning characteristics is like a thirsty deer that sees a mirage and falsely imagines it to be water. With respect to the various objects and circumstances spoken of by sages, one discriminates and clings everywhere, believing that the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind truly exist. One clings and discriminates, believing that the four great elements truly possess the natures of solidity, moisture, warmth, and movement, and thus gives rise to the deluded thought that all dharmas possess real self-nature. This is called deluded thought concerning characteristics.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning gain? It is delight in various gold, silver, and precious treasures. This is called deluded thought concerning gain.]

Deluded thought concerning gain means believing that gold, silver, and various precious treasures truly exist and can be obtained, that there are real gains to be had, and greedily pursuing them without letting go. This is deluded thought concerning gain.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning self-nature? It is the erroneous view that maintains self-nature in this way and does not differ from the deluded thought of pernicious views. This is called deluded thought concerning self-nature.]

What is deluded thought concerning self-nature? It is falsely imagining that each dharma has its own distinctive self-nature—for example, that cattle have the characteristics of cattle and are entirely different from horses. One thus stubbornly maintains that dharmas are each distinct, arbitrarily gives rise to discrimination and attachment, and refuses to let them go. Such a view is no different from the deluded thought of pernicious views held by non-Buddhists. This is deluded thought concerning self-nature.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning causes? It is discrimination between existence and nonexistence with regard to causes and conditions, and the arising of causes and characteristics. This is called deluded thought concerning causes.]

Deluded thought concerning causes means giving rise to false conceptions and attachments of existence or nonexistence with respect to dharmas produced through causes and conditions, and falsely believing that the myriad dharmas truly arise from various causes. This is deluded thought concerning causes.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning views? It is the pernicious views of existence, nonexistence, oneness, difference, both, and neither—deluded thoughts and attachments fabricated by non-Buddhists. This is called deluded thought concerning views.]

Deluded thought concerning views consists of the pernicious, dualistic conclusions of existence and nonexistence, oneness and difference, both and neither. These are in fact false doctrines established through the arbitrary deluded thoughts and attachments of non-Buddhists. This is deluded thought concerning views.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning establishment? It is the conception of self and what belongs to self, established as a definitive doctrine. This is called deluded thought concerning establishment.]

Deluded thought concerning establishment means falsely conceiving self and what belongs to self as the ultimate doctrine and clinging to it without letting go. This is

deluded thought concerning establishment.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning arising? It is attachment to the arising of existence or nonexistence through conditions. This is called deluded thought concerning arising.]

Deluded thought concerning arising means falsely imagining that all dharmas either arise from existence by way of conditions or arise from nonexistence by way of conditions, and stubbornly maintaining that dharmas truly arise. This is deluded thought concerning arising.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning non-arising? It is the view that all things are originally unborn, that without the seeds of causes and conditions they arise from a causeless body. This is called deluded thought concerning non-arising.]

Deluded thought concerning non-arising means believing that all dharmas are unborn in their essential nature, exist naturally, and do not involve arising from causes and conditions. This is deluded thought concerning non-arising.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning continuity? It is the continuity of those together, like threads of gold. This is called deluded thought concerning continuity.]

Deluded thought concerning continuity means falsely imagining that all dharmas arise through mutually conditioning one another, giving rise to and continuing from one another without end, like gold threads woven into cloth, with strands continuously linked together. To cling to this without letting go is deluded thought concerning continuity.

[Mahāmati, what is deluded thought concerning bondage and non-bondage? It is attachment to the causes and conditions of bondage and non-bondage, as when a person uses expedient means to be bound or released. This is called deluded thought concerning bondage and non-bondage.]

Deluded thought concerning bondage and non-bondage means falsely imagining that afflictions truly bind, that there truly is liberation from bondage, and that liberation is truly attained, just as a person may be bound by ropes and may also use a method to free himself from those bonds. This is deluded thought concerning bondage and non-bondage.

Having finished explaining the twelve distinct characteristics, we said earlier that “deluded thought” is their common characteristic. The text next provides a further summary of these distinct and common characteristics:

[With regard to these common characteristics of distinctions based on the self-nature of deluded thought, all foolish ordinary people are attached to existence and nonexistence. Mahāmati, those who are attached to dependent arising are attached to the self-nature of various deluded thoughts.]

Deluded thought has two layers of meaning. “Deluded” means false conception and attachment. To what does one falsely conceive and become attached? One falsely conceives existence or nonexistence as possessing real self-nature and clings tightly to it. “Thought” is a still deeper layer of deluded imagining based on this “delusion.” If “delusion” is merely erroneous cognition, then “thought” is its specific erroneous activity.

Therefore, the Buddha here summarizes the matter as follows: regarding the various natures and characteristics of these deluded thoughts, foolish ordinary people do no more than falsely conceive and cling to the sensory objects arising through dependent origination as truly existent or truly nonexistent, thereby giving rise to various deluded discriminations.

What follows is an analogy explaining this summary:

[For example, an illusion manifests various bodies, and ordinary people, through deluded thought, see various different illusory forms. Mahāmati, illusion and the various forms are neither different nor not different. If they were different, illusion would not be the cause of the various forms. If they were not different, there would be no distinction between illusion and the various forms; yet distinctions are seen. Therefore, they are neither different nor not different. Therefore, Mahāmati, you and the other bodhisattva mahāsattvas should not become attached to the self-nature of deluded thought regarding illusory dependent arising as different or not different, existent or nonexistent.]

For example, when magic is used to manifest various illusory appearances, ordinary people falsely conceive and cling to them, imagining that the various illusory forms they see are not illusory but truly existent. Mahāmati, illusion and the various illusory forms are in fact neither different nor not different. If they were different, illusion would not be the cause of the various illusory forms.

If they were not different, then illusion and the various illusory forms presently appearing should be without distinction. Yet the illusory realms we see differ in countless ways. Therefore, I say that they are “neither different nor not different.” Thus, Mahāmati, you and the other bodhisattvas must not falsely conceive the self-nature of dharmas arising dependently like illusions to be existent or nonexistent, different or not different.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]

[The mind is bound by objects; / awareness, thought, and wisdom turn accordingly. / When there is nothing at all, / wisdom of equality arises.]

When the mind is bound by the objects of the six sense faculties, correct wisdom turns with them in delusion and becomes deluded awareness and deluded thought. In truth, there are no objects of the six sense faculties, no mind bound by those objects, and still less any bondage or liberation. The three self-natures, too, are expedient teachings. Nothing inherently arises or ceases; there is originally neither defilement nor purity, neither increase nor decrease. When one realizes this state of nothing whatever, in which no dharmas are established, deluded thoughts are originally pure, circumstances are themselves quiescent, ordinary beings and sages are not different, and wisdom and ignorance are nondual. Such a state of mind and view is what is meant by “wisdom of equality arises.”

[Deluded self-nature exists; / in dependent arising it does not. / Deluded thought may apprehend and appropriate, / but dependent arising is not deluded thought.]

These four lines directly reveal the true principle. They mean that ignorant non-Buddhists, relying on the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment, falsely imagine that dharmas truly possess self-nature. Yet when observed from the perspective of the nature of dependence on others, dependent arising is empty in nature, and dharmas are originally without any self-nature that can be obtained. It is because sentient beings are inverted in deluded thought that they mistakenly take apprehender and apprehended to be truly existent. If one realizes the emptiness of dependent arising, all dharmas are seen as illusory manifestations and, in essence, as nothing whatsoever; then one no longer entertains inverted deluded thoughts.

[The various parts arise; / if they are like illusions, they are not established. / Those characteristics are various; / if they are deluded thoughts, they are not established.]

These four verse lines are an analogy, meaning:

When one sees the various differences among the parts of dharmas and understands that none of them is other than illusion, then the dharmas of those various differences are not established. When one sees the various sensory appearances of external objects and understands that they are all deluded thoughts, that true reality is without characteristics, then the various phenomena likewise are not truly established. In this way, one will no longer follow circumstances, pursue conditions, and drift in cyclic existence while proliferating inverted deluded thoughts.

[Those characteristics are errors; / all arise from the mind's bondage. / Deluded thoughts know nothing; / they entertain deluded thoughts about dependent arising.]

To regard all appearances as truly existent is an erroneous view; it is a bondage arising from the mind. Dharmas of dependent arising do not come forth from the mind; they are originally illusory. Deluded ordinary beings are unaware of this and take all dependently arisen things to be truly existent. Therefore, when they encounter all manner of illusory circumstances, they further increase their deluded thoughts and discriminations.

[These natures of deluded thought are precisely those of dependent arising. Deluded thoughts are various; they are deluded thoughts concerning dependent arising.]

Thus, this attachment of deluded thought also arises through the coming together of causes and conditions; it too is a dharma of dependent arising. Therefore, the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment and the dependent nature are originally nondual. Yet deluded ordinary beings, on seeing dharmas of dependent arising, again cling to conditions and continuously produce all kinds of deluded thoughts and discriminations. Thus, the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment and the dependent nature are also not one.

[Conventional truth and ultimate truth: the third is arising without causes. Deluded thought speaks of conventional truth; when it is cut off, there is the realm of the noble ones.]

With respect to the true nature of all dharmas, there is the conventional-truth view of deluded ordinary beings and the ultimate truth of the realm of noble wisdom. When all Buddhas teach the Dharma, they use ultimate truth to dispel the conventional-truth views of deluded ordinary beings. If the erroneous conventional view has been destroyed, there is no need even to posit noble truth. This is what is valuable about the Buddhadharma.

The third kind of view is the heterodox doctrine that things arise without causes. Its adherents claim that it differs from both conventional truth and the meaning of noble truth, but in fact it negates cause and effect, falls into annihilationism, and is no different from conventional truth.

Deluded ordinary beings and followers of non-Buddhist paths alike fall into erroneous and extreme views because of inverted deluded thoughts. The root of it all is nothing but deluded thought and discrimination.

If one can cut off deluded thought and discrimination, one realizes neither defiled nor pure, neither ordinary nor noble. This is true ultimate truth: when delusion is

ended, the real is revealed.

Below, the World-Honored One again uses four analogies to explain the relationship between deluded thought and dependent arising: neither one nor different.

[It is like the practices of cultivation: within one, many things appear; yet within it there are no many things. The appearances of deluded thought are likewise.]

It is like the practices of cultivation (here, “cultivation” broadly refers to all practices such as dhyāna and meditative absorption). One must first restrain the mind to one point and enter meditative absorption; then, in absorption, one contemplates and various contemplative appearances arise. Yet in actuality, none of these contemplated appearances has occurred.

The appearances of deluded thought are the same. Because of inverted deluded thoughts, ordinary beings see various dharma appearances as truly existent. Yet both deluded thought and the appearances that are deludedly imagined are nonexistent; all this is merely manifested illusion.

[It is like various eye ailments, through which deluded thoughts make manifold colors appear. The eye ailment has no color and is not color; dependent arising is likewise, though it is not realized.]

It is like this: because of an eye disease, one sees all kinds of visible appearances and mistakenly takes them all to be truly existent. If the eye disease is cured, these mistakenly perceived appearances also disappear. The deluded thoughts of ordinary beings are the same. Because they are unaware, they take dharmas of dependent arising to be truly existent. If the disease of inverted deluded thought is cured, they will know that all dharmas are originally empty and that everything is illusory.

[It is like refining pure gold and removing every impurity, or like empty space free of clouds and mists: the purification of deluded thought is likewise.]

It is like refining pure gold by removing impurities, or like dark clouds dispersing to reveal a clear sky: cutting off deluded thought and directly revealing true permanence are likewise.

[There is no nature of deluded thought, nor is there that dependent arising. Establishment and slander are all ruined by deluded thought.]

From the perspective of the wise, there is neither a truly existent self-nature of deluded thought nor any dharma of dependent arising that can be obtained. All dharmas are originally empty. Because deluded ordinary beings engage in deluded calculation and attachment, they produce the erroneous views of annihilationism

and eternalism—establishment and slander—which destroy the nature of absolute reality and perfection.

[If deluded thought has no nature, yet dependent arising has a nature, then from what has no nature, a nature arises; from what has a nature, no nature arises.]

If deluded thought has no real nature, yet one says that dharmas of dependent arising are truly existent, this is contradictory. Deluded thought takes illusory appearances without real nature to be real, thereby producing the erroneous two-sided views of existence and nonexistence. Therefore, one should not take this as false and that as true; rather, if one is true, all are true, and if one is false, all are false.

[Relying on causes, through deluded thought one obtains that dependent arising. Appearances and names constantly accompany one another, giving rise to all deluded thoughts.]

Because sentient beings are attached through pervasive discrimination, they are further taught the principle that dependent arising is empty in nature—the nature of dependence on others. Yet the habitual tendencies of inverted deluded thought in ordinary beings remain strong. Thus, upon hearing teachings such as dependent arising, they again take these names and appearances, which are provisional, to be real; attachment entangles them, and new successive deluded thoughts arise.

[When ultimate attainment is not established, one then crosses beyond all deluded thoughts. Thereafter wisdom is purified; this is called ultimate truth.]

Tracing things to their root and bringing them to their original source, the appearances of deluded thought are empty and the principle of dependent arising is unobtainable. Everything is a dreamlike, illusory provisional construction. Thus one extinguishes and crosses beyond all deluded calculations, attachments, and false imaginings. When all deluded thoughts have been eliminated, one returns to the purity of noble wisdom. This is called ultimate truth.

[Deluded thought has twelve kinds; conditioned ideation has six causes. Through self-realized knowledge of the objects of cognition, there is no difference between them.]

Although the self-nature of deluded thought is said to have twelve kinds, and the self-nature of conditioned ideation to have six causes, from the perspective of self-realized noble wisdom these are all expedient teachings; in actuality, there is no difference. If one clings to them as real, they become obstacles of what is known and block the gate to awakening.

[The five dharmas are reality; the self-natures are three. Those who cultivate and distinguish these do not depart from suchness.]

Although they are expedient teachings, the five dharmas and the three self-natures, as expedient teachings, are in fact manifestations of a single ultimate reality.

Practitioners should understand that these five dharmas and three self-natures each also have their expedient functions. They should understand the profound meanings of each, know how to cultivate and realize in accordance with these guides, and avoid straying into erroneous paths.

If one can thus deeply understand expedient means without abandoning them, one does not depart from suchness.

[The various appearances and dependent arising—through their names deluded thoughts arise. Those various appearances of deluded thought arise from that dependent arising.]

The various appearances, together with the principle of the coming together of causes and conditions and the emptiness of dependent arising, become deluded thought if one takes the provisional as real and clings to them as truly existent.

Therefore, none of these twelve kinds of deluded-thought appearances fails to arise through the coming together of causes and conditions. Thus it is said, “The various appearances of deluded thought all arise from dependent arising.” The two mutually support and are connected with one another.

[When awakened wisdom observes well, there are neither conditions nor deluded thoughts. Once attainment is complete, there is no nature; how then can there be awakening from deluded thought?]

If one carefully observes through self-realized noble wisdom, one can know that, in essence, there is neither dependent arising nor deluded thought. Going further, even the nature of absolute reality and perfection is nonexistent. Why then speak of there having originally been deluded thought that one must leave behind in order to awaken?

[The self-nature of that deluded thought establishes the two self-natures. Deluded thought manifests in many ways; the realm of noble ones is pure.]

On the basis of the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment, the two self-natures of dependence on others and absolute reality and perfection are established. If deluded thought is inverted, then all manner of dharmas are taken as truly existent, and discriminative obstructions are found everywhere. If noble wisdom contemplates truthfully, then everything is like an illusion: it has never

arisen, is originally pure, and there is nowhere that is not the realm of noble wisdom.

[Deluded thought is like the colors in a painting. Dependent arising is calculated through deluded thought. If it differs from deluded thought, then one relies on the doctrines of non-Buddhist paths.]

This is like a painter arranging various colors to produce a painting. Sentient beings, because of pervasive discrimination and attachment, bring forth the dharmas of dependent arising. Conversely, dharmas of dependent arising are like various scenes that cause a painter to imagine and arrange colors; they cause sentient beings to continue their pervasive discrimination and attachment. The key to all this lies in the mind of deluded thought. If one says that all dharmas do not arise from this mind of deluded thought, then one deludedly takes dharmas as truly existent or truly nonexistent and falls into the erroneous views of non-Buddhist paths.

[Deluded thought refers to what is imagined; because seeing and the seen arise together, when the two deluded thoughts are left behind, this is accomplishment.]

“Deluded thought” refers to the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment, which is capable of deluded thought. “What is said to be imagined” refers to the nature of dependence on others. These two natures arise together like the seer and the seen. When these two false natures are relinquished, one is immediately, from the very beginning, complete and perfected.

Summary of This Section:

This section begins with Mahāmati Bodhisattva asking the Buddha, for the benefit of practitioners, about the distinctions among the four fruits in the gradual stages of practice. The World-Honored One explains in detail the three kinds of first fruit and briefly discusses the remaining three fruits. To correct the complacency of the two vehicles, who are satisfied with attaining little, the Buddha further expounds the two aspects of awakening. To clarify the arising of function, he also expounds the material forms produced by the four great elements and the characteristics of the five aggregates. Finally, so that practitioners may fully realize bodhi, the World-Honored One expounds in detail the quiescence of nirvāṇa through dispelling delusion and revealing the real.

The main emphasis of this section lies in its final part, on dispelling delusion and revealing the real—especially its final long verse, which sweeps everything away and points directly to the source of mind!

17. The One Vehicle of Noble Wisdom

[Mahāmati Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva again said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, we pray that you will explain the characteristics of the noble wisdom of self-realization and of the One Vehicle. If you explain the characteristics of the noble wisdom of self-realization and of the One Vehicle, the other bodhisattvas and I will rightly understand them, realize them for ourselves, not depend on others, and penetrate the Buddhadharma.”]

In the preceding section, the Buddha identified the twelve characteristics of deluded discrimination and told Mahāmati to abandon all such deluded discriminations and enter the noble wisdom of self-realization. In this section, Mahāmati further asks: What are the characteristics of the noble wisdom of self-realization and the fruition of the One Vehicle? This is so that the assembly may understand them well and personally realize the ultimate Buddhadharma.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I shall explain it to you.” Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “Yes, World-Honored One. I respectfully receive your instruction.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “What the former sages knew and transmitted from one to another is that deluded discrimination is without self-nature. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, dwelling alone in quiet places, observe through self-realization without depending on others. Free from the deluded discrimination of views, they advance stage by stage and enter the ground of the Tathāgata. This is called the characteristic of the noble wisdom of self-realization.”]

“Observing through self-realization”: “observe” means contemplative awareness, while “examine” means direct discernment. “Observing through self-realization” means cultivating and realizing by observing and illuminating one’s own mind.

The Buddha told Mahāmati that what the ancient Buddhas and sages of the past transmitted from Buddha to Buddha and patriarch to patriarch is that all deluded discriminations lack self-nature; in reality, no deluded discriminations exist.

This is the general explanation. What follows is a detailed explanation of the characteristics of the noble wisdom of self-realization and the One Vehicle:

“Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, dwelling alone in quiet places, observe through self-realization without depending on others. Free from the deluded discrimination of views, they advance stage by stage and enter the ground of the Tathāgata. This is called the characteristic of the noble wisdom of self-realization.” Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas understand that no deluded discrimination can truly be obtained. Maintaining this right view, they dwell alone in quiet places and awaken and realize for themselves. Where there is nothing to discriminate and nothing to imagine falsely, they diminish and diminish again, relinquish and relinquish again. Thus they

advance stage by stage and realize and enter the fruition-ground of the Tathāgata. This is the characteristic of the noble wisdom of self-realization.

“Without depending on others, free from the deluded discrimination of views”—this sentence is crucial. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas understand that deluded thoughts are originally nonexistent, and are therefore able to leave behind all inverted deluded thoughts.

For example, actors know perfectly well that it is a play; therefore, though they are in the play, they are not burdened by its plot. Bodhisattvas understand that deluded thoughts lack self-nature. Thus, when deluded thoughts come, let them come; when they go, let them go. Neither follow them nor suppress thoughts; simply do not attend to them. Practiced in this way over a long time, without seeking deluded thoughts and without seeking truth, names, appearances, and deluded thoughts depart of themselves without being cast off, while right wisdom and suchness are realized of themselves without being sought. This is precisely what is meant by “free from the deluded discrimination of views.”

[“Mahāmati, what is the characteristic of the One Vehicle? To realize the awakening of the path of the One Vehicle is what I call the One Vehicle. How does one realize the awakening of the path of the One Vehicle? The grasper and the grasped are deluded discriminations; in the realm of reality, no deluded discrimination arises. This is called the awakening of the One Vehicle. Mahāmati, the awakening of the One Vehicle cannot be attained by non-Buddhist paths, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, Brahmā-kings, and the like; only the Tathāgata can attain it. Therefore, it is called the One Vehicle.”]

The preceding passage discussed the method of cultivation for entering the ground of the Tathāgata. This passage reveals the characteristic of the “One Vehicle.” The One Vehicle is the Buddha Vehicle—that is, the true fruition of the ground of the Tathāgata:

The Buddha told Mahāmati: What is meant by the “characteristic of the One Vehicle”? It is to realize the fruition of the path of the One Vehicle. But what does it mean to realize the fruition of the path of the One Vehicle?

“The grasper and the grasped are deluded discriminations; in the realm of reality, no deluded discrimination arises. This is called the awakening of the One Vehicle.” That is, the grasping subject and the grasped object are deluded discriminations; in the realm of reality, no deluded discrimination arises. “Only this one is real; all else is unreal.” Within this one reality, how could even the slightest deluded discrimination be admitted? Still less could one speak of existence or nonexistence. This is the fruition of the path of the One Vehicle, the ultimate fruition of Buddhahood.

This awakening of the One Vehicle is the ultimate meaning of the Buddhadharma. It cannot be known by other non-Buddhist paths, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, Brahmā-kings, and the like; only the Tathāgata realizes it completely. Therefore it is called the One Vehicle. Notice that bodhisattvas who have entered the stages are not mentioned here, for at the place of ultimate meaning there is neither truth nor delusion, neither right nor wrong; it admits of neither suddenness nor gradualness. This is the true fruition of the path of the Tathāgata.

"The One Vehicle" appears many times in Buddhist scriptures. The Lotus Sūtra says: "In the lands of the ten directions, there is only the Dharma of the One Vehicle. There is neither a second nor a third, except where the Buddha teaches by skillful means." The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says: "All Buddhas emerge from birth and death only by means of the One Vehicle." Therefore, for practitioners to vow to enter the One Vehicle is precisely their proper task.

Otherwise, one enters a mountain of treasures in vain and returns empty-handed. Chan Master Huanglong Huinan once used this "One Vehicle," which practitioners should constantly hold in vigilant awareness, to question a student: "What, after all, is the Dharma of the One Vehicle?" After a long pause, he answered himself: "Opening the cloth wrapper and spreading out the bowl—is this not the Dharma of the One Vehicle? Taking up the spoon and chopsticks—is this not the Dharma of the One Vehicle?" Then he lifted his staff and said: "What is this? If you call it the Dharma of the One Vehicle, your eyebrows and beard will fall out!" He struck the Chan seat with his staff and descended from the seat.

Do you all understand this One Vehicle? If you still do not, Master Yuanyin has an even more expedient saying: "Not a single thought arises, yet there is clear, ever-present knowing." This accords exactly with the meaning of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra: "In the realm of reality, no deluded discrimination arises." "The realm of reality" is "clear, ever-present knowing," and "no deluded discrimination arises" means "not a single thought arises."

Of course, all these are words that make one's eyebrows and beard fall out. Yet sentient beings' foolish habitual tendencies are deeply entrenched, and they refuse to awaken for themselves. Thus the Buddhas do not begrudge descending into the weeds, and the old master does not begrudge his grandmotherly concern. The final sentence of A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature —"Who has seen me open my mouth?"—is the lively and complete disclosure of the characteristic of the One Vehicle.

[Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, why do you speak of the Three Vehicles rather than the One Vehicle?" The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "Because they do not realize the Dharma of parinirvāṇa for themselves, I do not say that all

śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are of the One Vehicle. Since all śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are disciplined by the Tathāgata and receive expedient means of quiescence, whereby they attain liberation, it is not by their own power. Therefore, I do not speak of the One Vehicle. Furthermore, Mahāmati, because the habitual tendencies of the karmic obstruction of afflictions have not been severed, I do not say that all śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are of the One Vehicle. Because they do not realize the non-self of dharmas and do not leave behind segmented birth and death, I speak of the Three Vehicles."]

Mahāmati then asks: Since the One Vehicle is ultimate, why is it said that there are Three Vehicles? The Three Vehicles are the śrāvaka vehicle, the pratyekabuddha vehicle, and the bodhisattva vehicle. The Buddha tells Mahāmati that there are three reasons for speaking of Three Vehicles:

First, those of the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles do not understand that nirvāṇa is originally present and are unwilling to realize liberation for themselves; therefore, they are said not to be of the Buddha Vehicle. Although they arouse the resolve to leave behind the world, they still discriminate between the two sides, regard birth and death as suffering, and long for the pleasure of escape. They think that beyond birth and death there is a separate nirvāṇa to enter, and that beyond worldly dharmas there is a separate supramundane Dharma of the Tathāgata to attain.

At this point, the Tathāgata employs the expedient means of the Four Noble Truths to teach and discipline them, causing afflictions and deluded thoughts not to manifest, so that they realize a temporary quiescent purity. Thus, their liberation and nirvāṇa are an expedient liberation realized through reliance on the Tathāgata's power, not ultimate liberation. Therefore, they are not of the One Vehicle.

Second, although śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas have subdued their karmic obstructions of afflictions to some degree, the habitual seeds of affliction have not been completely severed. When conditions arise, they may still manifest; therefore, they are not of the One Vehicle.

Third, although those of the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles realize the non-self of persons, attachment to dharmas still remains. Although the devas and those of the Brahmā vehicle cultivate the ten wholesome deeds, the four dhyānas, and the eight meditative attainments, when their wholesome karma is exhausted, they fall again. They remain deeply immersed in saṃsāra and cannot be liberated from segmented birth and death. Therefore, they are said not to be of the One Vehicle.

Having explained these three reasons, the Buddha further summarizes:

["Mahāmati, when all the habitual tendencies arising from the faults of afflictions have been severed, and the non-self of dharmas has been realized; when all habitual tendencies arising from the faults of afflictions have been severed, and one realizes that attachment to the flavor of samādhi-bliss is without self-nature, one awakens to the undefiled realm. Having awakened, one then enters the ever higher supramundane undefiled realm, perfects all the qualities, and will attain the inconceivable, self-mastering dharmakāya of the Tathāgata."]

"Undefiled realm" refers to the partial true nirvāṇa that corresponds to the defiled realm.

Mahāmati, when śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas have completely severed the habitual seeds of all faults and afflictions and thoroughly realized the non-self of dharmas, they have entirely cut off the seeds of all afflictive habits. They fully understand that the bliss of samādhi is not ultimate, and that there is in reality no bliss of samādhi to which one can cling. No longer attached to this bliss, they awaken and emerge from the partial true nirvāṇa of the Lesser Vehicle.

Once they no longer abide even in the undefiled nirvāṇa of the Lesser Vehicle, they enter the ever higher undefiled realm. Without mind, action, or contrivance, they can manifest countless transformation bodies and freely enter and leave the world without obstruction, responding to sentient beings' minds according to what they know. They liberate all sentient beings, yet in reality no sentient beings are liberated, and thereby fully realize the inconceivable dharmakāya realm of the Tathāgata.

This process of cultivation may take as long as three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas, or it may be transcended in an instant.

[At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke in verse: "The vehicles of devas and Brahmā, the vehicles of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, and the vehicle of all Buddhas and Tathāgatas—I speak of all these vehicles. So long as the mind continues to move, these vehicles are not ultimate. If that mind is completely extinguished, there is neither vehicle nor rider; no vehicle can be established. This I call the One Vehicle."]

To explain once more the meaning of the One Vehicle, the World-Honored One spoke this verse:

The vehicles of devas and Brahmā, the vehicles of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, and the vehicle of all Buddhas and Tathāgatas—all such vehicles, so long as there remains a mind that can turn and something to be remedied, are not ultimate vehicles. Only when the deluded mind is completely extinguished, with neither one who rides nor a vehicle to be ridden, and no vehicle that can be established, is there the true One Vehicle.

["To guide sentient beings, I distinguish and speak of the various vehicles. There are three kinds of liberation, as well as the non-self of dharmas. When afflictions, wisdom, and the like are relinquished, liberation is far removed from them. It is like driftwood upon the sea, ever carried along by the waves; so too are foolish śrāvakas, tossed about by the winds of appearances. Their manifest afflictions cease, but the habitual afflictions and ignorance remain."]

"Manifest afflictions": afflictions include fundamental afflictions and subsidiary afflictions. The fundamental affliction is ignorance. From the delusion of fundamental ignorance arise all manifest afflictions. Subsidiary afflictions are the delusions of views and thought: greed, anger, ignorance, and the like, which arise in response to discriminating favorable and adverse conditions and pursue one without letting go.

"Their manifest afflictions cease" means that subsidiary afflictions have been extinguished and afflictions no longer manifest. "The habitual afflictions remain" means that the root of afflictions—that is, fundamental ignorance—has not been severed. Thus the habitual seeds of affliction still remain and may manifest again when conditions arise.

In order to guide sentient beings to transform consciousness into wisdom, the Buddhas teach, according to the differing capacities of beings, the various expedient vehicles, as well as the three liberations of emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness, and the two kinds of non-self of persons and dharmas. Ultimate liberation, however, is the relinquishment of everything: when afflictions are absent, wisdom too does not remain. Neither extreme is established; everything is relinquished. This is true liberation and freedom.

Deluded ordinary beings are not like this. Like pieces of driftwood floating in the great ocean, able only to rise and sink with the waves and never to be free, they are swept along by the habitual tendencies of deluded thoughts and discriminations, revolve in accordance with karmic appearances, and drift without support in the bitter ocean of birth and death.

Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are likewise so. They still have attachment to dharmas and discriminative thought, and thus are still blown about by the winds of deluded thoughts and dharmic appearances, without freedom. Although they can quell their minds and aspirations, restraining manifest afflictions so that they do not arise, they have not broken through fundamental ignorance, nor have they uprooted the habitual seeds of affliction. Therefore, even if they enter the samādhi of cessation, they still remain in the ocean of arising and ceasing, and will eventually fall out of it. Thus, they too remain deluded.

[Attached to the bliss of samādhi, they abide in the undefiled realm. They have no ultimate destination, yet neither do they regress. Having attained the bodies of the various samādhis, they remain unaware even for kalpas. They are like one who is dazed with drink, who awakens only after the wine has worn off. Awakening to the Dharma is likewise: one attains the unsurpassed body of the Buddha.]

The śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles are attached to the bliss of the Dharma of quiescent cessation and are unwilling to emerge from it. This is not ultimate, yet they do not regress as ordinary beings do. They abide in samādhi, unaware for kalpas, like a person who has become drunk: although he lies unconscious and does not rise, once the effects of the wine have entirely dissipated, he too becomes clear-headed.

This illustrates that, although practitioners of the two vehicles may at most bring segmented birth and death to an end, there are still realms to leave behind and dharmas to cultivate; their birth and death has not been truly and completely ended. Yet their effort is not in vain. Once they realize that there are realms from which to emerge and that this is not ultimate, they will thereby eradicate the view of a dharma-self, turn their minds toward the Great Vehicle, and ultimately realize the ultimate fruition of Buddhahood.

Outline of This Section:

The key terms of this section are “deluded thoughts are without intrinsic nature,” “departing from views and deluded thoughts,” “the noble wisdom of self-realization,” “not giving rise to deluded thoughts in the realm of suchness,” and “the One Vehicle.”

In this section, Mahāmati asks about the characteristics of the noble wisdom of self-realization and the One Vehicle. The Buddha first expands upon and answers the questions in the preceding section: what the Buddhas transmit is that even deluded thoughts are not real, and in truth there are no deluded discriminations to be found.

He then explains the noble wisdom of self-realization and the One Vehicle: bodhisattvas who uphold this right view observe for themselves, depart from views and deluded thoughts, advance ever higher, and realize the Tathāgata’s noble wisdom of self-realization. At the ultimate point, subject and object both vanish; no deluded thought arises, for there was originally no deluded thought that could arise. This is the characteristic of the One Vehicle.

He next criticizes the human and deva vehicles, which have not ended segmented birth and death, and the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, who are attached to the one-sided true nirvāṇa. All these still belong to those whose birth and death has not ended. Whoever takes the three wheels to be real does not belong to the One

Vehicle. Nevertheless, practitioners of the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles will eventually awaken from the bliss of samādhi, emerge from it, and realize the Tathāgata's original realm of nirvāṇa.

XVIII. Characteristics of the Mind-Born Body

At that time, the World-Honored One said to Mahāmati Bodhisattva Mahāsattva: "I shall now explain the distinguishing characteristics of the mind-made body. Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this." Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: "Excellent, World-Honored One. Yes, I shall respectfully receive your teaching." The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "There are three kinds of mind-made body. What are the three? They are the mind-made body born of the blissful experience of samādhi; the mind-made body awakened to the self-nature of dharmas; and the mind-made body co-born with the various kinds, without deliberate action. Practitioners should understand that, through ever-higher progress from the first bhūmi onward, they attain these three bodies."

In the preceding section, the Buddha directly answered the questions of self-realized noble wisdom and the One Vehicle, refuting the narrowness of the two vehicles. He pointed out that the vehicle of no vehicle is the true One Vehicle; yet this vehicle of no vehicle is not annihilation. The vehicle of no vehicle is the Tathāgata's essence. Having attained the essence, its function must necessarily unfold: the Buddhas and bodhisattvas respond to the minds of sentient beings, skillfully liberating them through immeasurable transformation bodies. This is the wondrous expedient function and manifestation of the One Vehicle of noble wisdom—the characteristics of the mind-made body.

Thus, after explaining the One Vehicle in which the three spheres are empty, the Buddha told Mahāmati that he would now explain the essential nature and characteristics of the mind-made body. There are three kinds of mind-made body: the mind-made body born of the blissful experience of samādhi; the mind-made body awakened to the self-nature of dharmas; and the mind-made body co-born with the various kinds, without deliberate action. Practitioners should understand that bodhisattvas of the first bhūmi realize that deluded thoughts have no substantial self-nature. Through self-realization and practice, they thereby leave behind the deluded mind-consciousness; as they advance ever higher, they realize these three kinds of mind-made body.

That is to say, the mind-made body belongs to bodhisattvas from the first bhūmi onward. Because such bodhisattvas possess the right view of signlessness, the light of wisdom in the mind-ground becomes manifest, revealing this wondrous expedient function for liberating sentient beings. It is entirely different from the non-Buddhist notion of a spirit-consciousness leaving the body.

Mahāmati, what is the mind-made body born of the blissful experience of samādhi? It pertains to the third, fourth, and fifth bhūmis. Because of the blissful experience of samādhi, the various activities of one's own mind abide peacefully in stillness. Though waves arise upon the ocean of mind, the characteristics of consciousness do not arise. One knows that the realms manifested by one's own mind are neither existent nor nonexistent in nature. This is called the mind-made body born of the blissful experience of samādhi.

Mahāmati, what is the mind-made body born of the blissful experience of samādhi? Bodhisattvas of the first bhūmi initially realize the mind-ground and experience immeasurable joy. At the second bhūmi, they remove the accumulated habits of worldly toil, leaving behind the defilements and obstacles of affliction. By the third, fourth, and fifth bhūmis, they perfect the pāramitās of patience, vigor, and dhyāna. The light of innate awakened wisdom bursts forth, and they can enter and emerge from every samādhi without attachment. This is the blissful experience of samādhi.

"The various activities of one's own mind abide peacefully in stillness"—bodhisattvas of the third, fourth, and fifth bhūmis enter and emerge from various samādhis, yet they deeply understand that all changing dharma-characteristics are manifested by their own minds. Therefore, in all these states of samādhi, they neither grasp nor reject, neither merge with nor separate from them, but always abide in a serene and lucid state of mind.

"Though waves arise upon the ocean of mind, the characteristics of consciousness do not arise. One knows that the realms manifested by one's own mind are neither existent nor nonexistent in nature"—because bodhisattvas understand that all kinds of realms are no more than waves upon the ocean of mind, never exceeding what is directly manifested by mind, and are all like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and foam, with no real self-nature to be found, they are not obscured by them or mistake the false for the true, much less become complacent over them. This is "though waves arise upon the ocean of mind, the characteristics of consciousness do not arise." "The characteristics of consciousness do not arise" means that such characteristics are not produced; that is, one does not mistake the false for the true.

This is the mind-made body born of the blissful experience of samādhi. Though one outwardly manifests the freedom to enter and emerge from various samādhis and to enjoy the Dharma, one's mind is in fact serene and at ease, without abiding in attachment. Vimalakīrti said, "Without rising from the samādhi of cessation, one manifests all deportments." This is precisely its meaning.

Mahāmati, what is the mind-made body awakened to the self-nature of dharmas? At the eighth bhūmi, one observes and realizes that dharmas such as illusions are entirely without substantial existence. Body and mind are transformed, and one

attains the illusory samādhi and other gateways of samādhi. One possesses immeasurable characteristic powers, freedom, and luminosity; adorned like wondrous flowers and swift as thought, one is like an illusion, a dream, the moon in water, or an image in a mirror. Neither created nor creator, yet like creation and creator, one is fully adorned with all forms and their various parts. One enters the assemblies in all Buddha-lands according to need, because one thoroughly understands the dharmas of self-nature. This is called the mind-made body awakened to the self-nature of dharmas.

“Body and mind are transformed” means that, compared with bodhisattvas before the eighth bhūmi, both body and mind undergo a qualitative leap.

“Illusory samādhi” means that, abiding in this samādhi, one penetrates the principle that all dharmas are like illusions, while also being able to manifest various illusory affairs in accordance with conditions.

Mahāmati, what is the mind-made body awakened to the self-nature of dharmas? The eighth bhūmi is specified here because, although those of the first seven bhūmis possess right view, the habitual tendencies of their co-born attachment to self still remain. Therefore, their mind-made bodies must still arise through entering samādhi; there is still entry and emergence.

When bodhisattvas, through self-realization and practice, polish away their habitual tendencies and advance ever higher to the eighth bhūmi, they thoroughly realize that all is illusory and entirely without substantial existence. They no longer waver in the slightest. The ancients often said: “Utterly naked,” “spotlessly clean,” and “When skin has completely fallen away, this alone is the one reality.”

At this point, no appearances, not even purposeful practice, can shake their minds. Thus the eighth bhūmi is also called the Immovable Ground. At that time, habitual tendencies depart of themselves without being deliberately cast off; co-born attachment to self vanishes completely. Having thoroughly realized no-self, bodhisattvas can therefore manifest countless “selves.” This is the transformation of body and mind at the eighth bhūmi.

“One attains the illusory samādhi and other gateways of samādhi, and possesses immeasurable characteristic powers, freedom, and luminosity”—at this time, it is as though one has awakened from a great dream and will never again sink into sleep. Having thoroughly realized that all is like illusion, one is said to have attained the illusory samādhi. Through this illusory samādhi, one further realizes all other samādhis, gains immeasurable expedient powers of manifestation, and possesses freedom in spiritual powers.

“Adorned like wondrous flowers and swift as thought; like an illusion, a dream, the moon in water, or an image in a mirror—neither created nor creator, yet like creation and creator.”

“Fully adorned with all forms and their various parts, one enters the assemblies in all Buddha-lands according to need”—at this time, the manifestations of the mind-made body are exceedingly swift and free, just like our thoughts. Ordinary beings’ thoughts can arrive wherever they think of; likewise, a bodhisattva’s mind-made body can swiftly reach wherever sentient beings need it.

Moreover, the manifested forms are as splendid as wondrous flowers. Like dreams and illusions, the moon in water, and images in a mirror, they cannot be grasped, yet they appear bright and clear, vivid and lifelike. Though they are not truly composed of the four great elements as creator and created, they are as vivid and alive as all dharmas of creator and created, fully possessing the characteristics of all material forms, with every detail complete and adorned.

Note carefully: is the mind-made body something produced by “thought”? In this sūtra, it is said only to be swift like a thought; hence it is called a mind-made body. We must never measure it by our ordinary, deluded minds and suppose that a mind-made body arises merely from casually forming an intention. To give rise to intention and cling to conditions is the deluded thinking of ordinary beings. The sūtra says, “Take care not to trust your own mind; your own mind is not trustworthy.” Bodhisattvas, however, are without such intentional thought; therefore, in response to the feelings of sentient beings, they can wondrously manifest everywhere and in every way.

“One enters the assemblies in all Buddha-lands according to need, because one thoroughly understands the dharmas of self-nature. This is called the mind-made body awakened to the self-nature of dharmas”—bodhisattvas of the eighth bhūmi and above can enter every Buddha-land with such a mind-made body to liberate sentient beings, without the slightest obstruction. This is because bodhisattvas of the eighth bhūmi thoroughly understand that the self-nature of all dharmas is originally unborn. Thus they can give rise to the myriad dharmas without arising, and manifest immeasurable transformation bodies without any act of transformation.

This is the “mind-made body awakened to the self-nature of dharmas.” The ancient worthies said, “Buddha-work is like a dream or illusion; the place of practice is like the moon in water.” Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva returns to the stream of compassion, manifesting in accordance with conditions: wherever there is prayer, there is response. This is precisely its meaning.

Mahāmati, what is the mind-made body co-born with the various kinds, without deliberate action? It is the joyful characteristic naturally attained through awakening to all Buddha-dharmas in dependence upon conditions. This is called the mind-made body co-born with the various kinds, without deliberate action. Mahāmati, you should observe and realize these characteristics of the three kinds of body, and cultivate them.

“Without deliberate action” means manifesting in accordance with conditions, yet without intentional discrimination.

What is the mind-made body co-born with the various kinds, without deliberate action? It is to thoroughly realize that all Buddha-dharmas are nothing other than inherently complete, which is the characteristic of great bliss. Suchness is originally so, requiring not the slightest contrivance. The myriad dharmas are originally manifested by one’s own mind and are all transformations of the Buddhas. What further need is there to add anything?

This is the mind-made body “co-born with the various kinds, without action or deliberate intention.” The ancient worthies said, “Lush yellow flowers are none other than prajñā; verdant bamboo is entirely the dharmakāya.” This is precisely its meaning.

Mahāmati, you should observe and discern this truthfully, and learn and cultivate these three kinds of mind-made body in accordance with reality.

At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke in verse: “Neither the vehicle of self nor the Great Vehicle; neither speech nor words; neither truth nor liberation, yet not without a realm. Nevertheless, riding the Mahāyāna and freely abiding in samādhi, one manifests various mind-made bodies, freely adorned like flowers.”

“The vehicle of self” refers to the vehicle in which attachment to self and what belongs to self has not been severed—that is, the Lesser Vehicle.

“Mahāyāna” means the Great Vehicle.

In this verse, the Buddha also dismisses everything taught in the preceding section concerning “self-realized noble wisdom” and the “One Vehicle”:

The characteristics of the One Vehicle are neither the Lesser Vehicle nor the Great Vehicle. Self-realized noble wisdom is neither words nor meanings. The Tathāgata’s Dharma is neither the truth of doctrinal principle nor liberation as a phenomenal state. Yet what the Tathāgata realizes is not a withered, quiescent state in which nothing whatsoever exists. In this vehicle of no vehicle, there are no words to speak, no dharma to establish, and no realm to display to others. Therefore, the three

kinds of mind-made body arise precisely on this basis, responding to the feelings of sentient beings by manifesting manifold forms of liberation, with incomparable wondrous characteristics and free adornment.

Therefore, if practitioners arouse a pure resolve and cultivate with single-minded depth, realizing the signless reality of true marks, their habitual tendencies depart of themselves without being deliberately cast off, and wondrous functioning arises of itself without being deliberately produced. Here the Buddha repeatedly emphasizes "neither the vehicle of self nor the Great Vehicle," for he fears that we may again become attached to the wondrous functioning of transformed forms and depart from the signless foundation. You must know that if one clings to the characteristics of transformative functioning, one is liable to enter the realm of Māra. Thus, only after the Buddha had deeply explained the One Vehicle of noble wisdom and led Mahāmati through the gate of signless prajñā did he extend the discussion to introduce these three kinds of mind-made transformative functioning.

In truth, when deluded, one becomes attached wherever one encounters a realm. Even if the Buddhas and bodhisattvas compassionately manifest countless transformation bodies to liberate you, this remains so. But when awakened, neither delusion nor awakening remains; one turns instead into the sovereign of the dharmakāya. Not to speak of mountains, rivers, and the great earth—even the Buddhas of the three periods of time and the Pure Lands of the ten directions: which of them is not manifested by your own mind? None of these wondrous appearances lies outside our mind.

Summary of This Section:

The key term in this section is "intent-born body." In response to the question raised in the preceding section, "the One Vehicle of Noble Wisdom," the Buddha elaborates: after bodhisattvas have cultivated and realized the One Vehicle of Noble Wisdom in accordance with reality, three wondrous aspects of the intent-born body will manifest outwardly.

Bodhisattvas of the third, fourth, and fifth bhūmis can enter right concentration and right absorption, thereby manifesting the intent-born body of samādhi-bliss absorption. At the eighth bhūmi, they inwardly realize that all dharmas are like illusions and entirely without substantial existence. Their bodies and minds then transform, and they attain the illusion-like intent-born body, outwardly manifesting immeasurable transformation bodies and exercising wondrous functions with ease. This is called the intent-born body of awakening to the self-nature of dharmas. Advancing still further, they thoroughly realize that things are inherently thus, originally complete, and truly without any intentional contrivance or action. This is

called the intent-born body of the various kinds that are co-born and free of intentional action.

Yet these three kinds of intent-born body are skillful wondrous functions that Buddhas and bodhisattvas manifest in accordance with conditions in order to guide sentient beings. What is most important, therefore, is to study their inwardly realized essence—self-awakened noble wisdom. If one becomes solely attached to and pursues the splendor of outward appearances, one is liable to enter the realm of demons. To realize the fruition characteristics of this One Vehicle requires the cultivation and realization of undefiled, uninterrupted wisdom, which leads to the next section: the inner five uninterrupted wisdoms.

19. The Five Heinous Offenses

[At that time Mahāmati Bodhisattva Mahāsattva addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, as the World-Honored One has said, if men or women commit the five acts of uninterrupted karma, they do not enter the Avīci Hell. World-Honored One, how can men or women commit the five acts of uninterrupted karma and yet not enter the Avīci Hell?" The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I shall explain it to you." Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "Excellent, World-Honored One! Yes, I respectfully receive your teaching." The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "What are the five acts of uninterrupted karma? They are killing one's father or mother, harming an arhat, disrupting the harmony of the saṅgha, and maliciously causing the Buddha to bleed."]

"Uninterrupted" is a translation of the Sanskrit Avīci. It conveys the sense of being direct and without any interval.

This continues the preceding topic. To realize the three kinds of mind-born body, one must have uninterrupted wisdom. The "five acts of uninterrupted karma" refer to the five heinous offenses. Everyone knows that the five heinous offenses are the most extreme evil karma: whoever commits them will certainly undergo the karmic retribution of Avīci Hell. Yet the Tathāgata says that there are also those who commit the five uninterrupted acts but do not enter the Unchosen Hell.

Here, "Unchosen Hell" means Avīci Hell. Thus Mahāmati wonders why one who commits the five uninterrupted acts can nevertheless avoid Avīci Hell. Although both are called "uninterrupted," there is a complete difference between ignorance and wisdom. What the Buddha is about to explain below is uninterrupted wisdom:

["Mahāmati, what is the mother of sentient beings? It is craving for renewed birth, together with greed and delight. Just as one is established through the condition of a

mother, ignorance is the father, and birth occurs in the settlement of the sense-bases. To cut off these two roots is called harming one's father and mother."]

"Just as one is established through the condition of a mother" refers to the twelve links of dependent origination of all dharmas. Of these twelve links, ignorance in a past life is the cause that brings about formation, consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense-bases, contact, and feeling as results in the present life. From these arise craving, grasping, and becoming as present causes, which bring about the future results of birth, aging, and death. Thus the karmic retributions of the three times continue in an unbroken cycle. Ignorance is the principal cause, capable of generating all afflictions; craving is the principal condition, capable of nourishing and fostering all karma.

"Entry" means the six entries, referring to the six sense faculties entering into the six sense objects: the eye enters forms, the ear sounds, the nose odors, the tongue tastes, the body tactile objects, and the mind dharmas.

"Bases" means the twelve bases, referring to the mutual interaction and penetration of the six sense faculties and six sense objects, which give rise to the various realms of consciousness.

This passage speaks of "harming one's father and mother":

Buddha-nature is originally perfect and luminous. When ordinary beings mistakenly seize upon a single thought and take it to be clear awareness, the various afflictions arise in profusion. Thus ignorance is like the father of sentient beings: "Ignorance as cause gives rise to the three subtle characteristics." What is the mother of sentient beings? Through defiled attachment arise grasping, delight, and sorrow, just as an infant is born and nourished to maturity through the condition of its mother. Thus craving has the function of moistening and fostering birth. What does it moisten? It moistens the karma of rebirth in saṃsāra, enabling it to continue—"Objects as conditions foster the six coarse characteristics."

Ignorance as cause gives rise to the three subtle characteristics; objects as conditions foster the six coarse characteristics. Through ignorance and defiled craving, deluded ordinary beings give rise together to the six entries, twelve bases, and eighteen realms, and affliction, karma, and suffering proliferate. Therefore, practitioners of wisdom first cut off the fundamental ignorance and defiled craving. This is "killing the father" and "harming the mother."

["When those agents no longer appear, it is like rat poison acting upon dharmas. To cut them off completely is called harming an arhat."]

Shi, “agents,” means that which drives or impels; it is also another name for the binding agents of affliction.

“The various agents” refers to the ten subsidiary afflictions: the view of the body, extreme views, attachment to views, attachment to rules and observances, greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt.

“The various agents no longer appear” means that the ten subsidiary afflictions do not arise in active manifestation. The Compendium of the Four Teachings says that arhats “only cut off the primary agents and cannot eradicate habitual tendencies.” Although arhats can temporarily subdue afflictions so that they do not manifest, fundamental ignorance has not been cut off and attachment to dharmas has not been eliminated. Therefore, the karmic seeds of habitual affliction still remain and will manifest again when conditions arise.

It is like being bitten by a rat: after the poison lies latent for a time, it erupts and causes one to go mad and rush about wildly. The habitual tendencies of affliction are the same. If their root is not removed, then when conditions mature, they will still be difficult to restrain and will erupt.

Therefore, one must not only cut off manifest afflictions, but also completely eradicate the habitual seeds stored in the eighth consciousness. Thoroughly eliminating the residual habits of affliction is what is meant by “harming an arhat.”

In Buddhist cultivation and realization, the first task is realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, thereby destroying fundamental ignorance. Only afterward can one eliminate every subtle residual habit. In this way one advances from stage to stage until reaching perfect fruition. It is like a poisonous tree whose branches, leaves, and fruits are all poisonous. If one merely prunes its leaves and removes its fruits, poisonous fruits will still grow again later.

Only by uprooting the poisonous root will the branches, leaves, and fruits naturally wither and cease to grow again. Thus, the crucial point in dealing with a poisonous tree is to remove its root. The key to studying Buddhism is to understand the fundamental nature of mind and eradicate ignorance; only then can habitual tendencies be eliminated at their root. The cultivation and realization of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma emphasizes realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature; it is a direct method of uprooting the root.

The Second Patriarch, Patriarch Wang Xianglu, once said: “To uproot suffering, one should uproot its root; to uproot the root, one should know the root. To know the root requires thorough awakening; to awaken thoroughly, one must realize the mind.” Once one truly realizes the mind and sees one’s true nature, even if habitual

tendencies still manifest, they are like an arrow at the end of its flight: they retain inertia but have no power to exert, and will certainly dissipate completely.

["What is disrupting the saṅgha? It is the aggregation and combination of the various marks of the aggregates. To cut them off completely is called disrupting the saṅgha."]

"Saṅgha" is a transliteration; translated, it means a "harmonious community." A saṅgha requires two kinds of harmony. First is harmony in principle: all those gathered take nirvāṇa and liberation as their aim. Second is harmony in practice, which has six aspects: observing the precepts harmoniously, sharing the same understanding harmoniously, dwelling together harmoniously, sharing benefits equally and harmoniously, speaking without contention harmoniously, and rejoicing together in mind harmoniously.

"Different marks" means the distinctions and changes among appearances. Opposed to different marks are common marks. The distinctions among appearances are easy to understand, but what appearance is common to all? The sūtras say: "The nature of all dharmas has only one mark, namely, no mark." Therefore, the marklessness of true reality is the common mark of all dharmas.

This sentence speaks of "disrupting the saṅgha." The various differentiated aggregate-marks of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness gather and combine to form the twelve classes of differentiated sentient beings. They thereby create immeasurable karma and deeply undergo the suffering of saṃsāric birth and death; this is the "harmonious saṅgha." To completely cut off this falsely compounded entity of the aggregates and directly realize the original absence of self is to disrupt the saṅgha. As the Diamond Sūtra says: "What the Tathāgata calls the mark of a unified whole is not the mark of a unified whole; it is only called the mark of a unified whole." The Heart Sūtra says: "At that time, he saw that the five aggregates are all empty, and thereby crossed beyond all suffering and adversity."

["Mahāmati, failing to realize the external marks and the marks of self and others, one takes the seven-consciousness body, manifested in the immediate awareness of one's own mind, to be real. With the undefiled adverse thought of the three liberations, one completely cuts off those seven consciousnesses that obscure the Buddha. This is called maliciously causing the Buddha to bleed. If men or women perform these uninterrupted acts, they are called the five uninterrupted acts, and are also called acts equal to uninterruptedness."]

The Buddha told Mahāmati that deluded people do not awaken. They do not know that external circumstances and the cognitive images within the mind are both illusory and have no inherent nature to be found. They cannot awaken to the fact that all dharmas are manifestations of their own mind. Their attachments to self and

dharmas remain firmly unbroken. Thus, the originally perfect and luminous essence of the tathāgatagarbha is instead enveloped and entangled by ignorance, mistakenly becoming the eighth consciousness and falsely giving rise to the seven defiled consciousnesses, namely the first seven consciousnesses. Karmic retribution continues, and saṃsāra does not cease.

The three gates of liberation—emptiness, wishlessness, and signlessness—are undefiled right views by which one enters the city of ultimate nirvāṇa. Their power is inconceivable. They are precisely the sharp sword that can slay the thieves of deluded thought, sever defiled attachment, and enable sentient beings to transform consciousness into wisdom. Courageously using this sharp sword of the undefiled wisdom of the three liberations to cut away one's own defiled consciousness and attachment, and to transform the eight consciousnesses into the four wisdoms, is "maliciously causing the Buddha to bleed."

The Buddha further summarized: if men or women completely eradicate craving and ignorance, thoroughly cut off the habitual tendencies of affliction, completely dismantle the falsely compounded aggregates, and completely sever deluded thoughts and attachments, then directly practicing and realizing these five matters is called performing the five acts of uninterrupted karma.

Note that in "the undefiled adverse thought of the three liberations," "adverse" is adverse in name but accords with reality; it expresses the determination to cut off. The Buddha is the dharmakāya father and mother of sentient beings, enabling them to awaken to their own minds and leave the paths of suffering. Therefore, the Buddha's kindness is difficult to repay.

To cause the Buddha to bleed is among the gravest of all karmic offenses. How much more so when it is preceded by "maliciously," which makes it the gravest of grave offenses. Yet conversely, if one can truly arouse the resolve to leave saṃsāra and cut off the deluded thoughts, attachments, and habitual tendencies that have flowed on through beginningless kalpas, one needs extraordinary decisiveness and courage. This supreme practice of wisdom can be undertaken only by a great person.

From this section we can see that the Buddha's teaching is extremely dynamic: if there is no dharma that can be spoken, then all verbal expressions and names are skillful means for liberating sentient beings. They may be used directly, or they may be used in an inverse way.

An example is the past teaching episode in which Mañjuśrī appeared to raise his sword to kill the Buddha. Long ago, at the assembly on Vulture Peak, five hundred bhikshus had gained the supernormal power of knowing past lives. Each saw that in past lives he had killed his father or mother and committed other grave offenses.

Their minds became unsettled, and they could not enter the Way. In order to set the five hundred bhikshus at ease so that they could enter the Way, the Buddha blessed Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva and caused him to hold a sharp sword toward the Tathāgata.

The Tathāgata said: “Stop! Stop! You should not commit an adverse act; do not harm me. I am certainly harmed, but I am harmed for good. Mañjuśrī! From the beginning, there has been no self in you. Yet because inwardly you see self and persons, whenever such thoughts arise in your mind, I am harmed. This is called harming.”

The Buddha told Mañjuśrī: Stop! Mañjuśrī should not commit an adverse act and harm me. Do not harm me; I am constantly being harmed. Why? In this world there is fundamentally no self or person; there is only the mind’s deluded perception of self and person. Whenever thoughts arise in a person’s mind and they perceive self and person, ordinary and sage, and so forth, this is precisely harming me. On hearing this, the five hundred bhikshus suddenly awoke.

Therefore, we must remain ever lucid and alert, and must not be deceived by others or by appearances. If even a trace of a view of persons or dharmas still arises, if there remains some dharma to be attained or even a point upon which to stand, it must urgently be cut away completely. Otherwise, not only can one not be said to revere the Buddha; it would not be excessive to say that one harms the Buddha.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, there are external uninterrupted acts, which I shall now explain. When you and the other great bodhisattvas have heard this meaning, you will not fall into delusion in future ages. What are the five uninterrupted acts? They are the uninterrupted acts previously described. If one commits them, one will not attain, in any of the three liberations, the dharmas of uninterruptedness and the like.

Apart from this, there are transformations manifested through spiritual powers that resemble uninterrupted acts: the spiritual-power transformations of śrāvakas, bodhisattvas, and Tathāgatas. For the sake of those who commit uninterrupted offenses, in order to remove their doubts and induce repentance, and to exhort and inspire them, they manifest through spiritual powers acts resembling uninterrupted offenses. There is no one who consistently commits uninterrupted acts and yet does not attain uninterruptedness and the like, except those who awaken to the direct manifestation of their own mind, relinquish deluded thoughts of body and possessions, relinquish attachment to self and what belongs to self, or at times encounter a good spiritual friend and are liberated from the continuing deluded thoughts of the other destinies.]

“External uninterrupted acts” are spoken of in contrast to internal ones. What the Buddha has just explained are the internal five uninterrupted acts; practicing these five uninterrupted acts leads to liberation and nirvāṇa.

Yet deluded ordinary beings may misunderstand the Dharma's meaning and suppose that, even if they commit the grave offenses of the external five uninterrupted acts, they will not enter the uninterrupted hell. This would amount to denying cause and effect. Therefore, the Buddha further said: "Mahāmati, there are also external uninterrupted acts," namely, the five kinds of killing first described. If one commits these five evil deeds of killing, the result is certainly not undefiled liberation but karmic retribution in hell, without the slightest deviation. Mahāmati, everyone should understand these two kinds of uninterrupted acts, internal and external, and thereby no longer fall into deluded and mistaken views.

"Apart from this, there are transformations manifested through spiritual powers that resemble uninterrupted acts: the spiritual-power transformations of śrāvakas, bodhisattvas, and Tathāgatas. For the sake of those who commit uninterrupted offenses, in order to remove their doubts and induce repentance, and to exhort and inspire them, they manifest through spiritual powers acts resembling uninterrupted offenses."

—The evil deeds of the external five uninterrupted acts also have exceptions. For example, Buddhas, bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and the like may see others committing offenses of uninterrupted retribution and, in order to guide and transform them, remove their doubts, lead them to repent, and enable them to leave the sea of suffering, manifest themselves as committing the grave offenses of the five heinous acts and undergoing their evil results. They will not receive the karmic retribution of the uninterrupted hell. There are many such examples in the Buddhist scriptures, such as King Ajātaśatru killing his father and Devadatta harming the Buddha. These were all skillful manifestations by bodhisattvas to encourage those who had committed grave offenses to arouse the resolve for repentance. They themselves were merely manifesting such acts and did not truly create the karma; therefore, they did not receive karmic retribution.

"There is no one who consistently commits uninterrupted acts and yet does not attain uninterruptedness and the like, except those who awaken to the direct manifestation of their own mind, relinquish deluded thoughts of body and possessions, and relinquish attachment to self and what belongs to self. Or, at times, they encounter a good spiritual friend and are liberated from the continuing deluded thoughts of the other destinies"—apart from these cases, those who commit deeds of uninterrupted retribution must receive the karmic result of the uninterrupted hell, without the slightest exception.

Can they nevertheless escape from it? Certainly they can. If those who have created such karma arouse the resolve to repent, suddenly awaken, and realize that everything is merely manifested by their own mind—within, there is no self-body capable of receiving retribution; without, there is no dependent environment to be

received—then from where could causes, conditions, and karmic results arise? “When the mind is extinguished, offenses too perish.” In this way, they can escape from the uninterrupted hell.

There is another possibility: when causes and conditions mature, one encounters a good spiritual friend, receives that person’s guidance, repents sincerely, and then suddenly gives rise to true wisdom of ultimate reality. One may then be liberated from the deluded thoughts of the evil destinies in which one would otherwise continue to receive retribution. This is called being delivered and released from the uninterrupted hell.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses: Craving is called the mother; ignorance is the father. Consciousness that apprehends objects is the Buddha; the various latent afflictions are the arhats. The collection of aggregates is called the saṅgha. When uninterruptedly and successively cut off, these are called the five uninterrupted acts; one does not enter the Avīci hell.]

This verse concerns the internal five uninterrupted acts. The following table explains them:



“Uninterruptedly and successively cut off” means cutting each one off completely. “Successively cut off” means cutting them off in sequence; “uninterruptedly cut off” means cutting them off directly and suddenly. Thus, “uninterruptedly and successively cut off” means that, whether gradual or sudden, they must ultimately be eradicated completely.

Chan Master Linji also said: “If you wish to attain a view in accord with the Dharma, simply do not be deluded by others. Inwardly or outwardly, whatever you encounter, kill it: encounter a Buddha, kill the Buddha; encounter a patriarch, kill the patriarch; encounter an arhat, kill the arhat; encounter your father or mother, kill your father or mother; encounter your relatives, kill your relatives. Only then will you attain

liberation. Do not be constrained by things; penetrate through them and be free." This accords in a different manner with what this section explains.

Summary of This Section:

The key terms in this section are "the five uninterrupted karmic acts" and "ultimate eradication." To realize the three kinds of mind-born body, one must possess uninterrupted, undefiled wisdom. The Buddha first answered concerning the internal five uninterrupted karmic acts: cutting off ignorance and craving, cutting off afflictions and habitual tendencies, cutting off the aggregation of the five aggregates, and cutting off the defilement of deluded consciousness. This is the path to Buddhahood.

The external uninterrupted acts mean that, if one actually commits the evil offenses of the five heinous acts, one must fall into the uninterrupted hell, unless one is a noble being making a manifest appearance. But if one arouses the resolve for awakening, or encounters a good spiritual friend whose compassionate guidance one accepts in faith, and then suddenly eradicates deluded thoughts and realizes that all karmic obstacles are merely manifested by mind, one can be delivered and released from the uninterrupted hell.

20. The Essential Nature of All Buddhas

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, I pray that you will explain the Buddha's knowing and awakening. World-Honored One, what is the Buddha's knowing and awakening?" The Buddha told Mahāmati: "To awaken to the selflessness of persons and dharmas, fully understand the two obstructions, be free from the two kinds of birth and death, and cut off the two afflictions—this is called the Buddha's knowing and awakening. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas who attain this Dharma are also called Buddhas. For this reason, I teach the One Vehicle." At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:]

Well understand the two kinds of selflessness; cut off the afflictions of the two obstructions;

Forever free from the two kinds of birth and death—this is called the Buddha's knowing and awakening.]

"The two obstructions": the obstruction of afflictions and the obstruction of what is known.

"The two kinds of birth and death": segmented birth and death and transformational birth and death.

“The two afflictions”: the fundamental afflictions (that is, the delusion of fundamental ignorance) and subsidiary afflictions (the two delusions of views and thought).

“Self”: Sanskrit ātman, transliterated as Atman. Its original meaning is “breath,” and by extension it denotes essence, intrinsic nature, or a governing self.

In the preceding section, the Buddha told Mahāmati that those who take the realm of defiled consciousness to be real are not true Buddhas and should sever such attachment. In this section, Mahāmati asks what, precisely, constitutes a true Buddha’s knowing. Here, “knowing” refers to wisdom and awakening.

The Buddha tells Mahāmati: The Buddha’s wisdom is awakening to the two kinds of selflessness—of persons and dharmas—and directly realizing that the two obstructions, of afflictions and what is known, are originally nonexistent. Thus one forever extinguishes segmented birth and death and transformational birth and death, and ultimately cuts off fundamental ignorance and the residual habitual tendencies of subsidiary afflictions. This is the Buddha’s awakened wisdom.

At this point, both the Lesser Vehicle and the Great Vehicle are spoken of provisionally. The stages of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas are likewise nothing more than provisional guides established for those traveling the path. Therefore it is said: “Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas who attain this Dharma are also called Buddhas. For this reason, I teach only the One Vehicle; the other two are not ultimate.”

In the sixteenth section, “Distinctions among the Four Fruits,” the Buddha explained twelve characteristics of false discrimination and proposed that the defilement of consciousness arising from false discrimination should be eliminated. Then, in the seventeenth section, he pointed out that false discrimination has no intrinsic nature and that, in truth, no false discrimination ever arises. Thus, a Tathāgata is one in whom false discrimination has never arisen in the realm of suchness; this is the One Vehicle.

Yet the One Vehicle is not annihilationist emptiness. Precisely because false discrimination does not arise, the three kinds of mind-born body arise, manifesting immeasurable wondrous functions for liberating sentient beings.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth sections, the Buddha further emphasizes that although Buddhas and bodhisattvas outwardly manifest wondrous functions and adornments, their inner realization consists in destroying ignorance, cutting off afflictions, advancing ever higher, and utterly eradicating every defilement of consciousness arising from false discrimination. Only this is the true fruition and virtue of the One Vehicle. The twentieth section concludes once more: the fruition of

the One Vehicle is the complete cutting off of birth and death and afflictions, and the complete realization of the two kinds of selflessness. At this point, there is no longer any Great Vehicle or Lesser Vehicle; this is the One Vehicle. Thus the causal-ground cultivation and fruition-ground virtues and marks of the "Buddhadharma of the One Vehicle" have been fully set forth.

This section states that "śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas who attain this Dharma are also called Buddhas," thereby correcting the prejudices of ordinary beings. It is commonly thought that practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle must pass through forty-one stages and three asaṃkhyeya kalpas before they can become Buddhas. Those of limited capacity who encounter this passage often shrink back in fear and place realization of one's true nature and Buddhahood beyond reach.

Yet in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, the Buddha teaches sudden transcendence to the highest truth: everyone inherently possesses the luminous Buddha-nature; originally there is neither self nor dharma, and all defilement and blemish arise from false discrimination and attachment. Therefore, the "two kinds of selflessness" may be realized progressively in stages, or perfectly accomplished in a single instant. This is what was called "the unfolding and contraction of practice and stages" in the initial ten profound discussions.

If one's resolve is pure and one enters deeply into a single gate of practice and realization, there will ultimately come an instant when empty space shatters into dust, emotional attachment is cut off, and deliberation ceases. Only then does one know that self-liberation and liberating others, sudden accomplishment and gradual realization, are all provisional teachings. For in truth there are "no marks of self, person, sentient being, or life span"; all the various dharma marks are nothing more than our misunderstanding. In fact, once arhats of the four fruits turn from the Lesser Vehicle toward the Great Vehicle and awaken from one-sided nirvāṇa, they immediately become eighth-bhūmi bodhisattvas.

Overview of This Section:

The key terms in this section are "the Buddha's knowing and awakening" and "the two kinds of selflessness." The preceding section, on the inner five uninterrupted offenses, established that the realm of consciousness is not true consciousness. Mahāmati therefore asks what the Buddha's true consciousness is, prompting the Buddha's reply: true consciousness is the two kinds of selflessness; realizing the two kinds of selflessness means being forever free from birth and death, which is the One Vehicle.

21. The Four Levels of Esoteric Meaning

At that time, Bodhisattva Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, why do you proclaim before the great assembly: ‘I was all the Buddhas of the past, and I underwent various births. At that time, I was King Māndhātṛ, a wheel-turning sage king, a six-tusked elephant, a parrot, Śakra Devānām Indra, and the seer Sunetra’? Such accounts are told in the sūtras of hundreds of thousands of births.”

“Māndhātṛ” means a white flower; it is also translated as “pleasing” or “delightful.”

A “wheel-turning sage king” is the most blessed person in the world. He appears when the human lifespan is eighty-four thousand years and rules over the four continents. When a wheel-turning king appears, the world is at peace, the people are happy, and there are no natural disasters or human calamities. This is the result of having cultivated abundant wholesome karma in past lives. Regrettably, he has not cultivated the supramundane karma of wisdom; thus, he merely becomes a greatly blessed king who rules the world, rather than cultivating practice, realizing the Way, and attaining fruition.

Regarding the “six-tusked elephant,” the Sutra of the Treasury of Miscellaneous Jewels says that in a past life the Buddha appeared in the form of a six-tusked white elephant. To eliminate a hunter’s greed, he pulled out his own tusks and gave them to him, vowing that in the future he would pull out the tusks of the three poisons from all sentient beings.

The Buddha also once manifested as a “parrot.” The Sutra of the Treasury of Miscellaneous Jewels records that in a past life the Buddha manifested as a parrot to liberate a farmer who caught birds—namely, Śāriputra.

“Śakra Devānām Indra” is the lord of Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, abbreviated as Śakra or Indra. It is said that the Buddha was reborn as Śakra Devānām Indra many times.

Regarding the “great seer Sunetra,” the Madhyama Āgama records that in a past life the Buddha was the master Sunetra. Master Sunetra was a non-Buddhist teacher revered by non-Buddhist seers, who guided non-Buddhists to abandon desire and attachment and be born in the heavenly realms.

The “sūtras of hundreds of thousands of births” refers to the various Jātaka sūtras. Jātaka sūtras are one of the twelve divisions of the teachings. They recount how the Tathāgata, in past lives, manifested different bodily forms, underwent various births and deaths, and practiced the bodhisattva path.

The preceding section discussed the Buddha’s awakening, and Mahāmati then became puzzled: if there is no self, why does the Buddha say that he is all the Buddhas of the past? The Buddha also says that he underwent various births in past lives. On the basis of these two contrasting manifestations—one, the appearance of

entering saṃsāra and taking birth; the other, the appearance of transcending the world and attaining liberation—Mahāmati asks the Buddha: Why is the World-Honored One both all the Buddhas of the past and one who underwent various births in the past? How could he simultaneously manifest these two utterly different extremes?

The Buddha told Mahāmati: “Because of four equalities, the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Awakened One proclaims before the great assembly: ‘At that time, I was Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and Kāśyapa Buddha.’ What are the four equalities? They are equality of names, equality of speech, equality of Dharma, and equality of body. These are called the four equalities. Because of these four equalities, the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Awakened One proclaims thus before the great assembly.”

Regarding “Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and Kāśyapa Buddha,” the Great Origin Sūtra of the Dīrgha Āgama records that seven Buddhas appeared in the past: Vipaśyin Buddha, Śikhin Buddha, Viśvabhū Buddha, Krakucchanda Buddha, Kanakamuni Buddha, Kāśyapa Buddha, and Śākyamuni Buddha. The first three Buddhas were the three Buddhas of the past Adornment Kalpa, while the latter four were the four Buddhas of the Auspicious Kalpa. This kalpa is called the Auspicious Kalpa because a thousand Buddhas appear in it and many sages are born. Here, the names of the first three Buddhas of the Auspicious Kalpa are used simply to represent all the Buddhas of the past.

The Buddha replies: Because of the four equalities, I say that I am the Buddhas of the past. The four equalities are equality of names, equality of speech, equality of Dharma, and equality of body. Because of these four equalities, the Tathāgata says: “I am all the Buddhas of the past.”

Why are the Buddhas of the past, present, and future said to be “equal,” although their manifestations differ? Ordinary people find this difficult to understand. Therefore, the ancients also called this teaching of the four equalities the “secret intent of the four equalities.” “Secret” means profound and describes these four equalities as deep and inconceivable.

Let us now examine how the Buddha explains these four equalities one by one:

What is equality of names? If the name “Buddha” is used to refer to me, that same name is also used to refer to all Buddhas.

The nature of that name has no distinction; this is called equality of names. What is equality of speech? I produce speech endowed with the sixty-four kinds of Brahmā’s voice, and so do those Tathāgatas, Arhats, Perfectly Awakened Ones. They too produce speech endowed with the sixty-four kinds of Brahmā’s voice, without

increase, decrease, or distinction, possessing the nature of the Brahmā voice of the kalaviṅka bird. What is equality of body? Between me and all Buddhas, there is no distinction in the dharmakāya, the physical body, or its marks and excellences. Except that, in order to tame sentient beings of the various realms, they manifest various distinct physical bodies; this is called equality of body. What is equality of Dharma? It means that I and those Buddhas have attained the thirty-seven factors of awakening.

In brief, they possess unobstructed wisdom regarding the Buddhadharma. This is called the four equalities. Therefore, the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Awakened One proclaims thus before the great assembly.

At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:

“Kāśyapa, Krakucchanda, and Kanakamuni are I. Because of these four equalities, I declare this to the Buddha’s disciples.”

“The sixty-four kinds of Brahmā’s voice”: The Scripture of the Vajra-Wielding Guardian records that the Buddha’s voice has eight inflections: nominative, accusative, instrumental, dative, ablative, genitive, locative, and vocative. These “eight inflections” describe the eight changes in the endings of nouns, pronouns, and adjectives in the Buddha’s speech. Namely: (1) the nominative case, meaning “… is”; and (2) the accusative case, meaning “… as the object of an action.”

(3) The instrumental case, meaning “by means of …”; (4) the dative case, meaning “for …”; (5) the ablative case, meaning “from …”; (6) the genitive case, meaning “…’s”; (7) the locative case, meaning “in” or “at …”; and (8) the vocative case, meaning “O …!” Each of these eight inflections possesses eight virtues: harmonious sound, gentle sound, truthful and clear sound, easily understood sound, faultless sound, unshrill sound, vast sound, and profound sound. Eight times eight makes sixty-four kinds.

“Kalaviṅka” is the name of a bird whose voice is clear and elegant, surpassing that of all other birds. The Glossary of Huìyuàn says: “This bird originally comes from the Snow Mountains. Its voice is harmonious and elegant, and listeners never tire of hearing it.”

“The thirty-seven factors of awakening”: bodhi means awakening, and “factors” here means causes. These thirty-seven are the causes of awakening for all vehicles and are also called the thirty-seven factors of the path. A detailed explanation appears in Question 008 of “The One Hundred and Eight Responses” in this book and will not be repeated here. All Buddhas equally realize these thirty-seven factors of the path to awakening; this is called equality of Dharma.

“What is equality of names? If the name ‘Buddha’ is used to refer to me, that same name is also used to refer to all Buddhas. The nature of that name has no distinction; this is called equality of names.”—What is equality of names? If the appellation “Buddha” is used to address me, it may likewise be used to address all Buddhas. The essential meaning of the appellation applied to me and to all Buddhas is awakening, without any distinction. This is “equality of names.”

The Aṅgulimālīya Sūtra mentions that when Aṅgulimāla and Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva traveled through eight billion Buddha lands, all the eight billion Buddhas said: “I am Śākyamuni Buddha.”

“What is equality of speech? I produce speech endowed with the sixty-four kinds of Brahmā’s voice, and so do those Tathāgatas, Arhats, Perfectly Awakened Ones. They too produce speech endowed with the sixty-four kinds of Brahmā’s voice, without increase, decrease, or distinction, possessing the nature of the Brahmā voice of the kalaviṅka bird.”—What is equality of speech? The Tathāgata’s voice in teaching the Dharma possesses all sixty-four excellent qualities, like the kalaviṅka bird’s voice: clear, elegant, and surpassing all others.

Among all sounds, only the Buddha’s voice teaches without teaching; in response to sentient beings’ questions, it manifests various teachings. Only the meaning conveyed by the Buddha’s teaching can draw sentient beings out of the bitter sea of saṃsāra and bring them to the far shore of wisdom; all other teachings fall short. Thus, the Tathāgata’s speech transcends all worldly sounds; it does not belong to increase or decrease, sameness or difference, arising or ceasing. The speech of all Buddhas is likewise so. Therefore, the speech of all Buddhas equally possesses the virtues of the sixty-four kinds of Brahmā’s voice and the quality of being clear, elegant, and unsurpassed. This is “equality of speech.”

“What is equality of body? Between me and all Buddhas, there is no distinction in the dharmakāya, the physical body, or its marks and excellences. Except that, in order to tame sentient beings of the various realms, they manifest various distinct physical bodies; this is called equality of body.”—What is equality of body? As above, there is no difference between me and all Buddhas in the dharmakāya or in their physical forms and marks, except that all Buddhas manifest various bodies in accordance with the capacities of sentient beings in the six realms, in order to tame them.

Buddha means awakening. Apart from awakening, all Buddhas have no separate physical form or sound that can be obtained.

What, then, is awakened to? It is the ultimate true reality. Therefore, true reality is without characteristics; this is the true bodily characteristic of all Buddhas, namely the appearance of the dharmakāya. Because all Buddhas realize that true reality is without characteristics, their sambhogakāyas are all perfect and without flaw; this is

the nondifference of their physical bodies. All Buddhas can manifest transformation bodies of countless different kinds in accordance with sentient beings' minds—"in accordance with sentient beings' minds, responding to what they know and perceive." Therefore, the three bodies of all Buddhas are equal; this is "equality of body."

This also directly answers Mahāmati's question as to why the hundreds of thousands of different births in the past are all the same as all Buddhas: it is not that the Buddha's body differs; rather, sentient beings' minds differ, and so they see the Buddhas as having various different manifestations of birth. As the Universal Gateway Chapter says: "To those who can be liberated by a certain body, he immediately manifests that body."

To those who can be liberated by the body of a deer king, he manifests the body of a deer king, and so forth. The various bodies in which the World-Honored One was born in past lives, as described in the Jātaka sūtras, are all of this kind. Likewise, although our fundamental teacher has now manifested the appearance of nirvāṇa, his Dharma-transforming body continues to teach the Dharma in full splendor.

After the Buddhadharma came to China, the Laṅkāvatāra school came to be called the Chan school. At that time, those Buddhist disciples who were to be liberated by a Chan master were met with the manifestation of a Chan master's body. We students of the Mind-Seal school, through the compassionate grace of our root guru, Acharya Yuanyin, have entered the unsurpassed gateway of wisdom and liberation. This is precisely: "To those who can be liberated by the body of Master Yuanyin, he manifests the body of Master Yuanyin."

By the same principle, people often lament the vastness and complexity of the Buddhist scriptures. Yet the Buddha is without speech; the teachings he manifests are nothing more than medicine prescribed according to the illness, or yellow leaves fashioned to stop a child from crying. What is truly complicated is not the Buddhadharma, but the human mind!

"What is equality in Dharma? It is that I and those Buddhas have all attained the thirty-seven factors conducive to awakening. In brief, the Buddha's unobstructed wisdom with regard to the Dharma is called the fourth equality. Therefore the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One, proclaims such words before the great assembly." That is, equality in Dharma means that I and all Buddhas have realized the complete Buddhadharma of the thirty-seven factors of the path. Broadly speaking, the Buddhadharma may be encompassed by these thirty-seven factors.

These thirty-seven factors of the path may further be grouped into seven major categories: the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four

bases of spiritual power, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, and the Noble Eightfold Path.

If the thirty-seven factors of the path are compared to the fruit of a great tree, then Dharma-nature is like the earth; the four foundations of mindfulness are like seeds; the four right efforts are the planting; the four bases of spiritual power are like sprouting; the five faculties are like taking root; the five powers are like the growth of stems and leaves; the seven factors of awakening blossom as flowers; and the Noble Eightfold Path bears fruit. This is an explanation according to stages.

Yet when attachment is cut off in an instant, one realizes that being is emptiness—indeed, not a single dharma can be obtained. None of the thirty-seven factors of the path is anything other than an expedient means. Emptiness is being—if practitioners are willing to arouse the resolve, then every factor of the path is a thoroughfare leading directly to the ultimate Way. Each of the thirty-seven factors encompasses all the others, and each is complete and unobstructed. This is an explanation of sudden transcendence. All Buddhas have fully realized these thirty-seven factors; this is called "equality in Dharma."

This section further explains that if neither persons nor dharmas possess a self, then everything is "I": the various rebirths of the past, all the Buddhas of the past, and the Buddha of the present are not contradictory. Why is this so? The Buddha taught the four equalities: designations, speech, bodily forms, and Dharma meaning. In these four respects, all Buddhas are equal and without distinction. This is the unobstructed wisdom of equality in Buddhadharma. The Chan school has a koan known as the "Three Barriers of Huanglong," which also mentions "my body," "the Buddha's body," and "the body of sentient beings":

Chan Master Huanglong Huinan would often ask monks in his room, "Everyone has the conditions of birth; where are your conditions of birth, Venerable?" Just as the exchange of question and answer was underway, he would extend his hand and say, "How is my hand like the Buddha's hand?" He would also ask, "When you have visited and consulted Chan masters in various places, what have you gained?" When someone answered, he would then lower his foot and say, "How is my foot like a donkey's foot?" For more than thirty years, he posed these three questions, yet none of the students penetrated their meaning.

Even if someone ventured a reply, the master never affirmed or denied it. The monastic community called these the Three Barriers of Huanglong. Later, Huanglong composed this verse himself:

"Everyone recognizes the words concerning the conditions of birth;
When has a jellyfish ever been able to leave its shrimp?

One only sees the sun rise in the east—
Who can still drink Zhaozhou's tea?

My hand and the Buddha's hand are raised together;
Chan practitioners should recognize this directly.
Without stirring up weapons or strife, the Way is spoken forth;
Here and now, one transcends Buddhas and surpasses patriarchs.

My foot and the donkey's foot move side by side;
At every step, they tread upon the unborn.
When one understands the clouds gathering and the sun withdrawing,
Only then does one know the free and untrammeled course of this Way."

"Everyone recognizes the words concerning the conditions of birth; when has a jellyfish ever been able to leave its shrimp?"—Are the various designations, words, and bodily forms the same or different?

"One only sees the sun rise in the east—who can still drink Zhaozhou's tea?"—At the level of the highest truth, is there still sameness or difference?

"My hand and the Buddha's hand are raised together; Chan practitioners should recognize this directly. Without stirring up weapons or strife, the Way is spoken forth; here and now, one transcends Buddhas and surpasses patriarchs."—If there is neither sameness nor difference, then Buddhas are each distinctly different, while patriarchs are all profoundly the same. What mystery or crucial point could there be here? Sweep away all such mysteries and crucial points, and in raising a hand or moving a foot, in lifting the brows or blinking the eyes, when has anything ever been lacking? Therefore: "Chan practitioners should recognize this directly. Without stirring up weapons or strife, the Way is spoken forth; here and now, one transcends Buddhas and surpasses patriarchs."

"My foot and the donkey's foot move side by side; at every step, they tread upon the unborn. When one understands the clouds gathering and the sun withdrawing, only then does one know the free and untrammeled course of this Way."—Is this not unobstructed wisdom?

Overview of This Section:

Key terms of this section: "the four equalities"—equality in designations, speech, Dharma, and bodily forms. The various forms of birth assumed by the founding teacher, as well as his present form of teaching the Dharma, are equal and without distinction from the Buddhas of the past in four respects: their designations, the words they speak, the bodily forms they manifest, and the Dharma they realize.

These are the four equalities, collectively called unobstructed wisdom. The next section will sweep away even these four equalities.

22. According to the Two Esoteric Practices

[Mahāmati again said to the Buddha: “As the World-Honored One has said, ‘From the night on which I attained supreme perfect awakening until the night on which I enter parinirvāṇa, throughout that interval I have not spoken a single word; nor have I spoken, nor shall I speak. Not speaking is the Buddha’s speaking.’ Why does the World-Honored One, the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One, say that ‘not speaking is the Buddha’s speaking’?”

The Buddha told Mahāmati: “I say this because of two dharmas. What are these two dharmas? They are the Dharma self-realized through conditions and the Dharma abiding from the beginning. These are called the two dharmas. Because of these two dharmas, I speak in this way.”]

The four dharmas of equality still involve verbal expression. Thus, upon reaching this gate, the Buddha sweeps away even language concerning equality.

Consider Mahāmati’s further question: Why, although the Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-nine years, did he say that from the night when he awakened to the Way upon seeing the morning star until the night when he entered parinirvāṇa, he had not spoken a single word? Moreover, not only had he not spoken in the present; the Buddhas of the past had never spoken, and the Buddhas of the future would not speak. Is not speaking itself the Buddha’s speaking?

The Buddha replied that because the Buddhadharma is “the Dharma self-realized through conditions” and “the Dharma abiding from the beginning,” not speaking is the Buddha’s speaking. The following explains these two reasons one by one.

[“What is the Dharma self-realized through conditions? Whatever that Tathāgata has attained, I too attain, with neither increase nor decrease. The Dharma self-realized through conditions is the ultimate realm, free from deluded thoughts of speech and free from the two modes of linguistic expression.”]

What is “the Dharma self-realized through conditions”? It means that the Buddhadharma is originally complete in itself. Because pure intrinsic nature is originally complete, it neither arises nor ceases, neither increases nor decreases; it cannot be attained, nor is there anything to relinquish.

If it is originally complete in itself, when could it ever have been lost? Since it has never been lost, what is there to attain? Therefore, “no wisdom and no attainment” is the attainment of all Buddhas. Thus, if this is said to be what all Buddhas attain,

then I too equally possess this attainment. This “attainment” is attainment without attainment. It is naturally and originally thus: neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. It is free from all appearances of speech arising from deluded thought and attachment, and far removed from every dualistic view.

In fact, this “Dharma self-realized through conditions” is not possessed only by the Buddhas of the three times; all sentient beings possess it inherently as well. Sentient beings simply fail to realize it because they are obscured by inverted deluded thoughts.

[“What is the Dharma abiding from the beginning? It is the path of the ancient sages, like the nature of gold and silver; the dharma realm eternally abides. Whether Tathāgatas appear in the world or do not appear in the world, the dharma realm eternally abides. It is like a road leading to a city. Suppose a man walking through the wilderness sees a level, direct road leading toward an ancient city. He follows it into the city and enjoys whatever pleasures he desires. Mahāmati, what do you think? Did he make that road and the various pleasures within the city?” He replied, “No.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The dharma realm eternally abides in the same way for me and for all Buddhas of the past.”

Therefore I say: ‘From the night on which I attained supreme perfect awakening until the night on which I enter parinirvāṇa, throughout that interval I have not spoken a single word; nor have I spoken, nor shall I speak.’”]

This passage uses two analogies to explain the Dharma that “abides from the beginning”: what the Tathāgata teaches is like gold and silver—durable and ever-abiding, never decaying. It is also like the road that has always existed leading to an ancient city; it was not invented or created by the Buddha:

“What is the Dharma abiding from the beginning? It is the path of the ancient sages, like the nature of gold and silver; the dharma realm eternally abides. Whether Tathāgatas appear in the world or do not appear in the world, the dharma realm eternally abides.” What is the “Dharma abiding from the beginning”? It is like gold and silver: whatever kind of vessel they are made into, the nature of gold and silver does not change.

Likewise, what all Buddhas realize reveals the true reality of the operation of all phenomena: it is true principle that is eternal and abiding. Reality itself transcends time and space; it is originally thus and endures from time immemorial. When a Tathāgata appears in the world, reality does not increase in the slightest; when a Tathāgata does not appear in the world, reality does not diminish by the least bit.

“It is like a road leading to a city. Suppose a man walking through the wilderness sees a level, direct road leading toward an ancient city. He follows it into the city and enjoys whatever pleasures he desires. Mahāmati, what do you think? Did he make that road and the various pleasures within the city? He replied, ‘No.’” It is also like people walking in the wilderness who see a level highway leading to an ancient city and naturally follow it into the city.

After entering the city, they enjoy all kinds of pleasures as they wish. Mahāmati, tell me: were they the ones who originally made this highway and created the various pleasures in the city? Mahāmati replied, “No.”

The Buddha told Mahāmati: “Exactly so. The One True Dharma Realm is likewise originally present and eternally unchanging. It was not created by me or by the Buddhas. The Tathāgata’s appearance in the world merely reveals this reality and demonstrates the expedient, direct path by which it may be realized.”

“Therefore I say: ‘From the night on which I attained supreme perfect awakening until the night on which I enter parinirvāṇa, throughout that interval I have not spoken a single word; nor have I spoken, nor shall I speak.’” Because of these two reasons, I say that from the night on which I realized supreme perfect awakening until the night on which I entered parinirvāṇa, I truly did not speak a single word. Moreover, all Buddhas have not spoken in the past and will not speak in the future.

[At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:

On one night I attained the Way.

Between these two, I have nothing at all to say.

Throughout the interval between these two, I spoke nothing at all.

Because of self-realization through conditions and the abiding Dharma, I speak in this way. Those Buddhas and I are entirely without distinction.]

The final verse summarizes these two dharmas: Between the two nights, I have spoken nothing. This is because the Buddhadharma is the Dharma self-realized through conditions and the Dharma abiding from the beginning. The sacred wisdom of suchness neither arises nor ceases and is inherently possessed by everyone. Yet deluded people do not understand it; only through personal realization do they know that they themselves have never lacked even the slightest fraction of it. This is called “the Dharma self-realized through conditions.” The true reality of the Tathāgata abides from time immemorial, and thus it is also called “the Dharma abiding from the beginning.”

Therefore, throughout the forty-nine years between the two nights, the World-Honored One did not speak a single word. Not only did the World-Honored One not speak; none of the Buddhas ever spoke. Therefore, there is no distinction whatsoever between all Buddhas and myself.

The Nirvāṇa Sūtra contains a similar account: As the World-Honored One was about to enter nirvāṇa, Mañjuśrī requested that the Buddha turn the Dharma wheel once more. The World-Honored One rebuked him, saying: “During my forty-nine years in the world, I have never spoken a single word. You ask me to turn the Dharma wheel again—have I ever turned the Dharma wheel?!”

This teaching of speaking through not speaking precisely reveals the incomparable preciousness of the Buddhadharma. Looking throughout the world, among the two vehicles, non-Buddhist paths, or any culture or philosophy, who else, like the Buddhas, cut their flesh to feed eagles, offered their bodies to nourish tigers, and repeatedly underwent birth and death to rescue multitudes lost in delusion from the sea of desire and river of attachment, yet said that they had never done anything? Who else, like the Buddhas, compassionately employed expedient means, condescended to enter the weeds, and tirelessly used their blazing, long tongues to open every gate of wisdom for sentient beings, yet said that they had never spoken?

Homage to our fundamental teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha.

Overview of This Section:

Key terms in this section: “Not speaking is the Buddha’s speaking,” “the Dharma self-realized through conditions,” and “the Dharma abiding from the beginning.” In this section, the Buddha sets aside even verbal expression. Though the Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-nine years, he did not speak a single word; nor had he spoken, nor would he speak. This is because the Buddhadharma is free from names, appearances, and deluded thoughts. It is the Dharma that “abides from the beginning” in suchness, and the Dharma of “self-realization through conditions” in true wisdom. Thus, all Buddhas and the World-Honored One have not spoken. Not speaking is the Buddha’s true speaking.

23. The Dharma Transcends Existence and Nonexistence

[At that time, the bodhisattva Mahāmati again entreated the World-Honored One: “May you please explain the characteristics of existence and nonexistence in all dharmas, so that I and the other great bodhisattvas may be free from the characteristics of existence and nonexistence and swiftly attain unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment.” The Buddha told Mahāmati: “Listen carefully, listen carefully,

and consider this well. I shall explain it to you." Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "Excellent, World-Honored One. Yes, I respectfully receive your instruction." The Buddha told Mahāmati: "The world relies on two kinds of views: reliance on existence and reliance on nonexistence. It falls into views of nature and no nature, seeking to see liberation without being free of the characteristic of liberation."]

"The characteristics of existence and nonexistence in all dharmas": "nonexistence" simply means absence. The characteristics of existence and nonexistence in all dharmas means clinging to all dharmas as either existing or nonexistent.

"The world relies on two kinds of views": what people in the world rely upon are two kinds of views.

"Reliance on existence and nonexistence": relying on a view of existence or a view of nonexistence.

"It falls into views of nature and no nature": "nature" means having an inherent nature. "No nature" means not having an inherent nature, that is, being without nature. To fall into views of nature and no nature is, through deluded thought and attachment, to fall into the two extreme views that dharmas either possess inherent nature or lack inherent nature. Put simply, things either exist or do not exist.

"Seeking to see liberation without being free of the characteristic of liberation": "seeking to see" means wishing to discover. "Not being free of the characteristic of liberation" means not having actually left behind the characteristic of liberation. The meaning is that one mistakenly believes one has already attained liberation, when one has not truly done so. Why? Because one has set up yet another characteristic of liberation.

What is the characteristic of liberation? It is to regard this world as truly existent and take annihilative nonexistence as liberation. For example, when worldly people perceive the suffering of life, they may think that abandoning life for death is liberation and choose suicide. Or there are practices in which, distressed by the confusion of deluded thoughts, one believes that suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise and entering a withered, quiescent, unmoving state is liberation. Such views are all the erroneous view of "seeking to see liberation without being free of the characteristic of liberation."

The section before last explained that difference is itself sameness; the preceding section said that non-speaking is the Buddha's teaching. Those who understand will understand at once, while those who do not understand cannot help but become confused. Why is this so? It is because people generally fall into the extreme views of existence and nonexistence, not knowing that both existence and nonexistence are false and mistaken views. Therefore, Mahāmati entreated the World-Honored One:

Please explain to us the true reality of all dharmas. Do they ultimately exist or not exist? How can one leave behind the extreme views of existence and nonexistence and attain awakening?

The Buddha said: Ultimately, worldly people's views rely either on existence or on nonexistence. All worldly opinions and views arise by taking "existence" or "nonexistence" as their fundamental basis; this is "reliance on existence and nonexistence." Because sentient beings hold to the extreme views of existence and nonexistence, they fall into the erroneous views of eternalism or annihilationism—that things either exist or do not exist. Worse still, they separately establish a characteristic of annihilative liberation and take this to be liberation. In fact, this is not true liberation that transcends existence and nonexistence, but a deep fall into the erroneous view of annihilationism.

Here the Buddha first refutes the matter in general: whether one relies on existence or on nonexistence, one falls into the erroneous views of the two extremes. Below, he refutes these two erroneous views separately:

["Mahāmati, what is the world's reliance on existence? It is to say that the world arises from causes and conditions and is not nonexistent; it arises from existence and not from nonexistence. Mahāmati, those who speak in this way assert that the world is without cause. Mahāmati, what is the world's reliance on nonexistence? It is to first accept the nature of greed, anger, and ignorance, and then, through deluded thought, cling to the nature of greed, anger, and ignorance as without nature. Mahāmati, if one does not grasp at having a nature, then, because nature and characteristics are quiescent, the Tathāgatas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas do not take the nature of greed, anger, and ignorance to be either existent or nonexistent."]

"It is to first accept the nature of greed, anger, and ignorance, and then, through deluded thought, cling to the nature of greed, anger, and ignorance as without nature": "accept" means to take up. One indulges in the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance—drinking alcohol and eating meat, stealing and engaging in sexual misconduct, following one's intentions and desires without restraint. After indulging in these, one falsely claims that greed, anger, and ignorance fundamentally do not exist.

What is the world's reliance on existence? Such people believe that the world truly has causes of arising and truly has seeds capable of producing things. On the basis of these causes, all dharmas of the world arise; all dharmas arise from existent seeds, not from nonexistent seeds. This is to regard both the seeds that produce and the dharmas that are produced as truly existent. To think in this way is, in fact, to hold that the world is without cause.

Why is this said? If all dharmas are produced through truly existent causes and conditions, then from where was that first truly existent cause itself produced? If it too arose from "existence," then there could never be a first cause for the arising of dharmas. Thus, this is actually a theory of causelessness—the assertion that "the world is without cause."

Here, regarding "the world is without cause," Tan Xiyong's translation of the Laṅkāvatāra offers a different interpretation, holding that it should read "the world has cause": "In the old translations this sentence is invariably rendered as 'the view of no cause,' which does not accord with the Sanskrit original. In Sanskrit, this sentence is lokasya ca hetVastiVadibhavati, and should be rendered 'the view of cause.' According to the meaning of the passage, only 'the view of cause' is appropriate."

(Concerning the origin of Tan Xiyong's version: although the language of the Laṅkāvatāra is ancient, abstruse, and difficult to read, records indicate that a Sanskrit original has nevertheless survived. Wikipedia states that the Sanskrit original of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra was accidentally discovered in Nepal by a British diplomat, and that in 1923 the Japanese scholar Nanjo Bunyu edited and published the Sanskrit text.

In 2005, Tan Xiyong based his New Translation of the Sanskrit Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra on the Sanskrit text edited and published by Nanjo Bunyu, also consulting the three extant Chinese translations and two Tibetan translations. This work therefore cites the differing translation in that version, in order to offer readers an additional line of inquiry.)

In short, whether the conclusion is that the world has causes or that it is without causes, this shows that the view of "the world's reliance on existence" is an erroneous view.

What is the world's reliance on nonexistence? It is first to accept greed, anger, and ignorance as existent, commit all kinds of evil karma, and then falsely reckon them nonexistent.

There is another view that is not like this: because one understands that the inherent nature of all dharmas neither arises nor ceases and is serenely and ever quiescent, there is nothing that can be defiled. This is called not grasping at existence. Nor does one separately establish a "nothing whatsoever"; this is called not grasping at nonexistence. Buddhas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas do not take the inherent nature of greed, anger, and ignorance as either existent or nonexistent in this way.

[“Mahāmati, which of these is erroneous? Mahāmati said to the Buddha: ‘World-Honored One, it is when they first grasp at the nature of greed, anger, and ignorance and later no longer grasp at it.’ The Buddha told Mahāmati: ‘Excellent, excellent. You understand it thus. Mahāmati, it is not only those who hold the nature of greed, anger, and ignorance to be without nature who are mistaken; śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and Buddhas may also be mistaken.’]

The Buddha asked Mahāmati: Then, between “the world’s reliance on nonexistence” and “not grasping at having a nature,” which view is erroneous?

Mahāmati said: The former is erroneous: after first accepting greed, anger, and ignorance and committing evil karma, one then believes that greed, anger, and ignorance do not exist.

“Mahāmati, it is not only those who hold the nature of greed, anger, and ignorance to be without nature who are mistaken; śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and Buddhas may also be mistaken”—this erroneous view that holds to “nonexistence” in fact has two forms: “It is not only those who hold the nature of greed, anger, and ignorance to be without nature who are mistaken; [after holding greed, anger, and ignorance to have nature, they make] śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and Buddhas [without nature], and this too is mistaken.”

The meaning is this: the Buddha says, yes. To first take greed, anger, and ignorance as existent, indulge in creating karma and undergo retribution, and then reckon them nonexistent—this view is erroneous and undermines worldly cause and effect. Moreover, there is another erroneous view relying on nonexistence: it holds greed, anger, and ignorance to be truly existent, and sentient beings to be truly defiled by them; yet it maintains that śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and Buddhas can, through cultivation, ultimately eliminate the defilement of greed, anger, and ignorance. This view too is erroneous, and it undermines supramundane cause and effect.

In the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch, Shenxiu composed this verse: “The body is like a bodhi tree; the mind is like a bright mirror stand. At all times diligently wipe it clean; do not let it be stained by dust.” This is the view that greed, anger, and ignorance truly exist and must be wiped away in order to attain the pure fruition of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom. Indeed, when the Fifth Patriarch saw it, he said, “Shenxiu has entered the gate but has not yet attained it; he has not seen his true nature.”

[“Why is this so? Because inner and outer cannot be obtained, and because the nature of afflictions is neither different nor not different. Mahāmati, greed, anger, and ignorance, whether inner or outer, cannot be obtained. The nature of greed, anger, and ignorance has no body and cannot be grasped. Thus Buddhas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas are not those who destroy them. Buddhas, śrāvakas, and

pratyekabuddhas are liberated in their own nature, because bondage and the cause of bondage are without nature. Mahāmati, if there were bondage, there would have to be one who is bound, for that would be the cause of bondage. Mahāmati, to speak of destruction in this way is called the characteristic of nonexistence.”]

Why is it said that to regard greed, anger, and ignorance as truly existent and capable of being eliminated damages the Buddhadharma? Because all inner faculties and external objects are utterly unobtainable. “Because the nature of afflictions is neither different nor not different” means that the nature of afflictions is neither existent nor nonexistent.

Mahāmati, the afflictions of greed, anger, and ignorance—the inner experiencer and the externally encountered defiling objects—are all utterly unobtainable. Moreover, greed, anger, and ignorance themselves have no actual inherent nature and truly cannot be grasped. This is what is meant by their “nature having no body” and by their being “ungraspable.” Since there is originally nothing to grasp, how could there be anything to destroy? Thus cultivation does not mean that Buddhas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas destroy greed, anger, and ignorance.

“Buddhas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas are liberated in their own nature, because bondage and the cause of bondage are without nature. Mahāmati, if there were bondage, there would have to be one who is bound, for that would be the cause of bondage.”

“Mahāmati, to speak of destruction in this way is called the characteristic of nonexistence”—Buddhas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas attain fruition because liberation is inherently complete in their own nature; because there is truly neither that which binds nor that which is bound, they thoroughly realize that they have fundamentally never been bound.

This does not mean that practitioners separately produce precepts, samādhi, and wisdom in order to eliminate greed, anger, and ignorance, or separately establish a liberation in order to eliminate bondage. Mahāmati, if greed, anger, and ignorance could bind sentient beings, then there would necessarily have to be sentient beings capable of receiving that bondage; only then would there be a real cause for being bound. Yet sentient beings are originally empty—where could there be anyone bound by greed, anger, and ignorance? Mahāmati, to realize fully in this way that greed, anger, and ignorance, and even precepts, samādhi, and wisdom, are empty in their very being—this alone is the Mahāyāna view of no characteristics.

Therefore, when Huineng saw the verse presented by Shenxiu, he immediately responded with this verse: “Bodhi originally has no tree, nor is the bright mirror a stand. Originally there is not a single thing—where could dust alight?” That is, afflictions have no inherent nature; they have never arisen, nor have they ever been

undergone. What, then, is there to remove? This is true removal. What all the sages of old have removed is just this.

["Mahāmati, for this reason I say that it is better to hold a view of self as solid as Mount Sumeru than to give rise to the empty view of the arrogant conceit of nonexistence. Mahāmati, those with the arrogant conceit of nonexistence are called destroyers: they fall into expectations based on views of particular and general characteristics, and do not know the manifestations of their own mind. They see external things as impermanent, perishing successively from moment to moment; they see the continuing stream of the aggregates, realms, and sense-fields changing and passing away, and abandon conceptual discriminations based on verbal signs. Such persons are called destroyers."]

"They fall into expectations based on views of particular and general characteristics." "Particular characteristics" are the individual forms and attributes of a dharma that it does not share with other dharmas. In contrast, "general characteristics" are features common to dharmas that are not confined to their individual characteristics. To "fall into expectations based on views of particular and general characteristics" is to become caught in discriminating the differences and similarities among dharmas, without being able to penetrate them. Simply put, it is to fall into deluded discriminations.

Mahāmati, therefore I say that it is better to hold a view of existence as firm as Mount Sumeru than to cling to the stubbornly empty and erroneous view of the arrogant conceit of annihilationist nonexistence. Mahāmati, those who hold this erroneous view of the arrogant conceit of annihilationist nonexistence fall into deluded discriminations and do not know that everything is manifested by their own mind.

"They see external things as impermanent, perishing successively from moment to moment; they see the continuing stream of the aggregates, realms, and sense-fields changing and passing away, and abandon conceptual discriminations based on verbal signs. Such persons are called destroyers." That is, they see only that dharmas are impermanent and changing, perishing from moment to moment. They see all phenomena—the five aggregates, eighteen realms, and six sense-fields—as ceaselessly changing and perishing. Thus, they believe that there is even less need to speak of or establish such theories as the path of liberation and verbal expression. This is the stubbornly empty view of arrogant conceit.

Because they even regard liberation as nonexistent and impermanent, they give rise, from annihilationist nonexistence, to the view that there is no Buddha and no Dharma. Thus, this is the erroneous, stubbornly empty view of the arrogant conceit of nonexistence.

It is like a vessel for holding water: if it is filled with the water called “nonexistence,” it can hold nothing else. How could it then be a vessel of Dharma? Even entering the Buddha’s path of practice becomes difficult. By contrast, those attached to existence, because their fetters are so firm, may instead regard the raft of the Buddhadharma as a lifesaving straw, thereby arousing a deeply earnest resolve to practice and realize.

Therefore, before his passing, Layman Pang Yun offered only this counsel: “May you empty all that is possessed; take care not to make real what is not.” Of course, the process of practice and realization must necessarily be as described in the preceding passage: at first one is deluded and thinks there are fetters, so one seeks liberation. But true liberation means that one has never been bound in the first place—so what is there to call liberation? This is the true liberation of the Buddhadharma.

In summary, in this section the Buddha refutes two erroneous worldly views: reliance on existence and reliance on nonexistence. He particularly refutes the erroneous view that relies on nonexistence. One form of such reliance is reckless conduct that denies cause and effect, thereby destroying worldly dharmas. The other kind of “nonexistence” is even worse: it holds that everything returns to annihilation, thereby destroying the Buddhadharma and the supramundane path of liberation. In truth, the Buddhadharma transcends both views of existence and nonexistence. The Buddha next explains this again in verse:

Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:

Existence and nonexistence are the two extremes, extending even to the realm of mind. When that realm is thoroughly purified, the equal mind is quiescent.

One should abandon both extremes of existence and nonexistence. Only after everything has been relinquished is there quiescence and equality.

[“Not grasping the nature of objects does not mean that there is nothing at all. All existent things are thusness, like the realm of sages.”]

Yet not grasping objects does not mean a dead emptiness in which nothing whatsoever exists. At the place where not a single dharma arises, the myriad things stand forth in profusion: this is precisely that all things are thusness.

[“Without a seed, there is arising; having arisen, there is again cessation. Conditioned existence is not existence. Those who do not abide in my teaching are neither non-Buddhists nor Buddhas, neither self nor other.”]

Because there is no inherent existence, the myriad dharmas appear; all dharmas arise and then cease again. These dharmas produced by causes and conditions have illusory existence but are actually nonexistent. Not abiding in either existence or

nonexistence alone is the Buddhadharma. Non-abiding means neither abiding in the extreme views of existence and nonexistence held by non-Buddhists nor retaining any view of Buddha in which to abide. “Neither non-Buddhist nor Buddha”—this is true Buddha-wisdom.

[“What is brought forth through the gathering of causes and conditions—how can it be said to be nonexistent? Who gathers the causes and conditions into existence, yet again declares them nonexistent?”]

Everything arises through the coming together of causes and conditions; how can it be called nonexistent? Yet who has brought these causes and conditions together? There is no independent subject, and so it is also said to be nonexistent.

[“Erroneous views discuss arising and ceasing; deluded discrimination imputes existence and nonexistence.”]

Those with the deluded discriminations of erroneous non-Buddhist views see the appearances of arising and ceasing in the world and mistakenly impute that the inherent nature of dharmas is truly existent or truly nonexistent.

[“If one knows that nothing arises, then nothing ceases. Contemplating this, all is empty and quiescent; both existence and nonexistence are abandoned.”]

One should understand that nothing originally arises, much less ceases. This limpid emptiness and quiescence of neither arising nor ceasing is free from the two extremes of existence and nonexistence.

Summary of This Section:

Key terms in this section: “worldly reliance on existence,” “worldly reliance on nonexistence,” “not taking the nature of greed, anger, and ignorance as existent or nonexistent,” and “free from both existence and nonexistence.” Erroneous worldly views mistakenly impute that the inherent nature of dharmas relies either on existence or on nonexistence. The view relying on nonexistence is the most harmful: it falls into the stubborn emptiness of nonexistence and thereby destroys both worldly and supramundane dharmas.

In truth, dharmas undergo successive transformations; their illusory arising and ceasing merely appear through the coming together of causes and conditions. Their inherent nature is neither existent nor nonexistent, neither arising nor ceasing, limpidly and ever quiescent. Therefore, the awakened do not grasp existence or nonexistence, but are free from both. To speak of existence is precisely to speak of quiescent equality; to speak of nonexistence is precisely to speak of the profusion of all appearances.

24. Discourse on the Tenet and Purport

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, I pray that you will explain for me and for all bodhisattvas the characteristics of realization and exposition. If we are skilled in distinguishing the characteristics of realization and exposition, then, having understood them, I and all bodhisattvas will swiftly attain anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi and will not follow the notions of the mind or the various māras and non-Buddhist paths.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I shall explain it for you.” Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “Yes, World-Honored One, I accept your instruction.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “All śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas have two kinds of penetration: realization and exposition.”]

The preceding section refuted the extreme views of existence and nonexistence. Once existence and nonexistence have been set aside, what exactly is the noble wisdom of self-realization? This is “realization.” As explained among the previous 108 responses, realization is the realm of noble wisdom directly realized by practitioners who have left behind all sorts of deluded thoughts, transcended all consciousness, and departed from dualistic views.

Here Mahāmati asks the Buddha to explain realization in detail, so that he may swiftly proceed toward bodhi. In answering, the Buddha not only explains realization but further discusses exposition. This is because realization cannot be discussed apart from exposition. The Buddha Dharma is wisdom: originally everything is already complete, and originally not a single thing can be obtained. Yet sentient beings take the false for the real and engage in deluded discrimination. To enable practitioners to enter realization, the Buddha adapts to sentient beings’ minds and employs skillful means of exposition, like using a finger to point at the moon, or yellow leaves to stop a child from crying. This is exposition.

Yet although realization does not dispense with exposition, foolish people often become attached to the appearances of words and teachings as truly existent. Some even concern themselves only with studying doctrinal terms as scholarship and do not pursue direct realization. Then the teachings that lead to bodhi instead become poison. Thus, the Buddha here again contrasts exposition with realization, showing that the meaning of realization is free from all provisional appearances of words. He encourages everyone not to cling, in the course of practice and realization, to the deluded appearances of words and letters. Only then can they directly realize the meaning of realization.

[Mahāmati, realization means relying on the characteristics of one’s own attainment and further advancement; departing from the deluded thoughts of words and letters; entering the undefiled realm and the characteristics of the ground of self-

realization; departing from all false notions; subduing all non-Buddhist paths and māras; and, through self-realization, entering the radiant effulgence. This is called the characteristic of realization.]

“Relying on the characteristics of one’s own attainment and further advancement”: “one’s own attainment” has already been explained. The Buddha Dharma is inherently complete, and thus it must ultimately be directly realized before it can be attained; this is “one’s own attainment.” “Further advancement” refers to the bodhisattva’s supreme advancement precisely where there is nowhere further to advance; therefore, it is the characteristic of exceptional advancement.

“Entering the undefiled realm and the characteristics of the ground of self-realization”: one enters the undefiled realm and reaches the characteristics of the noble wisdom of self-realization inherently possessed by one’s own mind.

“Departing from all false notions”: “notions” refers to perceptual deluded thoughts.

“Through self-realization, entering the radiant effulgence”: relying on the noble wisdom of self-realization, one reveals the luminosity of the mind-ground.

Mahāmati, realization means directly realizing the noble wisdom of self-realization, which is inherently complete. It is wisdom without a teacher, naturally bursting forth after all deluded thoughts of words and letters have been eliminated. When one is free of all inverted dreams and delusions, all non-Buddhist paths and evil māras naturally disperse. Only the radiance of noble wisdom of self-realization shines clearly and alone. This is realization—what we commonly call realization of the essence.

At this point, not a single dharma can be admitted: deluded thoughts are not established, and even wisdom and dharmas do not remain. Yet this is not annihilation or dead water. At precisely this time, luminosity shines alone, wondrous functioning is inexhaustible, and exposition can be brought forth.

[What is the characteristic of exposition? It is expounding the various teachings of the nine divisions, free from such appearances as difference and nondifference, existence and nonexistence; adapting to sentient beings by skillful means and teaching the Dharma as appropriate, enabling them to be liberated. This is called the characteristic of exposition. Mahāmati, you and the other bodhisattvas should study and cultivate this.]

“The various teachings of the nine divisions” refers to the nine divisions of the scriptures, also called the “ninefold teaching.” They are generally divided into the Mahāyāna nine divisions and the Hīnayāna nine divisions. The Mahāyāna nine divisions are the twelve divisions of the scriptures minus the three divisions of

causes and conditions, parables, and discussions. Here, the phrase represents all teachings spoken by the Buddha.

What is exposition? The various teachings expounded by the Buddha are all free from the appearances of sameness and difference, existence and nonexistence. To enable sentient beings to depart from these illusory appearances and awaken to liberation, the Tathāgata also makes skillful use of various forms acceptable to sentient beings in teaching the Dharma. All these are provisional means established to break sentient beings' every deluded attachment and lead them into the noble wisdom of self-realization. This is exposition, what we commonly call putting it into use. Mahāmati, you should cultivate realization and exposition in this way.

This explains that the Tathāgata's teachings, though empty space has no fixed form, can take square or round forms according to the vessel and transform into the three vehicles according to capacities. To attain this expository penetration of the teachings, one should first attain penetration of realization.

One who penetrates the essential meaning establishes not a single dharma, yet does not discard a single dharma. This is why the Buddha's teachings are so lively and varied: at times they are explicitly spoken, at times secretly spoken in mantras, and at times not spoken at all. Even blows and shouts, thunderous movement, speech and silence, stillness and activity—all serve to free sentient beings from fetters and locks and lead them to the shore of liberation. Volume Nine of the Nirvāṇa Sūtra says: "It is like someone who smears a great drum with a mixture of poisonous medicines and strikes it among a great crowd so that it sounds. Even those who have no intention of hearing it will die upon hearing it." This vividly explains the power of the Tathāgata's teaching of exposition.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]

The characteristics of realization and exposition: / One's own attainment and the teachings. / See well and distinguish well; / Do not follow the various notions.

This verse praises the characteristics of the two penetrations. Realization is the Dharma of one's own attainment; it is the essential meaning of the Buddha Dharma, free from language and deluded thought, inherently present in one's own nature, and attainable only through direct realization. Exposition, on the other hand, is skillful means and an instrument of teaching. The Buddha tells Mahāmati to distinguish them well and not cling to the deluded thoughts of language and letters, abandoning the ocean to grasp at floating foam.

In ancient times there was a Chan koan concerning Chan Master Shenzan and his ordination teacher. Chan Master Shenzan left his teacher to travel and seek

instruction. Later, he awakened upon meeting Chan Master Baizhang and then returned to his original teacher. His teacher asked, “While you were away from me, what work did you accomplish?” He replied, “I accomplished no work at all.”

—His teacher had not yet relinquished thoughts of gain and loss. Hearing Shenzan say that he had gained nothing from his travels, he concluded that his disciple had not applied himself diligently in study and practice, and so assigned Shenzan menial duties. One day, as the teacher was reading a scripture by the window, a bee struck against the window paper, seeking a way out. Seeing this, Shenzan said, “The world is so vast, yet you refuse to leave; how many donkey-years will you spend boring through that old paper?” He then said, “You refuse to leave the gate of emptiness, and foolishly strike against the window. For a hundred years you bore through old paper—when will you ever get out?”

—Seeing his teacher reading scriptures all day yet so utterly failing to understand their meaning, Shenzan could not help sighing, “The world is so vast, yet you refuse to leave!” The very meaning of realization is plainly before your eyes—how immediate and vast it is! Why, then, do you stubbornly cling to the deluded thoughts of words and refuse to leave them? “How many donkey-years will you spend boring through that old paper?” Though one has entered the Buddha’s gate for many years, one stubbornly clings to verbal theories and refuses to cultivate on the ground of one’s own mind in accordance with the teachings. If this is so, then even the Buddhist scriptures become nothing more than stale wastepaper. Study in this way until donkey-years pass, and one still cannot get out.

Hearing this, his teacher set aside the scripture and asked, “Whom did you meet in your travels? Before and after, I have noticed that your speech has become unusual.” Shenzan replied, “This disciple received from Venerable Baizhang an indication of a place of rest. I now wish only to repay your compassionate kindness.” The original teacher thereupon informed the assembly, prepared a vegetarian meal, and invited him to teach the Dharma. Shenzan then ascended the seat and said: “The numinous light shines alone, far transcending faculties and objects. The essence reveals true permanence and is not bound by words. The nature of mind is unstained and originally complete. Merely depart from deluded conditions, and you are a tathatā Buddha.” Upon hearing these words, his original teacher awakened and said, “Who would have expected that, in my old age, I would hear this ultimate matter!”

Therefore, the essential point of Buddhist practice and realization lies solely in realization. If one does not comprehend its essential meaning, one may wear out the scriptures, yet ordinary beings and sages will still remain worlds apart. Conversely, if one thoroughly understands the very meaning of realization, then there is neither penetration nor nonpenetration: the mind is unobstructed.

Thereafter, when teaching the Dharma, one will naturally prescribe medicine according to the illness, directly strike at the vital point of students' doubts, and remain perfectly unobstructed.

Just as the words Chan Master Shenzan spoke to his original teacher differ in wording from the Laṅkāvatāra, yet this passage—"The numinous light shines alone, far transcending faculties and objects. The essence reveals true permanence and is not bound by words. The nature of mind is unstained and originally complete. Merely depart from deluded conditions, and you are a tathatā Buddha."—secretly accords exactly with the essential meaning of the Laṅkāvatāra.

[There is no real self-nature; / It is like the deluded thoughts of foolish people. / How do deluded thoughts arise? / Non-self-nature is liberation.]

This means that none of the dharmas has any real self-nature; all so-called dharmas are merely deluded views arising in the minds of foolish people. Why do foolish people give rise to deluded thoughts? They suppose that greed, anger, and ignorance truly exist to be undergone, that greed, anger, and ignorance truly exist and can be extinguished, and then establish an annihilating nothingness in which nothing at all exists. Why do foolish people regard this as liberation?

[They observe all conditioned dharmas / As arising, ceasing, and continuing alike; / They strengthen the two views, / Inverted and unaware. / They take one side as ultimate truth / And sinlessness as nirvāṇa. / Observe worldly deluded thoughts / As like illusions, dreams, and banana plants.]

For in their view, all dharmas truly possess the continuity of arising and ceasing. Thus they sink into the erroneous views of the two extremes, caught in inverted deluded thoughts without knowing it. In fact, both extremes of existence and nonexistence are false; ultimate truth is not like this. The one ultimate truth is the quiescent cessation of nirvāṇa. Originally there is no karmic offense—so what is there to extinguish? When there is no offense to extinguish, this is true extinction of offenses.

It is not that there are first karmic offenses and then their extinction into nothingness, which would constitute nirvāṇa. The Tathāgata's right wisdom observes that all worldly dharmas are no more than deluded discriminations: as illusory and unreal as magical transformations and dream-events, and as fragile and insubstantial as banana plants.

[Though greed, anger, and ignorance exist, / In truth there is no person. / From attachment arise the aggregates; / All existences are like illusions and dreams.]

Even if the deluded appearances of greed, anger, and ignorance arise in many forms, on close examination there is no subject within them that acts or undergoes their effects. Whom, then, can greed, anger, and ignorance harm? “From attachment arise the aggregates”: the combination of aggregates arising from attachment and desire represents all conditioned dharmas through the phenomena of a person’s arising from feeling through old age and death. That is, all conditioned dharmas that you see are not truly existent but only illusorily existent. Sentient beings misunderstand them, become attached, grasp and reject, and therefore take the false for the real.

This verse first explains realization and exposition, then refutes the fundamental error of foolish people—the extreme views of existence and nonexistence—and further guides everyone to depart from the deluded thoughts of erroneous views concerning arising and ceasing. Departing from inverted deluded thoughts is the quiescent cessation of nirvāṇa.

Overview of This Dharma Gate:

The key terms of this Dharma gate are “penetration of the essential principle” and “penetration through exposition.” This Dharma gate uses penetration through exposition to reveal penetration of the essential principle, making clear that penetration of the essential principle does not lie in words and letters. Yet one who has penetrated the essential principle does not discard words and letters. Penetration through exposition belongs to the teaching; penetration of the essential principle must be directly realized. Therefore, before practitioners have thoroughly awakened to their original mind, they should understand that written and spoken words are merely expedient tools and must not be clung to. They should leave behind deluded thoughts that grasp at words and speech, and leave behind the erroneous views of annihilationism and eternalism. In this way, they can more readily proceed directly toward ultimate self-realized noble wisdom.

25. Deluded Discrimination

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, I only pray that you will explain the characteristics of unreal false discrimination. How does unreal false discrimination arise? What dharmas are called unreal false discrimination? With regard to what dharmas does unreal false discrimination occur?” The Buddha told Mahāmati: “Excellent, excellent! You are able to ask the Tathāgata about such a matter, bringing great benefit and great peace and happiness, out of compassion for all devas and human beings in the world. Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon it. I shall explain it for you.” Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “Excellent, World-Honored One. Yes, I respectfully receive your teaching.”]

The verse in the preceding section stated that extremist views arise because sentient beings give rise to false discrimination. In this section, Mahāmati further asks: What exactly are the characteristics of "unreal false discrimination"? He then poses three specific questions:

1. "How does unreal false discrimination arise?" Why does unreal false discrimination arise? This asks about the cause of its arising;

2. "What dharmas are called unreal false discrimination?" What dharmas constitute unreal false discrimination? This asks about the substance of false discrimination;

3. "With regard to what dharmas does unreal false discrimination occur?" Under what circumstances does unreal false discrimination arise? This asks what false discrimination depends upon for its arising—that is, its basis.

The World-Honored One answers each question in turn:

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: "False discrimination arises through attachment to various meanings and to various unreal discriminations. Mahāmati, attachment to grasping and what is grasped, failure to know the manifestations of one's own mind, and falling into views of existence and nonexistence cause heterodox views to increase. Through the habitual tendencies of false discrimination, attachment to the various external meanings, and the false-discriminating attachment of mind and mental factors, the notions of self and what belongs to self arise."]

"Various external meanings" refers to clinging to the real existence, outside the mind, of the various dharmas and meanings of form, sound, odor, taste, touch, and mental objects.

"Mind and mental factors" refers to the mind-king and its mental factors. The mind-king plays the principal role among mental dharmas and is elaborated as the eight consciousnesses. Mental factors include the fifty-one mental factors in the six categories of universal, particular-object, wholesome, afflictive, subsidiary-afflictive, and indeterminate factors; these are distinct functions, such as greed, anger, concentration, and wisdom, that arise in dependence on the mind-king. The Vimalakīrti Sūtra, fascicle 5, says: "He fully knows the minds and mental factors of sentient beings."

First, "False discrimination arises through attachment to various meanings and to various unreal discriminations": Sentient beings take the various sensory realms of the external world as real, while within they give rise to various unreal discriminating attachments to their own minds. False discrimination and deviant views therefore arise. This answers the first question: discriminating attachment is the cause of false discrimination's arising.

Second, “attachment to grasping and what is grasped, failure to know the manifestations of one’s own mind, and falling into views of existence and nonexistence cause heterodox views to increase”: What is unreal false discrimination? It is taking the grasper and the grasped, though false, to be real; clinging to and discriminating them; failing to know that they are all manifestations of one’s own false-discriminating mind; and thereby falling into the extremist views of existence and nonexistence. This then gives rise to continuing, successive discriminations that endlessly increase heterodox and deviant views. This answers the second question: the various extremist and deviant views arising from clinging and discrimination are unreal false discrimination, that is, the substance of false discrimination.

Third, “through the habitual tendencies of false discrimination, attachment to the various external meanings, and the false-discriminating attachment of mind and mental factors, the notions of self and what belongs to self arise”: Because of the beginningless habitual tendencies of false discrimination—that is, ignorance—one discriminates and clings to the various external illusory objects, believing that such dharmas truly exist outside the mind. Various discriminating sensations then arise, and with them self and what belongs to self. This answers the third question: ignorance is the basis of false discrimination and deviant views.

[Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, if false discrimination arises through attachment to various meanings and to various unreal discriminations; if attachment to grasping and what is grasped, failure to know the manifestations of one’s own mind, and falling into views of existence and nonexistence increase heterodox views; and if, through the habitual tendencies of false discrimination, attachment to various external meanings, and the false discrimination of mind and mental factors, attachment to self and what belongs to self arises—then, World-Honored One, the characteristics of the various external meanings fall into the characteristics of existence and nonexistence.”

“Apart from existence and nonexistence, apart from views of characteristics, the ultimate truth is likewise apart from the characteristics of measures, faculties, parts, analogies, and reasons. World-Honored One, why is it that, in one place, false discrimination arises through attachment to the various characteristics of unreal meanings, but false discrimination does not arise through attachment to the characteristics of the ultimate truth? Would this not mean, World-Honored One, that you are propounding a theory of false causes—saying that one arises and the other does not arise?”]

“The characteristics of the various external meanings fall into the characteristics of existence and nonexistence”: When one grasps the various external objects and discriminates falsely, one falls into the characteristics of existence and nonexistence.

“Apart from existence and nonexistence, apart from views of characteristics”: That is, apart from existence and nonexistence, and apart from views that posit determinate characteristics.

“Measures, faculties, parts, analogies, and reasons”: “Measures” refers to the sixth consciousness’s conjectural inference. “Faculties” refers to the direct sensory awareness of the first five consciousnesses. “Parts, analogies, and reasons” refer to the five-membered reasoning of Indian logic—thesis, reason, example, application, and conclusion. “Parts” refers to this five-membered reasoning; “analogies” to its examples; and “reasons” to its reasons. In substance, all these terms here refer to discriminating false thought and conceptual calculation.

The general meaning of this passage is that, after hearing the Buddha’s answer, Mahāmati first repeats the Buddha’s response concerning false discrimination and then asks: Why does false discrimination arise in this domain—that is, in the domain of unreal meanings—whereas it does not arise in the domain of ultimate truth? Its specific and coherent meaning is as follows:

Mahāmati says: As you have said, sentient beings perceive the various sensory realms outside and give rise within to various unreal discriminating attachments. They take mind and objects to be truly existent dharmas, and false discrimination consequently arises. False discrimination is taking the agent and the object of action, though false, as real; clinging to and discriminating them; failing to know that they are manifestations of one’s own mind’s direct awareness; and thereby falling into the deviant views of existence and nonexistence, annihilation and eternalism. Because of beginningless habitual tendencies of false discrimination, they discriminate and cling to the various external illusory objects, believing that dharmas truly exist outside the mind. Various discriminating sensations then arise, and with them self and what belongs to self.

Yet when you speak of ultimate truth, you say that ultimate truth is apart from existence and nonexistence, apart from such views of determinate characteristics, and far removed from all conjectural measurement, discrimination by the faculties, and determinations based on five-membered reasoning. This, you say, is ultimate truth.

“World-Honored One, why is it that, in one place, false discrimination arises through attachment to the various characteristics of unreal meanings, but false discrimination does not arise through attachment to the characteristics of the ultimate truth? Would this not mean, World-Honored One, that you are propounding a theory of false causes—saying that one arises and the other does not arise?” That is: World-Honored One, why, when criticizing the conventional dharmas of unreal

false discrimination, do you say that discriminating selection gives rise to false discrimination, whereas when you

speak elsewhere, in revealing the genuine ultimate truth, you also speak of being apart from characteristics? Is that not likewise discriminating selection? How then can it be the non-arising of false discrimination? By saying that one domain involves arising—the deviant views of conventional truth—and another non-arising—the noble wisdom of self-realization—are you not being one-sided? Would this not be equivalent to the heterodox theory of false causes?"

"Would this not" is a rhetorical question: "Would it not be so?" A "false cause," in the heterodox theory of false causes, is to falsely conceive some theory of the two extremes and then forcibly insist, "This is simply how it is!" Such specious argument is used to resolve the conflicts and contradictions in one's own position.

Mahāmati therefore asks whether the World-Honored One's teaching here also suffers from the same fault. This is the general meaning of Mahāmati's challenge.

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: "It is not that false discrimination arises in one place and does not arise in another. Why is this so? Because false discrimination concerning existence and nonexistence does not arise, and because one realizes that the externally manifested existent and nonexistent are manifestations of one's own mind, false discrimination does not arise. Mahāmati, I speak of other foolish people because their own minds have the characteristics of various false discriminations; with activities before them, attachment to the characteristics of the nature of various false discriminations arises."

"How may foolish people become free from attachment to views of self and what belongs to self, and free from the faults of the causal conditions of agent and action? By realizing the measure of their own false-discriminating minds, body and mind are transformed, and they ultimately and clearly understand the realm of the Tathāgata's self-realization at all stages. They are free from the false-discriminating views of things in the five dharmas and the three natures. For this reason, I say that false discrimination arises from attachment to various unreal meanings. When one knows the meaning as it truly is, one is liberated from the various false discriminations of one's own mind."]

"Free from the faults of the causal conditions of agent and action" means being free from the wholesome and unwholesome karmic causes and conditions of agent and action, and from the sufferings of birth and death. To be free from these is to be liberated from karmic causation and cyclic rebirth.

"Free from the false-discriminating views of things in the five dharmas and the three natures": The "five dharmas" are characteristics, names, discrimination, right

knowledge, and suchness; the “three natures” are the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment, the nature of dependence on others, and the nature of absolute reality and perfection. “Views” are the mind’s internal thoughts; “things” are externally manifested realms. To be free from false-discriminating views of the five dharmas and the three natures means to be inwardly unmoved by thoughts and outwardly unmoved by circumstances, relinquishing everything. Here, one abandons not only the view of conventional truth but also the view of ultimate truth. Only this is the true meaning of ultimate truth.

In answering, the Buddha responds to Mahāmati’s challenge from two perspectives: first, why false discrimination does not arise for an awakened one in the domain of ultimate truth; and second, why it arises for ordinary people in the domain of conventional truth. He further explains that one should possess right view and engage earnestly in practice and realization until one attains ultimate, thorough clarity. Only then is one truly free from all false discriminations and attachments. This is also the ultimate aim of this inquiry into the substance and characteristics of false discrimination. The specific explanation follows:

The Buddha tells Mahāmati: It is not that false discrimination arises in one place while not arising in another. Why is this so?

“Because false discrimination concerning existence and nonexistence does not arise, and because one realizes that the externally manifested existent and nonexistent are manifestations of one’s own mind, false discrimination does not arise”: In the realm of true principle, one is free from the extremist views of existence and nonexistence and directly realizes that the essential nature of all externally manifested dharmas is nonexistence, and that all are manifestations of one’s own mind. They are like flowers in a mirror and the moon reflected in water; is not trying to seize them futile? Because one possesses such ultimate right view,

one knows that every apparent arising is unreal and illusory. Thus, in the domain of ultimate truth, false discrimination does not arise. Rather, all cognition and wisdom seem to “arise” illusorily, yet in reality do not arise and have never arisen.

“Mahāmati, I speak of other foolish people because their own minds have the characteristics of various false discriminations; with activities before them, attachment to the characteristics of the nature of various false discriminations arises”: This further explains the “arising of false discrimination” among foolish people in conventional truth. Ordinary beings have habitual tendencies to posit the characteristics of false discrimination in their own minds; this is the driving force of habitual tendencies of ignorance. Therefore, upon seeing various external illusory realms, they give rise to various false-discriminating attachments, taking what is false for true and what is empty for real. Thus the view of ordinary beings sees

arising where, ultimately, there is no arising. This is precisely the opposite of the awakened one.

“How can ordinary people free themselves from the views that cling to self and what belongs to self, and from the errors of causes and conditions involving agent and action? By recognizing the measure of their own deluded mind, transforming body and mind, and ultimately comprehending the realm of self-realization attained by the Tathāgatas at all stages, they free themselves from deluded imaginings concerning the five dharmas, the self-natures, and phenomena.” So how can ordinary people rid themselves of erroneous knowledge and deluded views and realize true knowledge? This, too, is the purpose of this inquiry into deluded thought: if one is to free oneself

from erroneous views that cling to subject and object, leave behind the two opposing extremes, and become liberated from karmic causation and retribution, one must recognize that all is originally quiescent and extinct; whether deluded thoughts arise or do not arise is entirely an appearance of one’s own mind. Principle and phenomena, truth and conventionality—all must be relinquished. Then both body and mind are transformed, and one ultimately penetrates completely the realm of noble self-realizing wisdom attained by all Tathāgatas. Only then does one truly transcend all unreal deluded thoughts concerning the five dharmas and the three self-natures. This is truly: “Inwardly, do not turn with thoughts; outwardly, do not move with circumstances.”

In “transforming body and mind,” “mind” here refers to views, and “body” to conduct. “Transforming body and mind” means not only possessing right knowledge and views, but, more importantly, putting them into practice, until right knowledge and views are wholly transformed into one’s own inherent treasure. Eventually, even the slightest trace of knowledge and views vanishes completely. This is what is meant by “transforming body and mind and ultimately comprehending the realm of self-realization attained by the Tathāgatas at all stages.” Only in this way can one truly free oneself from all unreal deluded thoughts.

“For this reason, I say that deluded thoughts arise from clinging to various unreal meanings. By knowing meanings as they truly are, one gains liberation from the various deluded thoughts of one’s own mind.” Thus the Tathāgata says that deluded thought arises when one discriminates among various illusory and unreal dharmas, clings to them as truly existent, and thereby gives rise to all manner of erroneous knowledge and deluded views. Only by thoroughly realizing the true meaning of dharmas as they are can one be liberated from the various deluded thoughts and erroneous views manifested by one’s own mind.

In summary, the Buddha's answer to this challenge is that he does not say that deluded thoughts can arise in the domain of conventional truth but cannot arise in the domain of ultimate truth. Their arising or non-arising depends on whether one fully possesses right knowledge and views. Once one understands, arising itself is non-arising; this is the non-arising of deluded thought in the domain of the highest truth. Without understanding, one mistakes the false for the true, and deluded thoughts arise recklessly where, in reality, there is no arising. This is the arising of deluded thought in the conventional domain of ordinary people.

To truly possess right knowledge and views is to realize the mind and see one's true nature. This requires practice to arise and conceptual understanding to cease before one can ultimately realize completely the realm of the highest truth. The realm of the highest truth has nothing to do with deluded discrimination and does not involve the five dharmas or the three self-natures.

At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:

All causes and conditions— / from these the world arises. / Deluded thoughts cling to the four propositions; / they do not understand what I have penetrated.

The world does not arise from existence, / nor does it arise from nonexistence. / It does not arise from both existence and nonexistence, / nor from neither existence nor nonexistence.

All causes and conditions— / how can the foolish give rise to deluded thoughts? / It is neither existent nor nonexistent, / nor both existent and nonexistent.

Contemplate the world in this way, / and the mind is transformed, attaining selflessness. / All natures are unborn, / because they arise from conditions.

All that conditions produce / is not self-existent. / A result cannot produce a result, / for that entails the error of two results.

Because there is no error of two results, / no existent nature can be found.

Through all causes and manifold conditions, all dharmas in the world arise. Yet ordinary people mistakenly generate the four propositions of affirmation and negation and the like, and cannot penetrate the essential principle.

"The world does not arise from existence, nor does it arise from nonexistence. It does not arise from both existence and nonexistence, nor from neither existence nor nonexistence. All causes and conditions—how can the foolish give rise to deluded thoughts?" This refutes the erroneous view of non-Buddhists who cling to the four propositions as capable of producing things. The dharmas of the world do

not arise from existence, nonexistence, both existence and nonexistence, or neither existence nor nonexistence. They arise through the conjunction of all causes and manifold conditions. When causes and conditions combine, the appearance of arising manifests; when they do not combine, the appearance of cessation manifests. Why, then, do ordinary people arbitrarily generate deluded thoughts and cling to them?

“It is neither existent nor nonexistent, nor both existent and nonexistent. Contemplate the world in this way, and the mind is transformed, attaining selflessness.” Dharmas arising from conditions are neither truly existent nor truly nonexistent, yet neither are they apart from the manifest appearances of existence and nonexistence. If one can contemplate the world in this subtle way and thereby transform the mind, then the self is, at that very moment, selfless.

“All natures are unborn, because they arise from conditions. All that conditions produce is not self-existent.” All dharmas have never truly arisen; they merely manifest the illusory appearance of arising through the conjunction of manifold conditions. Likewise, all appearances of activity are not originally made by anyone; they merely manifest temporarily as appearances of activity through the conjunction of manifold conditions.

“A result cannot produce a result, for that entails the error of two results. Because there is no error of two results, no existent nature can be found.” Here, “result” may be understood as the fruition in the dharmas of causes and conditions. “Two results” means that a result produces a result. This passage says that one result cannot independently produce another result. If one result could independently produce a result, there would be no need for any other causes or conditions.

For example, a great tree has a seed as its cause, but it also requires timely air, water, and sunlight as conditions before it can grow into a great tree. If a seed could directly produce a great tree without air, sunlight, or water, this would be the “error of two results.”

That is to say, every appearance of fruition must arise only when causes and conditions are complete. Apart from causes and conditions, no fruition can be obtained. Likewise, this cause is itself the result of an earlier event, and it can produce a result only when preceding causes and conditions are complete. Thus, upon investigating each one in turn, no first cause or final result can be found. There are no actual events of cause, condition, and result. Hence all dharmas, including karmic causes, conditions, and retributions, are not truly existent and have no self-nature to be found.

This passage says that the dharmas of the world do not arise from existence or nonexistence. All dharmas arise illusorily through causes and conditions, yet have

never truly arisen. Since all dharmas originally have no real nature to be found, one cannot speak of their existence or nonexistence. Therefore, one should leave behind the deluded thoughts of the four propositions.

Contemplate all conditioned dharmas, / apart from the subject that apprehends and the object apprehended. / The measure of mind that is without mind— / this I call the measure of mind. / At the locus of measure lies self-nature; / both conditionality and self-nature are abandoned. / When nature is ultimately subtle and pure, / this is called the measure of mind.

“Conditionality and self-nature” refers to deluded thoughts of dependent arising and deluded thoughts of self-nature; see the sixteenth section for details.

When right wisdom contemplates conditioned dharmas, it is in essence free from both the consciousness that apprehends and the dharmas apprehended. Since there is neither subject nor object, there are originally no false discriminations and no noble wisdom of self-realization. Therefore, the measure of mind that is without mind is called the true measure of mind.

At the locus of the true measure of mind, both deluded thoughts of dependent arising and deluded thoughts of self-nature are absent. Mind and no-mind alike cannot be obtained. In this way one reaches ultimate subtle purity, which is the measure of mind of the tathāgatagarbha. “Purity” means that defilement has birth and death, while purity has no Buddhas; this is true purity. “Subtle” means the immediately present direct perception that is free of deluded discrimination. It cannot be reached by any conceptual thought, imagination, words and language, or artificially contrived inferential knowledge; therefore, it is subtle.

This means that one should not only leave behind the deluded thoughts of the four propositions, but also eliminate all apprehending subjects and apprehended objects, eliminate mind and eliminate no-mind. Even mind cannot be obtained. This is the measure of mind of the Tathāgata.

The self posited in conventional truth / has no real entity. / The aggregates that obscure the aggregates— / likewise have no entity. / There are four kinds of equality: / appearance, cause, nature, and arising; / third, self and selflessness; / fourth, cultivation and non-cultivation.

“The self of conventional truth” refers to attachment to self.

“The aggregates that obscure the aggregates”: the aggregates are the five aggregates; the second occurrence of “aggregate” means obscuring. “The aggregates that obscure the aggregates” refers to seeking to eliminate the five aggregates—that is, attachment to dharmas.

The self conventionally designated as the conjunction of the five aggregates is a provisionally established name and has no real entity. Moreover, the supramundane path of dharmas that seeks to obscure the five aggregates and escape suffering, emptiness, and impermanence is also a provisional expedient, like using an illusion to cultivate an illusion, and has no real entity. Thus both the self and dharmas are without self.

These two kinds of selflessness possess four kinds of equality. In "appearance, cause, nature, and arising," "arising" is the nature of fruition. Appearance and non-appearance are equal: this is the first equality. Every appearance necessarily has a cause, yet the natures of cause and fruition are originally unreal; thus cause and result are equal: this is the second equality. Results arise from causes, and when cause and result are complete, the "arising" of self occurs; self and selflessness are equal: this is the third equality. The process of directly realizing selflessness is cultivation, yet selflessness is originally present and is not something attained through cultivation; thus cultivation and non-cultivation are equal: this is the fourth equality.

This continues the preceding verse by explaining in detail the measure of mind of the Tathāgata's right wisdom: it is the complete realization of the twofold selflessness, together with the four equalities. That is, both person and dharmas are relinquished, and both cultivation and non-cultivation are relinquished. When one has relinquished everything that can be relinquished, this is the measure of mind of the Tathāgata.

As the habitual tendencies of deluded thoughts turn, / various minds arise. / Objects appear outwardly— / this is the conventional measure of mind.

Though outwardly manifest, they are not existent. / The mind sees them as various things / and establishes body and possessions— / this I call the measure of mind.

The measure of mind in conventional truth is otherwise. All is originally perfect and luminous, yet ordinary people mistakenly stir a thought and take luminosity as an object. From such habitual tendencies of ignorance, deluded thoughts proliferate in succession. Once the various deluded thoughts of consciousness are established, one sees various external objects as truly existent. This is the conventional measure of mind.

Yet all that appears is dreamlike and illusory, and in reality there is nothing at all. Because of the discriminating deluded mind, one sees various dharmas and external sensory objects as truly existent; these are called "possessions." One also sees the deluded consciousness that thinks through the inner faculties as truly existent; this is called "body." Therefore, one should possess right knowledge and views, knowing that all is manifested by one's own mind. Neither external objects nor internal

faculties is truly existent; they are utterly unobtainable. This is the true measure of mind.

Free from all views, / and free from the mind that conceives and the objects conceived, / there is neither attainment nor arising— / this I call the measure of mind.

Neither self-nature nor no self-nature: / self-nature and no self-nature are both relinquished. / This is called liberation of mind— / this I call the measure of mind.

Suchness and the limit of emptiness, / nirvāṇa and the dharma realm, / the various mind-born bodies— / these I call the measure of mind.

When one is free from all views, free from the mind that conceives and the objects conceived, then no dharma can arise and no dharma can be obtained. When emotional attachment is gone and discursive thought is empty in this way, this is the Tathāgata's true measure of mind. This explains how to realize the measure of mind of ultimate truth.

This direct perception of the true mind is neither existent nor nonexistent. It transcends the four propositions and is free from the hundred negations; all is relinquished, and not even the slightest speck is established. At precisely such a time, the mind is liberated. This is the true measure of mind. This explains the nature of the measure of mind of ultimate truth.

Yet this is not annihilation. Where not the slightest mote is established, all wondrous presence is precisely contained; when nirvāṇa is quiescent and extinct, it nevertheless encompasses the entire dharma realm; where all is still and unborn, the various mind-born bodies distinctly arise. This is the true mind-capacity of the Tathāgata's realm of self-realization. —Finally, it gives a comprehensive account of the wondrous, perfect characteristics and functions of the ultimate truth's mind-capacity.

Overview of This Teaching:

Key terms of this teaching: "unreal deluded thoughts" and "mind-capacity." Mahāmati first asks the Buddha what unreal deluded thoughts are. The Buddha replies that, because of the habitual tendencies of ignorance, one becomes attached to the sense faculties and their objects, giving rise to all manner of deluded thoughts and discriminations.

Mahāmati further asks: The ultimate truth also involves attachment and discrimination, so why is it that deluded thoughts do not arise in the realm of ultimate truth? The Buddha replies that the wise understand that all dharmas lack self-nature and are only manifestations of mind. Thus discrimination is itself not

discrimination, and the arising of deluded thoughts is itself non-arising. Therefore, to truly depart from deluded thoughts and erroneous views, one must thoroughly realize the realm of noble wisdom of self-realization, understand that all phenomena are only manifestations of mind, and discard everything. When one has discarded until there is nothing left to discard, one realizes that all things have never arisen, and that discarding itself is superfluous. This is the Tathāgata's true mind-capacity. This true mind-capacity is limpidly empty and quiescent, and therefore contains immeasurable wondrous presence.

26. Skilled in Language and Meaning

[At that time, the bodhisattva Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, as the World-Honored One has taught, bodhisattva mahāsattvas should be well versed in words and meanings. How is a bodhisattva well versed in words and meanings? What are words? What are meanings?" The Buddha told Mahāmati, "Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I shall explain it to you." Mahāmati addressed the Buddha, "Excellent, World-Honored One. Yes, I respectfully receive your instruction." The Buddha told Mahāmati, "What are words? They are the combination of imagined words and letters, relying on the throat, lips, tongue, teeth, gums, cheeks, and jaws; through the habitual tendencies of attachment to imagined self-and-other speech, words and sounds arise. This is called words."]

"Cheeks and jaws" refers to the flesh on both sides of the face.

The preceding section explained that one should not mistakenly take the various external meanings to be real. It also said, "Knowing meaning as it truly is, one is liberated from the mind's various deluded thoughts." Mahāmati therefore asks: How can one thoroughly comprehend the Tathāgata's words and meanings? For example, when the Buddha teaches the Dharma, why are bodhisattvas able to enter meaning through words? What, precisely, are words? What are meanings?

The Buddha first answers the question of words: What are words? Because of habitual tendencies of attachment from beginningless time, people take the linguistic and written instruments used for communication between self and others to be real. Taking this as the cause, and relying externally on such conditions as the throat, lips, tongue, teeth, gums, cheeks, and jaws, words and sounds arise through the conjunction of causes and conditions. These are worldly words.

["Mahāmati, what is meaning? To be free from all characteristics of deluded thought and of speech is called meaning. Mahāmati, with respect to such meaning, bodhisattva mahāsattvas, in solitary quiet places, develop the wisdom of hearing, reflection, and cultivation. Taking self-realization as their object, they proceed toward the city of nirvāṇa. Having transformed the body of habitual tendencies, they

enter the realm of self-realization and contemplate, between each stage and the next, the characteristics of superior progress in meaning. This is called bodhisattva mahāsattvas being well versed in meaning."]

What is meaning? To be free from all characteristics of speech and deluded thought is the meaning of ultimate truth. We often say, "The path of words and speech is cut off; the sphere of mental activity is extinguished." This is what it means. Because bodhisattvas comprehend this meaning of ultimate truth, they dwell alone in quiet places: first hearing and reflecting, then cultivating wisdom. They realize the right view that birth and death have never truly existed and that nirvāṇa is intrinsic from the outset. They then transform the habitual tendencies of body and mind, progressing continuously from stage to stage until complete fulfillment. This is bodhisattva mahāsattvas' thorough comprehension of true meaning.

["Furthermore, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas who are well versed in words and meanings contemplate words and meanings as neither different nor not different; they contemplate meanings and words in the same way. If words were different from meanings, one could not discern meaning through words and enter meaning by means of words, just as a lamp illumines colors."]

Mahāmati, bodhisattvas who thoroughly comprehend words and meanings know that meaning and words are neither one nor different, and thus do not fall into one-sidedness. If one considers words and meanings to be different, one will slight words and be unable to discern meaning through them. In fact, language is a tool for entering meaning. Just as colors cannot be seen without a lamp, learners cannot be guided to penetrate true meaning without language as a guide for communication.

["Furthermore, Mahāmati, regarding non-arising and non-ceasing, nirvāṇa inherent in one's own nature, the three vehicles and the one vehicle, mind, and intrinsic nature: if, dependent on words, one becomes attached to meanings, one falls into views of assertion and slander. Differing assertions give rise to differing deluded thoughts, which manifest in various illusory ways. It is like the various illusions upon which ordinary deluded beings form differing deluded thoughts; this is not the way of sages."]

The preceding passage says that language should not be abandoned merely because it is a skillful means for guiding beings. Here the Buddha further tells Mahāmati that one should not become attached to language either:

Mahāmati, all dharmas are non-arising and non-ceasing; nirvāṇa is inherent in one's own nature; there are the three vehicles and the one vehicle; gradual and sudden approaches are neither one nor different; and one's own mind inherently possesses the noble wisdom of self-realization. Although such profound meanings of the

Tathāgata's Dharma are expressed through words, attachment to written language, or even taking these meanings to have real existence, is an erroneous view and a fault. For true meaning is without any fixed meaning.

Therefore, if one takes words and meanings to have real existence, one falls into the "existence" view of assertion or the "nonexistence" view of slander. One arbitrarily establishes notions and gives rise to deluded, erroneous views. This is like generating all manner of discriminating thoughts about dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows. Such arbitrary deluded discrimination regarding these various dreamlike illusions is certainly not the conduct of sages.

In these passages, the Buddha explains what worldly words are and what the meaning of noble truth is. The meaning of noble truth is free from speech and deluded thought, yet it does not discard verbal or written expression.

Concerning how language and writing may indicate the true meaning of noble truth, Chan Master Linji once said: "In general, when expounding the doctrine of the school, a single utterance must contain the Three Profound Gates, and each Profound Gate must contain the Three Essentials. Within the meaning of each Essential are provisional and true, illumination and function."

"How do all of you understand this?" That is, those who propagate the teachings should know that a single utterance must contain the meaning of the Three Profound Gates and Three Essentials. Only then can they open their mouths to teach the Dharma. Otherwise, one blind person leads a crowd of blind people: the moment one speaks, one errs, harming both others and oneself.

What, then, is the meaning of the Three Profound Gates and Three Essentials? Later generations argued about this without end. By the time of Chan Master Fenyang Shanzhao, Master Fenyang spread his hands and said that the meanings of the Three Profound Gates and Three Essentials were truly difficult to distinguish. Ha! At that point, the Three Profound Gates and Three Essentials were finally made clear. Let us look at his original verse:

"The Three Profound Gates and Three Essentials are hard to distinguish; when one grasps the meaning and forgets words, the Way is easily approached. One utterance clearly encompasses the myriad forms; on the ninth day of the Double Ninth, the chrysanthemums are fresh." That is, it is difficult to penetrate the noble-truth meaning of the Three Profound Gates and Three Essentials within spoken words and phrases.

Yet it is also very easy. Cast aside all these discriminating calculations now; seize at once what is closest at hand, and the myriad forms are inherently present within a single utterance—how much more so the Three Profound Gates. But if, on hearing

this, you again select and cling to “non-discrimination” or “seizing at once,” then cast all of that aside and say something ordinary: Look—have the chrysanthemums on the ninth day of the Double Ninth not blossomed anew? At just this moment lies the meaning of Buddhadharma. What more is there to select and discriminate?

[At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:]

Those deluded thoughts of speech
Impose assertions upon all dharmas.
Because of those assertions,
At death one falls into the Naraka hells.

There is no self within the aggregates,
Nor are the aggregates themselves the self.
Yet it is not as those deluded thoughts suppose,
Nor is there simply no self.

All things possess a nature,
So ordinary deluded beings imagine.
If what they see truly existed,
All should see reality.

All dharmas are without self-nature;
Neither purity nor defilement exists.
Things are not real as they are seen,
Yet neither are they utterly nonexistent.]

“Naraka” is a Sanskrit transliteration; in translation, it means hell.

At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:

Foolish people give rise to discriminating, deluded thoughts about words, arbitrarily generate erroneous views and teachings, and mislead the multitude. They thereby bring about the karmic result of falling into hell after death.

Ordinary deluded beings regard the body formed by the conjunction of the five aggregates as the self. The awakened realize that there is truly no self within the aggregates. The Tathāgata’s Dharma body is free from all worldly appearances of the aggregates, realms, and sense-bases, yet this does not mean that nothing at all exists. This “no-self” is precisely “self.” Thus, although the Dharma body of noble truth cannot be sought within the aggregates, it cannot be made manifest apart from them. This refutes the view of a personal self.

Ordinary deluded beings further mistakenly believe that all dharmas truly possess self-nature. If this were so, there would be a real entity that sees and a real nature that is seen; then everyone should be able to penetrate and see the true nature. Yet in fact not everyone does so. Thus this eternalist view of "real existence" cannot be established; it is an unreal view.

The awakened do not hold such a view. They know that all dharmas truly lack self-nature and have never been defiled; even purity does not exist. Yet the markless true reality does not mean an annihilation in which nothing whatsoever exists. Therefore, all dharmas neither possess truly existing self-nature nor are they an annihilationist nothingness. This refutes the view of a dharma-self.

In sum, these verses refute ordinary people's deluded thoughts about language: first refuting the view of a personal self, then the view of a dharma-self, in order to guide people away from verbal discrimination and toward the ultimate meaning of noble truth.

Students of the scriptures should take warning here: if they merely study the words, names, and appearances in the scriptures, busily thinking and discriminating, yet do not understand meaning through words or put that meaning into their own cultivation and realization for direct realization, this is certainly not the conduct of practitioners. Still others merely follow intellectual understanding, flaunting their extensive learning and eloquence, until it develops into contention for fame and profit, thereby corrupting Buddhadharma.

The Compendium of the Five Lamps records the case of Chan Master Huike, the Second Patriarch, being killed: "He once expounded the unsurpassed Way beneath the mountain gate of Kuangji Monastery in Guancheng County, and his listeners gathered like a forest." At that time, a Dharma master named Bianhe was lecturing to the public on the Nirvāṇa Sūtra.

After teaching sūtras for many years, he not only failed to recognize that what Chan Master Huike taught was unsurpassed prajñā; because his own audience went to hear Huike teach, he instead became jealous and ultimately caused Chan Master Huike's untimely death. Such lecturers on sūtras and treatises may outwardly bear the appearance of Dharma teachers, but in fact they cut off others' Dharma-body wisdom-life and create grave demonic karma.

Therefore, true children of the Buddha should be like Mahāyāna bodhisattvas: they study the scriptures in order to "receive and uphold" them—that is, to receive them and put them into practice. The crucial point is practice: "With respect to such meaning, in solitary quiet places, develop the wisdom of hearing, reflection, and cultivation. Taking self-realization as their object, proceed toward the city of nirvāṇa. Having transformed the body of habitual tendencies, enter the realm of self-

realization and contemplate, between each stage and the next, the characteristics of superior progress in meaning." They should certainly not become entangled solely in words, names, and appearances, vainly counting the treasures of others.

["Furthermore, Mahāmati, I shall now explain the characteristics of wisdom and consciousness. If you and the other bodhisattvas can skillfully distinguish the characteristics of wisdom and consciousness, you will be able to penetrate them and swiftly attain anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi. Mahāmati, that wisdom is of three kinds: worldly, supramundane, and supra-supramundane. What is worldly wisdom? It is the attachment of all non-Buddhist adherents and ordinary beings to existence and nonexistence."]

["What is supramundane wisdom? It is that of all śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, who fall into attachment to the expectation of self-characteristics and common characteristics. What is supra-supramundane wisdom? It is that of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, who contemplate dharmas as without anything existent, see non-arising and non-ceasing, are free from the categories of existence and nonexistence, and, through self-realization, give rise to the Tathāgata stage of the selflessness of persons and dharmas."]

From the answer concerning words and meanings, the Buddha further draws out the key to distinguishing words and meanings: whether one relies on consciousness or wisdom. If one can skillfully distinguish wisdom from consciousness, one can penetrate their characteristics and swiftly realize true permanence:

Mahāmati, the characteristics of wisdom and consciousness are of three kinds: worldly, supramundane, and supra-supramundane.

1. Non-Buddhist adherents and ordinary beings who are attached to existence and nonexistence possess worldly consciousness;

2. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas become attached to the distinctions and similarities among dharmas. For example, they take the suffering, emptiness, and impermanence of the world to be real; they suppose that there is a separate supramundane dharma that can extinguish suffering and a separate destination through which one can escape, and they seek and cling to these. This is supramundane wisdom;

3. All Buddhas and bodhisattvas understand that all dharmas are devoid of anything and cannot be obtained; they also know that no dharma can be abandoned, and thus do not fall into annihilation. In this way, they are free from the two extreme views of existence and nonexistence; they thoroughly realize the twofold selflessness of persons and dharmas at the Tathāgata stage; and they thoroughly realize that the noble wisdom of self-realization is inherently complete and has

always been so in accordance with dharma. This is the supreme supramundane wisdom.

[Mahāmati, that which arises and ceases is consciousness; that which neither arises nor ceases is wisdom. Furthermore, falling into the characteristics of form and formlessness, and into the various causal characteristics of existence and nonexistence, is consciousness; transcending the characteristics of existence and nonexistence is wisdom. Furthermore, the characteristic of increase is consciousness; the characteristic of non-increase is wisdom.]

“The various causal characteristics of existence and nonexistence” means that non-Buddhists and adherents of the two vehicles attribute the causes of the characteristics of dharmas to either existence or nonexistence. In essence, this concerns whether dharmas, at their root, possess inherent nature or lack inherent nature.

Mahāmati, arising and ceasing are consciousness; neither arising nor ceasing is wisdom.

To cling to all characteristics as truly existent or truly nonexistent, and to attribute the arising of all dharmas characterized by existence or nonexistence to causes of existence or to causes of nonexistence, is consciousness. To transcend the characteristics of existence and nonexistence, and to transcend causes of existence and causes of nonexistence, is wisdom.

Furthermore, advancing and retreating, increasing and decreasing, are consciousness; neither retreating nor advancing, neither increasing nor decreasing, is wisdom.

These deluded consciousnesses are not merely the views of foolish ordinary people and non-Buddhists; students of the two vehicles also commonly hold such views. For example:

Regarding arising and ceasing, they believe that there are afflictions and delusions that can be extinguished, and bodhi and awakening that can arise;

Regarding existence and nonexistence, they believe there is defilement and delusion, and so seek purity and awakening;

Regarding increase, they want to advance and do not want to retreat. Thus, when the Sixth Patriarch Huineng heard Chan Master Wolun’s verse, “Bodhi grows day by day,” he said: “This verse has not realized the mind-ground. If one practices according to it, one merely adds further bonds.” He further offered a verse in rebuttal: “Huineng has no skills; he does not cut off the hundred thoughts. When encountering objects, thoughts continually arise—how could bodhi grow?”

The contemplative practice and safeguarding realization of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma are the same. The Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra says: “To give rise to the thought of wishing to strive diligently is delusion, not diligence. If the mind is free of delusion, diligence has no limit.” That is, at the very place where there is nothing to increase, strive diligently at all times.

The moment deluded thoughts of gain and loss or increase arise, one must swiftly sweep them away completely. “Safeguarding realization” and “increase” are merely provisional names for the dharmakāya in its original state.

Yet most people are deeply attached to their habitual tendencies. Eager for quick success and fearful of regression, they are always trying to manage how they should contemplate. They do not realize that this managing and these concerns are precisely arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence, and increase; they are exactly what departs from the original intent of the patriarchs’ instruction to contemplate and practice. The patriarchs’ expedient teaching of contemplation is meant precisely to illuminate and break through these things.

Therefore, to say to such people, “Do not contemplate any longer,” is to have them immediately cast off this managing. At this very moment, do not again fall into arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence, or increase. This is what is meant by, “If the mind is free of delusion, diligence has no limit.”

[Furthermore, there are three kinds of wisdom: knowing arising and ceasing, knowing the individual and common characteristics, and knowing neither arising nor ceasing. Furthermore, the characteristic of nonobstruction is the realm of wisdom; the various characteristics of obstruction are consciousness. Furthermore, the expedient characteristics produced by the conjunction of three factors are consciousness; the self-nature characteristic of no-thingness and no expedient means is wisdom. Furthermore, obtaining characteristics is consciousness; not obtaining characteristics is wisdom. Because the realm of noble wisdom attained by oneself neither goes out nor comes in, it is like the moon in water.]

“The conjunction of three factors”: among the twelve links of dependent origination, the sense faculty, object, and consciousness join together to produce contact. Here this represents the various expedient phenomena of the twelve links of dependent origination.

Furthermore, wisdom has three kinds: knowing arising and ceasing—this is all-knowing wisdom; knowing the common and distinct characteristics of dharmas—this is wisdom of the paths; and knowing neither arising nor ceasing—this is the most crucial wisdom of all aspects, which also comprehends and includes the first two kinds of wisdom.

The noble wisdom of self-realization has the functioning of these three kinds of wisdom. When sought, it is utterly unobtainable; when actively functioning, it can teach the Dharma according to the three capacities and the different kinds of beings. This is the all-round, unobstructed characteristic of complete penetration. The ancient Buddha Zhaozhou said, “This old monk uses a blade of grass as a sixteen-foot golden body, and uses a sixteen-foot golden body as a blade of grass.” Neither obstructs the other; they interpenetrate perfectly and without obstruction. This is the “realm of wisdom.”

Foolish ordinary people are not like this: they regard existence and nonexistence as contradictory. Adherents of the two vehicles consider the world’s suffering to be real, and believe that there are real dharmas through which one may escape and attain great bliss. Such views obstruct one another and have not reached thorough penetration. These various “characteristics of obstruction” are all the “realm of consciousness.”

Moreover, ordinary people and adherents of the two vehicles believe that dharmas conditioned by causes and conditions truly exist, as do the phenomenal events of karmic results conditioned by causes and conditions. This is “consciousness.” To know that the self-nature of dharmas has never arisen or ceased, does not arise dependently on conditions, and presents no expedient characteristics to be seen—this is “wisdom.”

Finally, to have characteristics that can be obtained or dharmas that can be realized is consciousness; to have no characteristics that can be obtained and no dharmas that can be realized is wisdom.

Then is the “realm of noble wisdom attained by oneself” an attainment or a non-attainment? It is like the moon in water: although the appearance of the moon is manifest, it is ultimately one substance with the water and cannot be grasped. So too with the realm of noble wisdom of self-realization. Although one must directly realize it in order to understand it fully, it is ultimately inherently complete. From the outset, there is neither a cycle of rebirth to leave nor a separate noble realm to enter.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:

Gathering karma is consciousness. Not gathering is wisdom. Observe all dharmas. Thoroughly comprehend their lack of anything. Attain the power of mastery. This is called wisdom. Being bound by realms is mind. Awakening to the arising of thoughts is wisdom. From the absence of anything and from the supreme, wisdom arises.]

“Gathering” means taking up; it refers to the six sense faculties giving rise to thoughts and grasping after the six sense objects.

“Collecting” means accumulating and assembling.

To regard the sense faculties as real, grasp after external objects, engage extensively in taking and gathering, thereby producing the characteristics of wholesome and unwholesome karma and bringing about karmic retribution in birth and death—this is consciousness. When faculties and objects are free from relative opposition and there is nothing to grasp, that is wisdom. True wisdom observes all dharmas and finds them ultimately devoid of anything. “Because nothing is attained,” one gains great freedom and liberation. As it is said, “Feeding a hundred billion Buddhas of the three times is not as good as feeding one who is without thought, without abiding, without cultivation, and without realization.” This is wisdom.

To take the various inner faculties and external objects as real, and to be trapped by them without being able to escape, is bondage. Bondage is consciousness. To awaken to the fact that all inner faculties and external objects are deluded thoughts and are ultimately unborn—this is wisdom. Originally there is no bondage; originally there is liberation.

The Tathāgata speaks of wisdom in reliance on consciousness. If there were no discriminating deluded consciousness, wisdom too could not be posited. Therefore, “the absence of anything” is the most ultimate meaning. All wisdom arises from this “absence of anything.”

[Mind, mentation, and consciousness, far removed from thought and ideation, attain the dharma free from thought. The Buddha’s children are not śrāvakas. The forbearance of tranquil supreme advancement, the Tathāgata’s pure wisdom, arises from the supreme meaning of goodness. All practices are entirely relinquished.]

“Forbearance” means patient acceptance: abiding in the meaning of dharma without wavering.

“The forbearance of tranquil supreme advancement”: “tranquil forbearance” is the forbearance of cessation. The Sūtra of the Benevolent Kings speaks of five kinds of forbearance: subduing forbearance, faith forbearance, compliant forbearance, forbearance of the unborn, and forbearance of cessation. The forbearance of cessation belongs only to those on the ten bhūmis, those of equal enlightenment, and Buddhas. Their afflictions have all been cut off; they are pure and unconditioned, profoundly still in cessation, and do not abide even in cessation. This is the forbearance of the supreme advancement of cessation.

To be free from the deluded thoughts of reflection, discrimination, and ideation, and free from the measurements of the eight consciousnesses, thereby attaining the inconceivable dharma—this is the mode of practice of the Buddha's children, not something śrāvakas can understand. To abide in the tranquil forbearance of dharma is the Tathāgata's pure wisdom. The Tathāgata's pure wisdom arises from the supreme ultimate meaning of goodness. In the realm of this supreme ultimate meaning, there is vast openness without good or evil. Once goodness itself does not remain, all the practices of ordinary beings and sages alike are entirely relinquished. This is the great practice of freedom.

[I have three kinds of wisdom. The noble ones disclose the true reality. In relation to their thoughts and reflections, they embrace all dispositions. The two vehicles do not accord with this. Wisdom is free from all things. They discriminate and cling to self-nature, and from the śrāvakas they arise. Transcending all measures of mind, the Tathāgata's wisdom is pure.]

This pure wisdom of the Tathāgata is the true measure disclosed by the noble wisdom of self-realization. It has three functions: knowing arising and ceasing, knowing common and distinct characteristics, and knowing neither arising nor ceasing. Ordinary people and others are bound by various deluded thoughts, unable to escape, and so sink into the bitter ocean of birth and death. The Tathāgata, however, can employ these three kinds of wisdom to teach the Dharma in accordance with sentient beings' capacities, embracing every kind of disposition so that each attains liberation.

Practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle cannot thoroughly comprehend the supreme supramundane wisdom that all things are devoid of anything, and therefore cannot accord with it. They discriminate and cling to the self-nature of dharmas, believing that there is truly a world from which one may depart; thus they become śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. The Tathāgata's wisdom is not so. The Tathāgata ultimately understands that self-nature neither arises nor ceases, and that there is originally neither exit nor entry. It far transcends all the measures of deluded thought. This is the Tathāgata's pure wisdom.

Summary of This Section:

The key terms of this section are "language," "meaning," "consciousness," and "wisdom." Language is conventionally shared speech formed through the conjunction of verbal delusion and causes and conditions; the meaning of the noble truth is free from verbal expression and deluded thought. Before entering nirvāṇa, the Buddha also instructed the assembly to follow the Four Reliances, one of which is to rely on meaning rather than words. Yet true meaning is no meaning. Therefore, in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, the Buddha goes further and relinquishes even meaning:

neither language nor meaning can be obtained. To cling to language or mistakenly regard meaning as truly existent is the deluded thought of foolish ordinary people, not the wisdom of sages.

The Buddha then further explains that discrimination and selection are consciousness, while nondiscriminating equality is wisdom. To rely on wisdom rather than consciousness is the Tathāgata's wholesome, supreme, and pure practice.

Maitreya Bodhisattva likewise praises the Tathāgata's pure wisdom in this verse: "Discrimination is consciousness; nondiscrimination is wisdom. Relying on consciousness is defilement; relying on wisdom is purity. Defilement entails birth and death; purity is without all Buddhas."

27. Deluded Attachment and Liberation

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, non-Buddhist paths hold nine theories of transformation. From their views of transformation arise birth and nonbirth. These are: transformation of form and location, transformation of appearance, transformation of causes, transformation of formation, transformation of views, transformation of nature, transformation in which conditions manifest distinctly, transformation in which what is produced manifests distinctly, and transformation of affairs. Mahāmati, these are called the nine views of transformation.]

The Buddha tells Mahāmati that non-Buddhist paths have nine theories of "transformation," by which they explain the development and change of all things in the world:

"Transformation of form and location"—all change is merely a transformation in shape and size, as when an aluminum can is crushed flat or an iron rod is bent into a ring.

"Transformation of appearance"—all changes in the dharmas are merely transformations of outward appearance. For example, what was once a vast sea is now a field of mulberry trees.

"Transformation of causes"—the changes of all things occur because their fundamental generating causes differ. For example, melons grow from melon seeds and beans from bean seeds. The fruits produced differ because the fundamental causes—the seeds planted—differ; thus it is determined that all things undergo their respective changes and transformations.

"Transformation of formation"—in other versions of the Laṅkāvatāra, this is also called "corresponding transformation" or "transformation of principle." It means that

the myriad dharmas operate and change according to fixed laws and principles. This is what the common saying means by “Though changes may be myriad, they never depart from their source”: all transformations correspond to inherent laws and principles and occur in accordance with them; hence this is called transformation of formation.

For example, because of the law of gravitation, the moon exerts an attraction on the earth’s seawater; thus, as the earth rotates, its seawater rises and falls in tides, changing from morning to evening.

“Transformation of views”—the belief that the mental world can govern transformations in the material world. For example, one may use thought to bend a spoon, or enter a deeply withered and quiescent meditative absorption and then believe that the world no longer exists.

“Transformation of nature”—the belief that the fundamental cause of changes in all dharmas lies in changes in their inherent nature. For example, in nuclear fission, when uranium atoms within become helium atoms, vast amounts of energy are released outward, suddenly producing a violent explosion.

“Transformation in which conditions manifest distinctly”—“distinctly” means to appear or become evident. This means that the conditions which cause things to appear differ, and therefore all things each display different transformations. For example, water in a lake may appear as ice in a cold region, while in a hot region it appears clear and flowing throughout the year.

“Transformation in which what is produced manifests distinctly”—when the methods of fabrication change, the states manifested by the things produced also change. For example, the same piece of gold can be hammered and chiseled into a gold vessel, or melted by heat into liquid gold.

“Transformation of affairs”—the causes, conditions, and results of all worldly affairs that are produced are all subject to impermanent transformation. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “No one can step into the same river twice,” emphasizing that every affair is changing.

Because non-Buddhist paths do not understand that all phenomena are manifested by mind alone, they falsely conceive existence and nonexistence and give rise to various discriminations and attachments. Thus they develop nine theories of the transformation of things. Here, the Buddha first tells Mahāmati what these nine theories are; below, he refutes them in detail.

[All non-Buddhist paths, on account of this, give rise to theories of transformation involving the birth of existence and nonexistence. What is transformation of form

and location? It is the view that form and location differ. For example, when gold is transformed into various vessels, various forms and locations appear, but the nature of gold does not change. The transformation of all natures is likewise. Or some non-Buddhist paths give rise to such false imaginings … up to the false imagining of transformation of affairs. These are neither the same nor different, but are false imaginings.]

Mahāmati, all non-Buddhist paths mistakenly believe that the myriad dharmas are either truly existent or truly nonexistent; consequently, they produce the nine theories of transformation. What is the theory of transformation of form and location? It is the false imagining of transformation arising from attachment to changes in the forms of things.

For example, gold can be made into various objects. They believe that these objects, differing in form, are manifestations of gold, while gold's essential nature has not changed. From this they infer that all changes in things are like this: in all dharmas, the four great elements that produce them do not change; only the material dharmas and forms and locations that are produced undergo movement and change.

Yet all dharmas are neither one nor different, and no characteristics of arising and ceasing can be found in them. Still less are there transformation and nontransformation. The transformations perceived by non-Buddhist paths are nothing but discriminations falsely imagined by their own minds.

[Know that all transformations of nature are like this. When milk becomes curds, or fruit becomes wine, and so forth, these are false imaginings of transformation by non-Buddhist paths; there is in fact no transformation. Whether existent or nonexistent, nature and non-nature external to the manifestations of one's own mind—Mahāmati—arise from the habitual cultivation of false imaginings by ordinary deluded sentient beings. Mahāmati, no dharma either arises or ceases, just as one sees illusory forms arise in a dream.]

"Whether existent or nonexistent, nature and non-nature external to the manifestations of one's own mind"—these discriminating false imaginings of existence and nonexistence are all manifestations of one's own mind. External things do not truly exist; that is, outside mind there are no dharmas.

"No dharma either arises or ceases, just as one sees illusory forms arise in a dream"—the dharmas are fundamentally without arising or ceasing. Sentient beings falsely perceive them as arising or ceasing, just as they see illusory appearances in dreams.

Know that the transformations of all dharmas, such as making curds from milk or brewing wine from fruit, are transformations falsely imagined by non-Buddhist paths through their attachment to existence and nonexistence. In fact, not a single thing undergoes transformation. All dharmas are manifestations of one's own mind and have no inherent nature that can be found; thus neither transformation nor nontransformation exists. Mahāmati, these mistaken views of transformation arise because ordinary deluded sentient beings continually engage in false imagination and discrimination.

Mahāmati, originally, not a single dharma either arises or ceases. The phenomena of arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing seen by sentient beings are like the illusory appearances seen in dreams: though things appear to arise, they are not real.

[Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke in verse: Forms, locations, and times transform; the four great elements and the sense faculties, and the intermediate state gradually arise—all are false imaginings, not the insight of wisdom.]

Wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke in verse: the so-called transformations of all worldly dharmas—including the aggregation of the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind; the combination of the five aggregates; and the gradual arising of the intermediate state—are all discriminations of false imagination, not what wisdom perceives.

[The supreme teaching is dependent arising, not like their false imaginings. Yet the world's dependent arising is like a city of gandharvas.]

In truth, the transformations of all these dharmas are nothing more than the coming together of causes and conditions; in their very nature, they are empty. They are entirely unlike the various erroneous theories asserted by non-Buddhist paths. Non-Buddhist paths falsely cling to dharmas as truly existent and therefore also consider transformation and change to be truly existent, thereby forming numerous erroneous theories of transformation. In reality, worldly dharmas arising from conditions are like the illusory appearance of a mirage and are not truly existent.

[Then Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, may you explain for us the meaning of the continuity and liberation of all dharmas."

"If I and the bodhisattvas can clearly distinguish the characteristics of continuity and noncontinuity in all dharmas, we will understand the skillful means of all continuity, without falling into attachment to continuity through construing meaning according to what has been said. We will become adept in the characteristics of the continuity and noncontinuity of all dharmas; free ourselves from false imaginings based on speech and letters; travel throughout all Buddha-lands; assemble with innumerable

multitudes; attain mastery of spiritual powers; receive the seal of dhāraṇī; manifest various transformations; radiate illuminating awakened wisdom;"

"skillfully enter the ten inexhaustible phrases; undertake practices without contrivance; and, like the sun, moon, wish-fulfilling jewel, and four great elements, be free on every bodhisattva ground from the views of characteristics created by our own false imaginings. Seeing all dharmas as like illusions and dreams, we will enter the Buddha-ground and attain the Buddha-body. In all realms of sentient beings, we will teach the Dharma and guide them according to what is appropriate, causing them all to abide in all dharmas as like illusions and dreams; to be free from the false imaginings of the categories of existence and nonexistence, and of arising and ceasing, as well as from meanings of speech that differ from these; and to transform their bodies into increasingly sublime ones."]

"Mastery of spiritual powers" means freedom in the exercise of spiritual powers.

"The seal of dhāraṇī": dhāraṇī gathers all dharmas and retains immeasurable meanings; it is the Buddha's mind-seal.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva then said: "World-Honored One, I hope that you will explain to us the principle of the continuity of all dharmas, as well as how one may be liberated from continuity."

If the bodhisattvas and I can skillfully distinguish the characteristics of continuity and noncontinuity in all things, we can discern all continuity through skillful means and will not fall into the attachment to continuity described above. We will understand the characteristics of continuity and noncontinuity in all dharmas, become free from words, speech, and false discriminations, travel throughout all Buddha-lands, and assemble with innumerable multitudes.

We will attain mastery of spiritual powers and the seal of dhāraṇī; manifest various transformations; radiate light everywhere; and attain the supreme wisdom of self-awakening. We will skillfully carry out inexhaustible vows and practices and undertake the various skillful practices of noncontrivance. Like the sun and moon, which do not abide in space; the wish-fulfilling jewel, which manifests according to colors yet has no inherent nature; and the four great elements, which pervade without obstruction, we will be free, on every bodhisattva ground, from the views of characteristics and from the false imaginings of our own minds.

We will skillfully contemplate all dharmas as unreal and illusory, like dreams and shimmering heat; enter the Buddha-ground and attain the Buddha-body; and teach the Dharma to and guide sentient beings in all realms according to what is appropriate. We will lead sentient beings into true reality, enabling them to understand that all dharmas are like illusions and to abide without abiding. We will

cause them to be free from the erroneous views of the two extremes of existence and nonexistence, from false imaginings of arising and ceasing, and from words that differ from true reality, so that they may transform into the sublime body of the Tathāgata.

This is Mahāmati's request that the Buddha explain the true meaning of the various characteristics of continuity.

"Continuity" refers to the cyclical and unceasing sequence of cause and effect. According to the version by Tam Shek-wing, the original Sanskrit of the scripture is samdhyasamdhi. Its root, samdhi, has two meanings: one is "connection," and the other is "between light and darkness." From the former, the Northern Wei and Liu Song translations rendered it as "continuity"; from the latter, the Tang translation rendered it as "profoundly secret." The term in this scripture, however, is samdhya-samdhi, which may also be understood to mean "profoundly secret attachment."

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "Excellent, excellent. Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon it. I shall explain it for you." Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: "Yes, World-Honored One. I respectfully receive your instruction."]

The Buddha told Mahāmati: "The innumerable dharmas all involve the continuation of attachment based on meanings as spoken of: the continuation of attachment to appearances; the continuation of attachment to objects of conditioning; the continuation of attachment to existence and nonexistence of intrinsic nature; the continuation of deluded attachment to arising and non-arising; the continuation of deluded attachment to cessation and non-cessation; the continuation of deluded attachment to vehicles and non-vehicles; the continuation of deluded attachment to the conditioned and the unconditioned; the continuation of deluded attachment to the particular characteristics of each bhūmi; the continuation of uninterrupted deluded attachment to one's own thoughts; the continuation of deluded attachment, relied upon by non-Buddhists, to the categories of existence and nonexistence; and the continuation of uninterrupted deluded attachment to the three vehicles and the one vehicle."

"The continuation of attachment to appearances" refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to all appearances, including the appearances of the five aggregates and of noble wisdom.

"The continuation of attachment to objects of conditioning" refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to the things one takes as objects.

"The continuation of attachment to existence and nonexistence of intrinsic nature" refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to whether things exist or do not exist.

“The continuation of deluded attachment to arising and non-arising” refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to arising and non-arising.

“The continuation of deluded attachment to cessation and non-cessation” refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to cessation and non-cessation.

“The continuation of deluded attachment to vehicles and non-vehicles” refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to whether something is Buddhadharma or a non-Buddhist path.

“The continuation of deluded attachment to the conditioned and the unconditioned” refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to the conditioned and the unconditioned.

“The continuation of deluded attachment to the particular characteristics of each bhūmi” refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to the states of each bodhisattva bhūmi.

“The continuation of uninterrupted deluded attachment to one’s own thoughts” refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to the mind’s own deluded conceptualizations.

“The continuation of deluded attachment, relied upon by non-Buddhists, to the categories of existence and nonexistence” refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to the views of the two extremes of existence and nonexistence on which non-Buddhists rely.

“The continuation of uninterrupted deluded attachment to the three vehicles and the one vehicle” refers to uninterrupted discriminating attachment to whether Buddhadharma is the gradual teaching of the three vehicles or the sudden teaching of the one vehicle.

The Buddha told Mahāmati: “All worldly and supramundane phenomena, as you have said, display continuity because of deluded conceptual attachment. Such are the continuation of attachment to appearances, the continuation of attachment to objects of conditioning, the continuation of attachment to existence and nonexistence of intrinsic nature, and so forth.”

“Furthermore, Mahāmati, these and the rest arise from the continuity of the deluded thoughts of ordinary foolish beings. Because of this continuity, the deluded thoughts of ordinary foolish beings are like silkworms spinning cocoons: with the threads of deluded thought, they bind themselves and bind others, attaching to the continuing appearances of existence and nonexistence.”

Having explained the above eleven kinds of continuity, the Buddha points out that these various appearances of continuing attachment are all the result of the ceaseless deluded discrimination of ordinary foolish beings. Because deluded thoughts continue without interruption, ordinary foolish beings, like spring silkworms spinning cocoons, use the threads of deluded thought to bind themselves and others, thereby continuously attaching and discriminating between existence and nonexistence.

“Furthermore, Mahāmati, within this there are no appearances of continuity or non-continuity. Because they see all dharmas as quiescent and deluded thoughts do not arise, bodhisattva mahāsattvas see all dharmas as quiescent. Furthermore, Mahāmati, they awaken to the fact that external existence and nonexistence are merely appearances manifested by their own minds and are nonexistent. In accordance with their observation of what is manifested by their own minds, they see that all natures of existence and nonexistence are without appearance. Seeing the quiescence of continuity, they find in all dharmas no appearances of continuity or non-continuity.”

Yet, Mahāmati, there are in fact no real appearances of continuity or non-continuity here. Bodhisattva mahāsattvas understand that all things are originally quiescent, without arising, ceasing, coming, or going; thus no deluded thought can arise. They see that all dharmas are originally quiescent, without coming, going, arising, or ceasing. Deluded thoughts are likewise so and cannot be obtained.

Furthermore, Mahāmati, know that there is no dharma outside the mind: all is manifested by one’s own mind and has no substantial intrinsic nature. All dharmas are empty and quiescent in themselves; they do not possess truly existent characteristics of intrinsic nature. If, in accordance with causes and conditions, one sincerely observes all dharmas manifested by one’s own mind, one discovers that all dharmas truly lack characteristics of intrinsic nature and that all continuity is originally quiescent.

Therefore, in all dharmas there are no appearances of either continuity or non-continuity.

“Furthermore, Mahāmati, within this there is neither bondage nor liberation. Others fall into knowledge that is not in accordance with reality and therefore posit bondage and liberation. Why is this so? It is because, among all dharmas, neither existence nor nonexistence obtains, and no sentient being can be found.”

The Buddha told Mahāmati: “Here there is likewise neither bondage nor liberation. Deluded sentient beings fail to know the true characteristics of dharmas as they are, and thus mistakenly believe there to be bondage and liberation. Yet if neither

dharmas nor sentient beings can be obtained, how much less can bondage and liberation!"

When Chan Master Daoxin came to pay homage to the Third Patriarch, Sengcan, he said, "I pray that the Venerable Monk will show compassion and grant me the dharma gate of liberation." The Third Patriarch said, "Who binds you?" Daoxin replied, "No one binds me." The Patriarch said, "Why, then, do you seek liberation?" At these words, Daoxin awakened greatly.

Thus all the patriarchs since ancient times and all Buddhas breathe through the same nostril. They seek only to free you from clinging and remove your bonds; they do not give people a single dharma. Why? Because no dharma can be obtained. Bodhidharma said: "A Buddha is one without karma, without cause and effect. If even the slightest dharma can be obtained, it is all slander of the Buddha; on what basis could one attain Buddhahood? If one abides in a single mind, a single capacity, a single understanding, or a single view, the Buddha does not permit it." This is what is meant.

Why, then, do deluded ordinary people cling to the belief that bondage and liberation truly exist? Let us look at the following passage.

"Furthermore, Mahāmati, foolish people have three continuities: greed, anger, and ignorance; craving for future existence; and the simultaneous arising of delight and attachment. Because of these continuities, there is continuity of destinies. That continuity continues through the five destinies. Mahāmati, when continuity is cut off, there are no appearances of continuity or non-continuity. Furthermore, Mahāmati, when the conditions of threefold conjunction are conceptually grasped as expedient means, the continuity of consciousness arises without interruption. Such conceptual attachment to expedient means produces continuity. When the consciousness arising from the conditions of threefold conjunction ceases, one sees the three liberations, and all continuity does not arise."

"Craving for future existence" means mentally grasping at dharmas one hopes to realize in the future.

"The simultaneous arising of delight and attachment" means that emotions such as love and hate arise together. "When emotion arises, wisdom is obstructed"; sentient beings arise from this, and saṃsāra follows.

The Buddha told Mahāmati that foolish people have three kinds of continuity: greed, anger, and ignorance. Greed, anger, and ignorance give rise to expectations for the future—that is, "craving for future existence." Delight and attachment then arise together, causing the cycle of rebirth in the six realms to continue without interruption.

How, then, can continuity be cut off? By truly knowing that the appearances of all continuities are false and that there is originally no appearance of continuity to be cut off. This is provisionally called cutting off continuity. Therefore, “when continuity is cut off, there are no appearances of continuity or non-continuity.”

Mahāmati, foolish people take the three continuities of greed, anger, and ignorance as their fundamental cause. They continually discriminate and cling; these interweave and converge through causes and conditions, so the various consciousnesses arise in uninterrupted continuity. It is only because of firmly ingrained habits of deluded conceptual attachment that appearances of continuity arise.

If the “consciousness” produced by the conjunctive conditions of the three continuities ceases—that is, if firmly ingrained habits of deluded conceptual attachment are broken—one accords with the three liberations and sees clearly that all appearances of continuity have never arisen and have no basis on which to arise. This is called “all continuity does not arise.” Here the Buddha further explains to Mahāmati how continuity may be cut off.

This is the Buddha’s answer to Mahāmati concerning continuity: foolish people have eleven kinds of continuing attachment and therefore see nine kinds of transformation in the world, giving rise to many erroneous views. In truth, all dharmas lack intrinsic nature; still less are there continuity or non-continuity. All continuity has never arisen.

At that time, the World-Honored One wished to restate this meaning and spoke these verses: “Unreal deluded thoughts are what are called the appearances of continuity. If one knows their reality, the net of continuity is cut off. Ignorant of the various natures, one is carried along by verbal expression; like the silkworm, one spins a web and binds oneself. Foolish people are bound by deluded thoughts and do not examine continuity.”

At this point, the Buddha summarizes in verse: the various appearances of continuity spoken of are merely the unreal deluded thoughts of sentient beings. If one can truly know the real characteristics of dharmas, these various false continuities will naturally cease.

Foolish people do not understand the reality of dharmas and cling to verbal expressions. This is like a silkworm spinning a cocoon and binding itself. Foolish people are entangled by their own deluded conceptual attachment and cannot truly observe that the various continuities are like illusions. In truth, all continuity has never arisen; there are truly no appearances of continuity or non-continuity.

“Mahāmati again addressed the Buddha: ‘As the World-Honored One has said, through various deluded thoughts one imagines the various natures. Those intrinsic natures do not exist; there is only the intrinsic nature of deluded thought. World-Honored One, if there is only the intrinsic nature of deluded thought, and intrinsic nature and non-nature stand in mutual dependence, would this not entail the error of saying that afflictions and purity are without intrinsic nature? For all dharmas are deluded thought, because intrinsic nature and non-nature are so.’”

“Various” means all kinds and every kind.

“Intrinsic nature and non-nature” means that there is no truly real nature of its own, or, in other words, no objectively real existence.

Bodhisattva Mahāmati again said to the Buddha: “As the World-Honored One has said, foolish people use their various deluded thoughts to discriminate and conjecture about the intrinsic natures of dharmas. In truth, all dharmas lack intrinsic nature; they are merely deluded thoughts. World-Honored One, if all dharmas are entirely deluded thoughts and no dharmas truly exist, does that not mean that there are fundamentally neither afflictions nor purity? Would this not fall into the annihilationist view? For you have said that all dharmas are deluded thoughts and lack real intrinsic nature.”

“The Buddha told Mahāmati: ‘So it is, so it is, as you have said. Mahāmati, it is not as the foolish imagine—the intrinsic natures of things are not truly existent. This is the intrinsic nature of deluded thought; it is not that intrinsic nature and non-nature are thus. Mahāmati, noble wisdom has its intrinsic nature. Through noble knowledge, noble vision, and the noble wisdom-eye, intrinsic nature and non-nature are known in this way.’”

“Noble knowledge, noble vision, and the noble wisdom-eye” are distinguished from the knowledge and views of foolish people, who deludedly imagine that everything truly exists. They are the Buddha’s knowledge, the Buddha’s vision, and the Buddha’s wisdom-eye.

The Buddha told Mahāmati: “Yes, yes, it is as you have said. All dharmas do not truly exist in the manner imagined by foolish people; this is merely deluded thought, and no intrinsic nature of any dharma can be obtained. Yet this truth of reality can be realized only through the Tathāgata’s noble wisdom. Only through the Tathāgata’s noble knowledge, noble vision, and noble wisdom-eye can one discern this reality.”

In this passage, the Buddha further dispels Mahāmati’s doubts. All dharmas truly have no self-nature, yet this is not annihilation. Is not that which realizes the insubstantiality of all dharmas precisely the Buddha’s wondrous numinous

awareness? Therefore, the lack of self-nature in all dharmas is by no means annihilation.

[Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: “If the noble ones know, see, and observe with the wisdom-eye of noble knowledge and noble vision—not with the heavenly eye or the fleshly eye—and know suchness and self-nature in this way, rather than as ordinary people do through deluded thought, then, World-Honored One, why do ordinary people, having abandoned such deluded thought, fail to awaken to the matters of noble nature? World-Honored One, would they not then be neither mistaken nor not mistaken? Why is this so? Because they do not awaken to the self-nature of noble matters, they are not free from mistake; and because they do not see appearances apart from being and nonbeing, they are also not mistaken.”]

Mahāmati continued: “If noble ones observe with the wisdom-eye of noble knowledge and noble vision, they can know the ultimate truth. If this knowledge is not through the fleshly eye or the heavenly eye, and not in the deluded manner of ordinary people—”

“—then, World-Honored One, why can ordinary people not awaken to the ultimate truth as noble ones do after leaving behind deluded thought? World-Honored One, would those ordinary people not become neither mistaken nor not mistaken? Why? Because they cannot awaken to the self-nature of noble wisdom, they are not without error; because they do not perceive any states of experience and are then free from the appearances of being and nonbeing, they are also not mistaken.”

Mahāmati’s question follows this logic: if the Buddha, observing with noble knowledge, noble vision, and the wisdom-eye of noble knowledge, can awaken to the matters of noble wisdom, then ordinary people should likewise be able to awaken to the true existence of noble wisdom if they simply cease deluded thought. Yet this is not in fact so. Mahāmati has misunderstood the meaning of leaving delusion behind. If one clings to “leaving delusion” as something real, one not only fails to leave delusion behind but adds a further delusion of “leaving delusion.” It is like soaking a stone in cold water: one has merely fallen from clinging to being into clinging to nonbeing, and thus into annihilation.

[“World-Honored One, noble ones do not see in this way, imagining things as they are, because they do not take the realm of their own characteristics as an object. World-Honored One, those characteristics of nature and self-nature also appear in this way through the self-nature of deluded thought. One does not speak of cause or no cause, because that would fall into views of the characteristics of nature. Their realms differ and are not like those of such people. Thus there is the fault of endless regress, World-Honored One, because they do not awaken to the characteristics of nature and self-nature.”]

“Matter” refers to the matter of noble nature.

“Different realm” means another, distinct, or special realm.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva says: “World-Honored One, noble ones do not entertain deluded thoughts of these two extremes. They do not mistake the false for the true or take their own experiential realm as real, clinging either to the extreme of being or to that of nonbeing. They know that such matters as noble wisdom are also deluded thought, because they do not cling to the realms manifested by their own minds as truly existent.” “Those characteristics of nature and self-nature also appear in this way through the self-nature of deluded thought” means that the nature of confused deluded thought is likewise thus: in essence, confused deluded thought is also unobtainable. That is, there was fundamentally never any delusion; therefore, awakening is only a provisional expression.

Therefore, the World-Honored One does not say that all dharmas have a cause or lack a cause. For whenever one speaks of being or nonbeing, ordinary people follow the words and fall into erroneous views of the two extremes—either the erroneous view that things arise from a truly existent cause, or the erroneous view that they arise from a truly existent absence of cause. All other matters and states are the same.

What the World-Honored One teaches is solely intended to eradicate the erroneous views and deluded thoughts of ordinary people. Yet ordinary people readily form still further deluded attachments, taking the World-Honored One’s words as real, and thus turn back and forth within the harmful views of the two extremes, falling into endless errors. World-Honored One, this is all because they cannot awaken to the true characteristics of all dharmas.

[“World-Honored One, if the self-nature of deluded thought is not the characteristic of the nature of cause and self-nature, how can they imagine that what is not deluded thought can truly know deluded thought? World-Honored One, deluded thought differs from the characteristics of self-nature. World-Honored One, their causes are dissimilar to the characteristics of the self-nature of deluded thought. How can each of them be free of deluded thought, while ordinary people do not know reality as it is? Yet, in order that sentient beings may leave deluded thought behind, it is said that what appears as deluded thought does not truly exist. World-Honored One, why prohibit sentient beings from clinging to the existence or nonexistence of the self-nature of things, while speaking of the realm traversed by noble wisdom in a way that invites clinging to existence? Why say that empty dharmas have no self-nature, yet speak of matters pertaining to the self-nature of noble wisdom?”]

Let us first consider the opening sentence: “World-Honored One, if the self-nature of deluded thought is not the characteristic of the nature of cause and self-nature, how can they imagine that what is not deluded thought can truly know deluded thought?” Reordering the words slightly, it reads: “World-Honored One, the self-nature of deluded thought is not the characteristic of the nature of cause and self-nature. How can they imagine that, if there is no deluded thought, they can truly know deluded thought?” That is: noble ones—

—do not apprehend the matters of the self-nature of noble wisdom, or the true ultimate reality of the self-nature of all dharmas, through the discriminating deluded thought of pervasive discrimination and attachment. It has nothing to do with deluded thought; no discriminating deluded thought can conceive of it. Why, then, do ordinary people speculate and imagine: “If discriminating deluded thought is wrong, then if I do not discriminate and think of nothing, I will be able to apprehend the nature of all illusory dharmas?”

“World-Honored One, deluded thought differs from the characteristics of self-nature. World-Honored One, their causes are dissimilar to the characteristics of the self-nature of deluded thought. How can each of them be free of deluded thought, while ordinary people do not know reality as it is?” Again, with the order slightly rearranged: “World-Honored One, deluded thought differs from the characteristics of self-nature. World-Honored One, the causes of ordinary and noble beings are dissimilar; therefore, ordinary people entertain deluded thoughts about the characteristics of self-nature.”

“How can each of them be free of deluded thought, while ordinary people do not know reality as it is?” That is, the deluded and erroneous views of ordinary people are wholly different from the true self-nature of all dharmas: the true aspect of all dharmas is not as sentient beings mistakenly imagine it to be.

Ordinary and noble beings differ in their causal grounds. Noble wisdom does not give rise to arbitrary conjecture, but enters through wisdom. Ordinary people, however, engage in pervasive discrimination and attachment; they apprehend consciousness with consciousness and chase conditions after conditions. Thus they generate many erroneous notions and deluded thoughts concerning the self-nature of all dharmas. Since they do not know the true self-nature of all dharmas, how could they possibly leave behind mistaken deluded views?

“Yet, in order that sentient beings may leave deluded thought behind, it is said that what appears as deluded thought does not truly exist. World-Honored One, why prohibit sentient beings from clinging to the existence or nonexistence of the self-nature of things, while speaking of the realm traversed by noble wisdom in a way that invites clinging to existence? Why say that empty dharmas have no self-nature,

yet speak of matters pertaining to the self-nature of noble wisdom?" In order that sentient beings may leave behind their deluded and erroneous views, the Buddha says that all dharmas are deluded thought and are not truly existent.

World-Honored One, why prohibit sentient beings from clinging to whether all dharmas have a self-nature or lack one, yet say that the realm traversed by noble wisdom truly exists? Would this not also be a form of pervasive discrimination and attachment? Why say that all dharmas are empty and lack self-nature, while also saying that matters of the self-nature of noble wisdom truly exist?

The question Mahāmati Bodhisattva raises here is this: why does the Buddha say that there truly are matters of the self-nature of noble wisdom and its realm? Having left behind deluded thoughts about whether dharmas possess or lack self-nature, is there still truly a self-nature of noble wisdom that can be known?

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: "I do not say that empty dharmas have no self-nature, nor do I fall into the view of existence by speaking of matters of the self-nature of noble wisdom. Rather, I do so in order to cause sentient beings to leave behind the words that inspire fear. Since beginningless time, sentient beings have clung to the characteristics of nature and self-nature, and to the characteristics and views that grasp matters of the self-nature of noble wisdom; therefore, I speak of empty dharmas. Mahāmati, I do not speak of the characteristics of nature and self-nature. Mahāmati, I merely abide in the empty dharma as it truly is, realized for myself; I am free from confused and inverted appearances and views, free from views of self-nature and no self-nature manifested by one's own mind, have attained the three liberations, and, sealed by the seal of suchness, abide in observing through self-awakened realization the conditions of nature and self-nature, free from appearances and views of matters as being or nonbeing."]

"I merely abide in the empty dharma as it truly is, realized for myself": "realized for myself" means that it is inherently complete and can be attained only through one's own realization. All dharmas have never arisen, so how could they ever cease? This is the true aspect of all dharmas; it is originally thus in accordance with dharma. The sentence as a whole means abiding solely in this one reality as it truly is. Within this reality there is neither gain nor loss, neither truth nor delusion, neither going out nor coming in.

The Buddha tells Mahāmati: "It is not that, in saying all dharmas are empty and lack self-nature, I fall into empty annihilation; nor, in speaking of the self-nature of noble wisdom, do I fall into the view of existence. I speak in this way solely to enable sentient beings to leave behind inverted dreams, fear, and hindrance. Since beginningless time, sentient beings have discriminated and clung to the worldly dharmas as truly possessing self-nature. Or, though seeking to escape saṃsāra, they

cling to there being truly existent characteristics of noble wisdom and noble matters that can be seen and realized. Therefore I say that all is empty, in order to sweep away sentient beings' pervasive discrimination and attachment."

"Mahāmati, I have not said that the true characteristics of all dharmas truly exist, or that the matters of noble wisdom truly exist. Mahāmati, noble ones merely abide in emptiness as it truly is from the outset. They are free from confused, inverted, and erroneous views; free from grasping dharmas outside the mind; free from all views of the extremes; and attain the three liberations. Thus they realize that the true aspect is without characteristics and is originally suchness."

At this point of the true aspect being without characteristics, noble ones observe that all dharmas are nothing but manifestations of causes and conditions, and are free from the deluded and erroneous views of being and nonbeing. As Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva said: "Whatever arises through causes and conditions, I declare to be emptiness; it is also a provisional designation, and this is the meaning of the Middle Way."

In brief, the Buddha's reply to Mahāmati in this passage is that all he says is merely expedient means. A person of true wisdom does not abide even in these expedient means. This is to abide constantly in "the empty dharma as it truly is"; this is the three liberations.

Note the phrase here, "sealed by the seal of suchness." That is, it is sealed with the seal of the true aspect. Yet the true aspect has no characteristics that can be sealed; this is the true seal. Not only does the one who realizes have no seal to apply, but for all Buddhas and patriarchs, at this point there is nothing that can be mutually sealed. This is "sealed by the seal of suchness."

It is like Patriarch Linji, who said when he was about to pass away: "After I am gone, you must not allow my Treasury of the True Dharma Eye to be extinguished." Chan Master Sansheng stepped forth and said, "How would I dare extinguish the Master's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye?" The Master said, "If someone later asks you about it, what will you tell them?" Sansheng immediately gave a shout. The Master said, "Who would have known that my Treasury of the True Dharma Eye would be extinguished by this blind donkey!" Having spoken, he sat upright and passed away.

Patriarch Linji posed to his disciples the question, "What will you tell them?" Yet Sansheng cut it off with a shout. Where here is there any room for a seal or no seal? This is the true seal, yet even the true seal is unobtainable. Thus Chan Master Linji replied, "Who would have known that my Treasury of the True Dharma Eye would be extinguished by this blind donkey!" This is the mutual confirmation of the seals of Buddhas and the minds of patriarchs throughout the ages. All confirmation in the

Buddhadharma does not go beyond this: where there is truly nothing to seal, mind seals mind.

The tenet of the Mind-Seal school of the Buddha-Dharma is likewise so. For example, when The Buddha-Heart Sutra speaks of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, it says: “World-Honored One, know that this light cannot be measured, weighed, or praised; nor is there any confirmation of it. Why? Because it is the same as all Buddhas, for whom there is no confirmation; the same as all Tathāgatas, for whom nothing is attained; because none of all appearances is seen; because the faculties are carefully guarded without relinquishment; because this gives the demonic adversaries no opening; and because it can block all the paths of the demon king. For these causes and conditions it is called the Heart-of-Heart.”

“Furthermore, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas should not establish as a tenet that all dharmas are unborn. Why not? If one takes the non-self-nature of all natures as one’s tenet, and because that tenet gives rise to the appearance of a cause, then in asserting the tenet that all dharmas are unborn, that tenet is thereby destroyed. That tenet of the unbornness of all dharmas is destroyed because a tenet arises dependently. Moreover, because that tenet of unbornness applies to all dharmas, and because the characteristic of indestructibility is unborn, anyone who establishes the tenet that all dharmas are unborn thereby destroys what they assert.”

Furthermore, Mahāmati, one must not cling to “the unbornness of all dharmas” as something real. A bodhisattva should not establish such a doctrinal thesis. Why? If one takes the unbornness and lack of self-nature of all dharmas as one’s tenet, one has already produced the characteristic of a tenet concerning “the unbornness of all dharmas.” If a tenet is established, that tenet must be destroyed. Why?

“That tenet that all dharmas are unborn is destroyed because a tenet arises dependently”—if one maintains the unbornness of all dharmas as a tenet, one destroys that tenet. For one who maintains a tenet is the maintainer, and there must necessarily be an object maintained, arising in dependence upon it. That is, one has produced a dharma to be maintained; thus, “the unbornness of all dharmas” cannot be established.

Moreover, because this doctrine of “the unbornness of all dharmas” applies to all dharmas, all dharmas naturally include the characteristic of indestructibility. If the characteristic of indestructibility is unborn, then it becomes a characteristic of destruction. Thus, the doctrine of “the unbornness of all dharmas” is itself naturally destroyed and cannot be established.

“Mahāmati, the tenet that neither existence nor nonexistence arises applies to all natures; the characteristics of existence and nonexistence cannot be obtained. Mahāmati, if one establishes a tenet on the basis that that tenet is unborn and that

all natures are unborn, then that tenet is destroyed, since the characteristics of the natures of existence and nonexistence are unborn. Therefore, one should not establish a tenet."

Mahāmati, the unbornness of all dharmas means that both existence and nonexistence are unborn. If "both existence and nonexistence are unborn" applies to all dharmas, then neither the characteristic of existence nor the characteristic of nonexistence can be obtained.

"Mahāmati, if one establishes a tenet on the basis that that tenet is unborn and that all natures are unborn, then that tenet is destroyed, since the characteristics of the natures of existence and nonexistence are unborn. Therefore, one should not establish a tenet"—this sentence reads more smoothly if its order is rearranged: "Mahāmati, since the characteristics of the natures of existence and nonexistence are unborn, if one establishes a tenet on the basis that that tenet is unborn and that all natures are unborn, then that tenet is destroyed; therefore, one should not establish a tenet." Mahāmati, because the characteristics of both existence and nonexistence are unborn, this tenet too should be unborn.

Therefore, if one were to uphold this doctrine of "unbornness," then establishing a tenet on the basis that all dharmas are unborn would already constitute "arising." In this way, one would destroy that tenet. That is, one should not establish this doctrinal thesis.

Here the Buddha uses worldly logic from four perspectives to demonstrate that one must not cling to the unbornness of all dharmas as real or establish this doctrinal thesis; otherwise, one will fall into self-contradiction.

"Because the five-membered argument has many faults, because its causes successively differ in characteristics, and because it is contrived, one should not establish a thesis. Thus, one should not establish as a thesis that all dharmas are unborn, that all dharmas are empty, or that all dharmas lack self-nature."

"The five-membered argument has many faults"—the five-membered argument was a method used by ancient Indian philosophers for setting forth a proposition and proving it through reasoning. It resembles the category of formal logic in Western philosophy and necessarily has defects of its own.

For example, regarding the same proposition, if the two sides cite different reasons and offer different analogies, they may often reach utterly different conclusions without violating the premises of the five-membered argument. Indian scholars of logic, such as Dignāga, discussed in detail the faults to which the five-membered argument is prone: nine faults of the thesis, fourteen faults of the reason, five faults

of homogeneous examples, and five faults of heterogeneous examples—a total of thirty-three faults.

The meaning of this passage is as follows:

Mahāmati, the method of argumentation in the five-membered argument has many faults. From the same premises, under different causes and conditions, successive deductions can produce utterly different results; moreover, it falls into conditioned and contrived activity. Therefore, one should not establish a doctrinal thesis through such a five-membered argument. Likewise, statements such as “all dharmas are empty” and “all dharmas lack self-nature” should not be established as views of a truly existing doctrinal thesis.

In fact, it is absolutely impossible to use inverted worldly views as one’s basis and logic as one’s tool to infer and assess the Buddha’s wisdom. However rigorous one’s logic may be, it cannot escape this fact: the premises and content of reasoning are all inverted deluded thoughts grasped as real, all heterodox views of the two extremes, and all contrary to true reality. Therefore, the conclusions reached will inevitably end in self-contradiction.

“Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas nevertheless speak of all dharmas as like illusions and dreams, because appearances may manifest or not manifest, and because there are faults in seeing and cognizing. They should teach that all dharmas have a nature like illusions and dreams, except when doing so would cause foolish ordinary people to become frightened and turn away. Mahāmati, foolish ordinary people fall into views of existence and nonexistence; do not cause them to become frightened and turn away from the Mahāyāna.”

Mahāmati, therefore, bodhisattvas tell those sentient beings who are stubbornly deluded and attached that all dharmas are like illusions and dreams. The objects that sentient beings perceive are all false, and the views they cognize are all erroneous. Therefore, bodhisattvas should teach them the ultimate dharma nature that all dharmas are like illusions and dreams.

Except when speaking directly might at times frighten foolish ordinary people; then one should not speak so directly. Mahāmati, foolish ordinary people cling to real existence and real nonexistence. Therefore, do not cause sentient beings to become afraid of the Dharma of unbornness and turn away from the Mahāyāna path. At such times, the Dharma should be taught with skillful means.

Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke in verse: “No self-nature, no speech; no phenomena, no continuity. The deluded imaginings of foolish ordinary people are like the evil cognition of a corpse.”

At this time, the Buddha restated the essential meaning in verse:

All dharmas lack self-nature, and true reality is beyond speech. Emptiness, the phenomena of the two extremes, and such things as continuity are all deluded imaginings. The deluded and heterodox views of foolish ordinary people are an ignorant and evil cognition like that of a corpse.

“All dharmas are unborn; this is not the tenet of non-Buddhist paths. Ultimately, nothing arises; natures are accomplished through conditions. All dharmas are unborn; the wise do not form such a thought. Because that tenet gives rise to causes, the awakened completely extinguish it.”

All dharmas are originally unborn. One must not, like followers of non-Buddhist paths, establish the words “unbornness” as a doctrinal thesis. The statement that all dharmas are ultimately unborn eliminates both establishment and slander: even unbornness itself is unborn. Nor are the so-called dharmas annihilated; in truth, they are all illusory manifestations arising through the conjunction of causes and conditions.

All dharmas are originally neither arising nor ceasing. Therefore, the wise do not entertain the thought that “all dharmas are unborn.” Followers of non-Buddhist paths take views as real and establish numerous doctrines concerning arising and ceasing; the awakened extinguish all attachment and all conceptual establishment. For in the one true reality, there is fundamentally no room for either arising or non-arising.

“It is like one with diseased eyes who falsely sees hanging hairs. Conceptual attachment to natures is likewise so: it is the erroneous deluded imagining of foolish ordinary people. They posit the three realms, yet no phenomenon has self-nature. When phenomena and self-natures are posited, deluded thoughts arise through discursive reflection. Characteristics and phenomena are provisionally set forth in verbal teachings; the mind is confused and violently agitated. Children of the Buddha can transcend this and leave all deluded imaginings far behind.”

For example, someone with an eye disease falsely sees hairs hanging before the eyes. The deluded conceptual discriminations of ordinary beings are the same: because foolish ordinary people discriminate and cling, they give rise to many erroneous views and deluded thoughts.

In truth, the ten directions, the three realms, and so forth are all merely provisional names. No phenomenon possesses a self-nature that can be obtained; all are no more than expedient designations. Yet foolish ordinary people mistakenly take all illusions as real and thereby continue their inverted reflections, giving rise to all kinds of deluded and mistaken views.

The Buddhas originally teach by provisionally establishing words in accordance with sentient beings' capacities and causes and conditions. Yet foolish ordinary people cling to these expedients as real; their minds are stirred and confused. Even when true reality is directly set forth to them, they may, through extreme shock or fear, turn away from the True Dharma. Only genuine children of the Buddha can understand this ultimate and definitive meaning, immediately transcend deluded thought and attachment, and leave behind the unreal heterodox views of the two extremes.

"It is not water, yet the conception and feeling of water arise; this comes from thirst and craving. Foolish ordinary people are deluded in this way, but the vision of the noble ones is not so. The noble ones see purity; the three liberations and samādhi arise. Far removed from arising and ceasing, they roam in non-possession. Cultivating non-possession, there is neither self-nature nor lack of self-nature. Self-nature and lack of self-nature are equal; from this arise the fruits of the noble ones."

Just as a thirsty person sees a mirage and takes it for water, giving rise to the conception and feeling of seeing water, such illusory thoughts arise from thirst and intense craving. Only foolish ordinary people have such delusion; the vision of noble wisdom is not so. Noble ones directly realize original purity, realize the three liberations and penetrate countless samādhis, remain far from deluded thoughts of arising and ceasing, and roam freely throughout all that is "without possession."

All dharmas have no truly existing self-nature of either existence or nonexistence; all dharmas have never arisen. Cultivation is likewise so: in truth, there is nothing to obtain, and no cultivation or realization to obtain. "Because there is nothing to obtain, bodhisattvas…" Yet only through deep cultivation and realization can one awaken to this: nothing has ever been lacking, so what more is there to seek? All noble beings likewise directly realize the equality of all dharmas through this right view, provisionally called "the fruition of noble wisdom."

"How can there be self-nature or lack of self-nature? How can there be equality? It is because that mind does not know and is extremely restless within and without. If one can destroy this, the mind will see equality."

So why speak of self-nature or no self-nature, or of equality and inequality? The deluded minds of foolish ordinary people do not understand true reality; they drift and move restlessly amid deluded thoughts concerning the sense faculties, the body, and the world. If one shatters these deluded discriminations, one will naturally see the true reality that all things are originally unobstructed and all dharmas are originally equal.

Outline of This Section:

In this section, the Buddha begins with the nine theories of transformation held by non-Buddhist paths, pointing out that what they perceive is nothing but the continuity of deluded imaginings. He then further explains to Bodhisattva Mahāmati the operation and principle of continuity, and tells him how to become liberated from the net of continuity.

Thereafter, through their analysis of the noble wisdom of self-realization and the non-arising of all dharmas, the Buddha and Mahāmati elucidated the true meaning of the noble wisdom of self-realization and emptiness as it truly is. They pointed out that neither should be established as real, yet "non-arising" is not annihilation.

This is also a characteristic of the Laṅkāvatāra: its analytical refutations are quite detailed, yet its conclusions are also very direct. Nearly every topic begins with the mistaken views of existence and nonexistence. Mahāmati analyzes and questions the matter from every angle; sometimes the World-Honored One refutes these views by following the analysis, and at other times he refutes them directly through definitive meaning. Yet in the end, each topic returns to the ultimate definitive meaning in which not a single dharma is established and not a single word remains.

At the end of this section, the World-Honored One again points out that sentient beings should avoid taking words as real and avoid establishing the words of the sacred teachings as fixed doctrinal views. They should thoroughly relinquish all pervasive discrimination and attachment, understand the true meaning of emptiness as it truly is, uphold right view, and thoroughly realize genuine equality and unobstructedness.

28. Wisdom Does Not Apprehend Objects

[Then Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, as the World-Honored One has said, wisdom cannot be apprehended through objects of grasping; this is an establishment provisionally posited in accordance with measures. What is apprehended is without own-nature, and apprehension too is without own-nature. Since there is no apprehension, wisdom does not arise; it is merely a name provisionally posited."]

"Wisdom cannot be apprehended through objects of grasping": "objects" refers to objects of experience; "objects of grasping" are all the objects upon which awareness depends. This means that awareness, reflection, inference, grasping, and the like cannot reach wisdom. Wisdom does not admit of conceptual deliberation, nor is it found in any fabrication. Simply put, the Way does not belong to knowing.

"An establishment provisionally posited in accordance with measures" means manifesting what can be known in accordance with the minds of sentient beings.

At this point, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: World-Honored One, according to what you have said, wisdom is utterly unobtainable and cannot be grasped by any thought or awareness. Even the so-called self-awakened noble wisdom is merely an expedient provision adapted to sentient beings. In reality, there is no external object that can be clung to or discriminated, and grasping and discrimination themselves are also unobtainable. Since there is no object that can be discerned or known, there is not truly any "wisdom" that arises. The so-called "wisdom" is merely a provisional name.

["How is it, World-Honored One? Is wisdom unobtainable because one does not perceive the differences and nondifferences of the particular and general characteristics of things? Or is it unobtainable because the various particular and general characteristics, natures, and own-nature characteristics are concealed? Or because mountains, cliffs, stone walls, earth, water, fire, and wind obstruct it? Or because something is extremely distant or extremely near? Or because one is old or young, blind or mentally obscured, or lacking in the sense faculties, so that wisdom is unobtainable?"]

"Wisdom": Note that the "wisdom" of which Mahāmati speaks here refers to the discriminating function of seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing. This clearly misunderstands the Tathāgata's noble wisdom. The Tathāgata's noble wisdom is originally complete; it belongs neither to knowing nor to not knowing. Even when deafness, blindness, or muteness prevents the capacity for ordinary knowing, such nonknowing is itself a kind of knowing, a manifestation of the characteristics and functioning of intrinsic wisdom.

Then, World-Honored One, if one cannot discern the differences and nondifferences among dharmas, or discern their appearances and essential nature, is this what you mean by wisdom being unobtainable?

If the distinctive features and essential nature of the various dharmas are hidden and not outwardly manifest, so that they cannot be known, is this what is meant by wisdom being unobtainable?

If material barriers such as mountains, cliffs, stone walls, earth, water, fire, and wind prevent one from knowing, is this what is meant by wisdom being unobtainable?

If something is too distant to be reached, or too close to be grasped, and therefore cannot be known, is this what is meant by wisdom being unobtainable?

If, through old age and declining faculties, youth and incomplete development, blindness, mental obscuration, weakened or lost bodily functions, or even incomplete sense faculties, one cannot know—does this too count as the wisdom being unobtainable of which the Buddha speaks?

This passage shows that Mahāmati has associated the nondiscriminating realm of noble wisdom, in which wisdom is unobtainable, with numb and ignorant unawareness. Hence his question: do the five conditions above—such as dementia, deafness, and muteness, in which one cannot know the truth of things—count as the "wisdom being unobtainable" of which the World-Honored One speaks?

["World-Honored One, if wisdom is unobtainable because one does not perceive the differences and nondifferences of particular and general characteristics, then this should not be called wisdom but non-wisdom, since there are objects that cannot be apprehended. Further, if wisdom is unobtainable because the various particular and general characteristics, natures, and own-nature characteristics are concealed, that too is non-wisdom, not wisdom. World-Honored One, wisdom arises because there are objects of knowledge; it is not the case that there are no objects of knowledge meeting with it, and this is why it is called wisdom. If wisdom is unobtainable because of mountains, cliffs, stone walls, earth, water, fire, wind, extreme distance or nearness, old age, youth, blindness, mental obscuration, or incomplete sense faculties, this too is not wisdom but non-wisdom, since there are objects that cannot be apprehended."]

"Objects of knowledge" refers to objects or principles that can be known.

World-Honored One, if one cannot distinguish the characteristics of dharmas and their differences and nondifferences, and this is called "wisdom unobtainable," that cannot be right. Such a condition should not be called "having wisdom but being unable to obtain it"; it should be called "having no wisdom." Since one cannot know and lacks the capacity for knowing, it is non-wisdom. It should not be classified as nondiscriminating wisdom or as the condition in which wisdom is unobtainable.

Similarly, if the distinctive features and essential nature of the various dharmas are obscured, so that they cannot be distinguished, this cannot be called having wisdom but being unable to obtain it. Since the external objects are obscured and cannot be known, it too should be called non-wisdom.

World-Honored One, only when there are external appearances and principles that can be known can there arise, in dependence upon them, wisdom that knows. If there are indeed principles and external objects that can be known, yet one fails for various reasons to discover or know them, such "not knowing" should not be the noble "wisdom unobtainable" of which the World-Honored One speaks. Clearly, it should be called "having no wisdom."

If mountains, cliffs, stone walls, earth, water, fire, wind, excessive distance, excessive nearness, old age, youth, blindness, mental obscuration, or incomplete sense faculties obscure things so that one cannot know their principles, then this should

not be called having wisdom but being unable to obtain it. It should be called "having no wisdom."

For all these conditions have one feature in common: there are actual objects and principles, but for various reasons one lacks the capacity to know them. This condition should be called "non-wisdom."

Mahāmati further says here that the five conditions above plainly involve an inability to know, and should therefore be called non-wisdom rather than the noble state of "wisdom unobtainable." He mistakes wisdom for worldly cleverness and intellectual acumen, supposing that wisdom should know everything. For example, if one cannot see what lies beyond a mountain because the mountain blocks one's view, he takes this to be a lack of wisdom.

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: "It is not so. What you call non-wisdom should be wisdom, not non-wisdom. I did not speak in this concealed manner. Wisdom cannot be apprehended through objects of grasping; this is an establishment posited in accordance with measures."]

"Speaking in a concealed manner" means that I do not accept the connection you have made. What connection? The connection between being unable, for various reasons, to know the true principles of things and the presence or absence of wisdom. "Concealment" means being unable, for various reasons, to know the original principles of things.

The Buddha told Mahāmati: It is not so! The five conditions that you call the absence of wisdom are in fact manifestations of the characteristics and functioning of wisdom. This "non-wisdom" is not an absence of wisdom. I do not accept your claim that being unable to know something for various reasons constitutes a lack of wisdom. No: the non-wisdom that lacks the ability to know is also a manifestation of intrinsically complete wisdom.

"Wisdom cannot be apprehended through objects of grasping; this is an establishment posited in accordance with measures"—what I mean by the statement "wisdom cannot be apprehended through objects of grasping" is an expedient teaching; it does not mean what you have just described.

This is the Buddha's reply to Mahāmati. In brief: do not misunderstand wisdom. Not knowing is not non-wisdom. Wisdom of the Way belongs neither to knowing nor to not knowing. It has nothing to do with knowing or not knowing.

["When one realizes that what appears before one's own mind as direct perception is neither existent nor nonexistent, and that external own-nature is without own-nature, one knows, yet no object is apprehended. Since it is not apprehended,

wisdom does not arise with regard to objects of knowledge. In accord with the three liberations, wisdom too is unobtainable."]

"In accord with the three liberations": "in accord with" means to correspond with. The three liberations are emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness.

What, then, does the Buddha mean by "wisdom cannot be apprehended through objects of grasping"? This passage explains it in detail: if one realizes that all dharmas are merely manifestations of one's own mind and have no substantial own-nature, one can know that, ultimately, none of the various objects of experience can be obtained.

If objects cannot be obtained, how could cognition of objects be obtained? Therefore, knowing and not knowing have no bearing on intrinsically complete noble wisdom. Because noble ones know that all objects of experience are unobtainable, they do not grasp at external things in pursuit of some other wisdom. They know that there is no external, separate wisdom to be obtained. This is what is meant by "wisdom does not arise with regard to objects of knowledge."

That is to say, self-awakened noble wisdom is also an expedient expression and must likewise be swept away completely. This also accords with the three gates of liberation: emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness. Since it is empty, signless, and wishless—since not the slightest object can be obtained—there is naturally no noble wisdom to be obtained either. This is the meaning of my expedient statement that "wisdom cannot be apprehended through objects of grasping."

["Those who are not free from deluded thought, through the false habits concerning the beginningless nature and non-nature of things, make such knowing. This knowing is what they do not know. Therefore, regarding external objects, places, characteristics, natures, and non-natures, their deluded thoughts do not cease. They establish what appears before their own mind as direct perception, and speak of and cling to the characteristics of self and what belongs to self. Failing to realize what appears before their own mind as direct perception, they give rise to deluded thoughts concerning wisdom and objects of knowledge. Because of deluded thought, they cannot examine external nature and non-nature, and they rely on the annihilationist view."]

"They give rise to deluded thoughts concerning wisdom and objects of knowledge" means giving rise to deluded thoughts that principles and wisdom are truly existent or truly nonexistent.

Since beginningless time, ignorant ordinary people have been conditioned and accumulated by false conceptual elaborations, thereby developing worldly cleverness and intellectual acumen over countless kalpas. This is what the

Śūraṅgama Sūtra calls: “To establish knowing upon knowing is the root of ignorance.” The self-awakened noble wisdom of which I speak is certainly not like this.

“This knowing is what they do not know” means that this noble wisdom is true knowing, but ignorant ordinary people cannot awaken to it. Thus, they cling to the various externally appearing objects as real and continually discriminate and generate deluded thoughts. With regard to all dharmas manifested by their own minds, they take there to be a real subject and object, and thus continuously grasp and cling. Because foolish people do not realize that all is merely manifested by their own minds, they generate all kinds of discriminating attachments concerning cognition and external objects.

Because foolish people continue such deluded discrimination without interruption, they cannot penetrate the fact that all myriad dharmas are originally without own-nature. Therefore, when I say that wisdom is unobtainable, they again understand this “wisdom unobtainable” through an annihilationist view.

In these two passages, the Buddha explains that wisdom cannot be apprehended. The noble wisdom of self-realization, which is non-discriminating, is not the annihilation of awareness; rather, it realizes that all dharmas are in fact without inherent nature. This wisdom is originally complete and has nothing to do with knowing or not knowing. Ordinary people, however, are not like this. They mistakenly take wisdom to be the broad learning and eloquence of worldly intelligence, and thus become deeply entangled in delusive thoughts. Therefore, when I say that wisdom cannot be apprehended, they immediately associate this with annihilation.

[Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses: There are those who cling to conditioned things, which wisdom does not observe. They call this absence of wisdom—not wisdom; this is what those given to delusive thought say.]

The World-Honored One restated this in verse: Some maintain that the many objects to which delusive thought clings are real and objectively existent. When one is unable to discern all the differences and similarities among these objects, they regard this as lacking wisdom. They consider such “not knowing” to be other than the noble wisdom of self-realization. This is the deluded and erroneous teaching of ordinary people.

[With regard to characteristics that are neither different nor not different, wisdom does not observe them. Obstructions and distance or nearness—this is called erroneous wisdom.]

Because things themselves are obscured and cannot manifest, one may be unable fully to distinguish and know their characteristics of difference and similarity, and thus consider this to be a lack of wisdom. One may further believe that obstructions by material things such as mountains, rocks, walls, earth, water, fire, and wind, as well as distance and nearness, prevent one from observing objects everywhere and therefore from knowing them. To regard this as lacking wisdom is erroneous wisdom.

[When the faculties of the old and young are dim, and wisdom does not arise, yet objects are held to exist truly—this too is called erroneous wisdom.]

Some believe that, owing to age or other causes, the functions of the six sense faculties become incomplete, so that things cannot be perceived normally. They believe that things and objects truly exist but simply cannot be known, and that this constitutes a lack of wisdom. This view too is erroneous wisdom.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, foolish ordinary people are turned about by beginningless, false, evil, and erroneous delusive thoughts. While being thus turned about, they do not properly understand inner realization or verbal exposition. Because they cling to the external characteristics manifested by their own minds, they become attached to expedient teachings. They are unable properly to distinguish the pure characteristics of the four propositions in inner realization.]

“Turned about” means being deluded by false thoughts and thereby revolving through the six realms.

“The four propositions are pure” means that there originally are no four propositions. At this very moment, to speak is itself non-speaking; therefore, the four propositions are pure.

Furthermore, Mahāmati, foolish ordinary people have, since beginningless time, been deluded by false and evil delusive thoughts and have revolved through the six realms. Sentient beings revolving thus have minds darkened by delusion. They do not properly understand the inherently complete “inner realization,” nor the “verbal exposition” that employs expedient teachings. Instead, they take the objects manifested by mind alone to be truly existent, and thus become attached to expedient words themselves. Consequently, they cannot comprehend the ultimate Buddhist purport, which transcends words and thought and does not fall into the four propositions.

Here the Buddha further points out that the root of ordinary people's misunderstanding of the noble wisdom of self-realization as either truly existent or truly nonexistent lies in their lack of inner realization and their misunderstanding of verbal exposition.

[Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: “It is indeed as the World-Honored One has taught. I only pray that the World-Honored One will distinguish and explain verbal exposition and inner realization for me. May I and the other great bodhisattvas become skilled in these two forms of realization, so that ordinary people, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas in future ages will not fall into their errors.”]

“Errors” means erroneous views.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva said to the Buddha: “It is exactly as you have said. I hope that you will explain verbal exposition and inner realization in detail for us. Then I and the other great bodhisattvas will thoroughly understand these two, and in future ages—that is, from this time onward—we will be able to teach future ordinary people and practitioners of the two vehicles without being confused by their erroneous views.”

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Excellent, excellent. Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I shall explain it to you.” Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “Yes, World-Honored One, I respectfully receive your teaching.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The Tathāgatas of the three times possess two kinds of realization: verbal exposition and inner realization. Verbal exposition means teaching the various complete sūtras in accordance with what suits the minds of sentient beings. This is called verbal exposition.

Inner realization means that practitioners depart from the various delusive thoughts manifested by their own minds; they do not fall into the categories of sameness, difference, both, or neither; they transcend all mind, intellect, and consciousness; and they enter the realm of noble self-realization. It is free from the characteristics of what is produced by causes, and cannot be known by any non-Buddhist practitioners, śrāvakas, or pratyekabuddhas who fall into the two extremes. This, I say, is called the Dharma of inner realization. Mahāmati, these are the characteristics of inner realization and verbal exposition. You and the other great bodhisattvas should cultivate and study them.”]

“Complete sūtras”: “complete” means endowed with all wholesome qualities; “accord” means according with the wondrous principle and with the capacities of sentient beings. “Complete sūtras” means teachings that are complete and all-encompassing.

“Transcend all mind, intellect, and consciousness”: “transcend” means to go beyond. It means departing from all delusive thoughts of mental consciousness and transforming consciousness into wisdom.

“Free from the characteristics of what is produced by causes”: “produced by causes” means produced through causes and conditions. The realm of noble self-realization

is free from characteristics produced by causes and conditions. That is, the realm of noble self-realization is not produced by causes and conditions and cannot be attained through the appearances of causes and conditions.

The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: The Buddhas of the three times all possess two kinds of Dharma realization: verbal exposition and inner realization.

Verbal exposition means giving various expedient teachings suited to the capacities of sentient beings; this is called verbal exposition. Inner realization means that practitioners depart from the various delusive thoughts arising from their own minds, do not fall into the erroneous views of the two extremes, such as sameness and difference, and transcend all measures of mental consciousness in order to realize the Tathāgata's noble wisdom, which is inherently complete.

This realm of noble wisdom of self-realization is inherently possessed by all of you. It has nothing to do with being ordinary or holy, is free from all appearances produced by the conjunction of causes and conditions, and cannot be measured or conjectured by non-Buddhists or practitioners of the two vehicles who fall into the erroneous views of the two extremes. This is inner realization.

Mahāmati, these are the characteristics of inner realization and verbal exposition. You and the other great bodhisattvas should cultivate and study them in accordance with reality.

[Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses: I speak of two kinds of realization: inner realization and verbal exposition. Exposition instructs beginners; inner realization is for practitioners.]

“I speak of two kinds of realization” means the two Dharma approaches of which I speak,

“Inner realization and verbal exposition” means inner realization and verbal exposition,

“Exposition instructs beginners” means that verbal exposition is used to teach and inspire beginning students,

“Inner realization is for practitioners” means that inner realization is for transmitting the mind seal to practitioners.

In sum, the Buddha teaches all dharmas solely to enable the assembly to open, reveal, awaken to, and enter the Buddha's knowledge and vision. The Buddha's knowledge and vision is inner realization—what the Laṅkāvatāra teaches as emptiness, the unborn, lack of self-nature, and freedom from the characteristics of the two extremes. This realization is inherently complete in all sentient beings and

originally perfect, with nothing gained or lost; therefore, it can only be personally realized and personally known.

All other bodily practices and verbal teachings—whether the Buddha's broad and long tongue over forty-nine years, Śākyamuni holding up a flower and Mahākāśyapa smiling, or Linji's shout and Deshan's staff—are none other than expedient teachings intended to enable sentient beings to awaken inner realization. Thus, “exposition instructs beginners.” Therefore, Chan Master Dahui Zonggao said: “What enters through a gate is not a family treasure. Know with certainty that the house of the Chan master has no real dharma to give to anyone.”

Summary of This Section:

In the preceding passage, the Buddha introduced noble wisdom, and Mahāmati then mistakenly took noble wisdom to be truly existent. In this section, the Buddha further criticizes the annihilationist misunderstanding that wisdom cannot be apprehended. Mahāmati associates its being unapprehendable with the inability, owing to various limiting conditions, to know the characteristics of all things, and supposes that this should constitute a lack of wisdom. In fact, knowing and not knowing have nothing to do with wisdom.

The World-Honored One teaches according to the capacities of his audience, prescribing medicine for each condition. Yet sentient beings often discriminate and grasp according to their own delusive thoughts. They ignore the audience, premises, and intended principle of the Buddha's teaching, turning his words into fixed thoughts and concepts. Therefore, the Buddha tells us that, for practitioners, entering inner realization is the most crucial matter. The words spoken by the Buddha are only temporary crutches given so that sentient beings attached to appearances may enter the path of liberation. Ultimately, they are meant to lead students to turn the light back upon themselves, cast away the crutches, and walk on their own. This is inner realization.

Therefore, in studying the scriptures and teachings, students should seek realization in their own minds. Only one who can enter inner realization is a true child of the Buddha. Yet we are now far removed from the age of the sages, and historical circumstances and linguistic environments have continually changed.

Mahāmati, speaking face-to-face with the Buddha, still had many misunderstandings; how much more so do we today? Therefore, in this author's view, if students today wish truly to comprehend the Buddhist scriptures, it is best to choose a suitable Dharma gate, penetrate deeply into one practice, and cultivate and realize it, thereby uprooting habitual attachments and delusive thoughts accumulated over many eons. By sealing mind with mind, and also understanding words through mind, one most readily enters the Buddha's ultimate meaning. At the

ultimate point, even the ultimate is unapprehendable. If one can thus lose both ordinary and holy, with words and meanings alike forgotten, there is great rest indeed—what further matter could there be?

29. Do Not Study Worldly Treatises

The previous section explained the distinction between worldly wisdom and eloquence and the noble wisdom of self-realization. In this section, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again asks about the difference between worldly doctrines and the Buddha Dharma, intending to lead everyone to a deeper understanding of verbal exposition and realization of the essential teaching. Here the Buddha makes it still clearer that the Buddha Dharma speaks only of self-realization. All other forms of discourse, if they do not point toward self-realization, merely fall into the heterodox views of worldly wisdom and clever argumentation, taking one ever farther from the path of liberation.

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, on one occasion you said: ‘Do not associate with or study the various worldly doctrines and their manifold arguments. Those who do so embrace craving rather than embrace the Dharma.’ World-Honored One, why did you say this?”]

“Various worldly doctrines” refers to the many heterodox views of the world. One of the most representative is Lokāyata, also called the “Doctrine of Following the World.” Its adherents conform to the assumptions of ordinary worldly people, deny past and future lives, deny rebirth, and maintain that after death everything returns to nothingness. They therefore advocate enjoyment in this present life.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva said to the World-Honored One: “World-Honored One, you once said that one must never rely upon or study the various doctrinal views and numerous arguments of the world. If one relies on and studies them, one will only grasp more firmly at craving and become still less able to accept the truth. In other words, studying worldly doctrines leads people ever farther from the path of liberation. World-Honored One, why do you say this?”

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Worldly discourse employs various expressions and styles, causes and conditions, and analogies, gathering them together as adornments in order to entice and deceive foolish ordinary people. Such people do not enter the reality of self-realization, do not awaken to all dharmas, are inverted by deluded thoughts, and fall into the two extremes. Foolish ordinary people, deluded by ignorance, thereby destroy themselves. They continue through the various destinies and cannot attain liberation. Unable to realize that what appears before them is the mind itself, they do not depart from the imagined external nature and inherent nature to which they cling through deluded thought. Therefore, the

manifold arguments of worldly discourse cannot free one from birth, aging, illness, death, sorrow, grief, suffering, and affliction; they only deceive, delude, and confuse."]

"Gathering them together as adornments": "gathering" means collecting and extensively assembling all kinds of material in order to make one's content appear grand and magnificent.

"Do not enter the reality of self-realization": they cannot directly realize the true realm of realization of the essential teaching.

"Destroy themselves": by accepting wrong knowledge and wrong views, they destroy their own Dharma body and wisdom-life.

The Buddha told Mahāmati: Worldly discourse invariably employs all kinds of rhetorical embellishment, supplemented by extraordinary causal connections, vivid analogies, extensive exposition, and magnificent presentation, in order to portray itself as supreme and unsurpassable. Non-Buddhists use these means to entice and deceive foolish ordinary people, causing them to become absorbed in ornate language and speculation. They thus cannot enter the true realization of their own minds, cannot awaken to the ultimate reality of all dharmas, become deeply mired in deluded and inverted thoughts, and fall into the discriminatory heterodox view of dualistic opposition.

Ordinary people are foolish and deluded, and readily accept such wrong knowledge and views. This destroys their Dharma body and wisdom-life. Continuing to cling to deluded thoughts in this way is to seek dharmas outside the mind; thus they cannot realize that all dharmas are merely illusory manifestations of their own minds, and they continue in rebirth without attaining liberation.

Therefore, the worldly discourse and various speculative explanations of non-Buddhists cannot possibly free people from birth, aging, illness, death, sorrow, grief, suffering, and affliction. They only leave people more deeply deceived, deluded, and confused.

In this passage, the Buddha broadly explains why one should not associate with worldly doctrines. From the standpoint of their essential nature, worldly doctrines have nothing to do with realization of the essential teaching in one's own mind; from the standpoint of relying on and practicing them, the more deeply one studies worldly doctrines, the farther one moves from the path of liberation.

["Mahāmati, Śakra, lord of the devas, was widely versed in many doctrines and himself composed a doctrine of sound. A disciple of those worldly theorists, holding the image of a dragon, went to Śakra's heavenly palace and established his doctrinal

thesis. He vowed to destroy Indra's thousand-spoked wheel, declaring that if he failed, he would cut off each of his heads, one by one, in acknowledgment of his defeat. Having made this vow, he used Śakra's own doctrine to subdue Indra. Śakra was defeated, his chariot was destroyed, and he returned to the human world."]

"Śakra, lord of the devas": another name for Indra, lord of the devas.

"Doctrine of sound": also called treatises on linguistic knowledge; a category of non-Buddhist doctrine.

Mahāmati, Indra had extensively studied and investigated many worldly doctrines, and himself created a worldly school called the "Doctrine of Sound." On one occasion, a disciple of that school manifested in the form of a dragon and came to Indra's heavenly palace.

This disciple was determined to establish his own doctrinal position and vowed to defeat Indra and destroy his thousand-spoked chariot. He swore: if he failed, he would rather cut off all his heads as an acknowledgment of defeat. After making this vow, the disciple debated Indra by drawing upon the contents of Indra's own Doctrine of Sound, and ultimately defeated him. Indra was defeated because the doctrine he had created contained a flaw; naturally, his thousand-spoked chariot was also shattered, and he had no choice but to return to the human world.

Here the Buddha recounts how Indra fell through studying worldly doctrines. The question is this: even if it was a non-Buddhist worldly doctrine, how could Indra, with his wisdom and merit, be defeated by an animal in dragon form? In fact, anyone who establishes a school necessarily clings to a particular view as real and establishes a doctrine upon it. If any view is held to be real and pursued to its conclusion, it will inevitably contradict its own premises. Therefore, if Indra's Doctrine of Sound had not been refuted by an animal, it would certainly have been refuted by someone else. Wherever there is doctrinal construction, there is necessarily a point at which it fails.

["Thus, Mahāmati, worldly discourse uses causes, analogies, and adornment. Even animals can employ various expressions and styles to delude devas and asuras, causing them to cling to views of arising and ceasing—how much more so human beings. Therefore, Mahāmati, worldly discourse should be kept at a distance, for it can bring about the causes of suffering. Do not associate with or study it!"

Mahāmati, just so, all worldly doctrines consist merely of ornate language, causal connections, vivid analogies, and an imposing atmosphere; none can reveal the true reality of dharmas. Even foolish animals can use various worldly expressions to bewilder devas and asuras, causing them to cling deeply to views of arising and ceasing. How much more readily may human beings be deceived by such heterodox

knowledge and discourse? Therefore, Mahāmati, worldly doctrines should be kept at a distance, for these heterodox views are all roots of suffering. Do not rely upon or study them!

["Mahāmati, worldly theorists speak only of the realm of bodily sensation. Mahāmati, there are hundreds of thousands of such worldly doctrines; but in the latter time, five hundred years later, they will destroy the collected teachings, because wrong awareness, wrong causes, and wrong views will flourish and be accepted by evil disciples."]

"Destroy the collected teachings": destroy the true Dharma. Since Buddhist scriptures were compiled through three councils, "the collected teachings" here refers to the Buddhist scriptures.

"Wrong awareness, wrong causes, and wrong views": wrong awareness, wrong causes, and wrong views. Wrong awareness means inverted awareness—namely, the bodily sensations or deluded conceptual consciousness discussed in this passage. Wrong causes means other causes or causelessness. Wrong views are heterodox views, such as views of the body, extremes, wrong views, attachment to views, and attachment to precepts.

Mahāmati, the views of worldly doctrines, in the final analysis, merely discuss the realms of bodily sensation or awareness. Mahāmati, there are hundreds of thousands of such non-Buddhist theories. Five hundred years after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, they will destroy the true Dharma. For at that time wrong awareness, wrong causes, and wrong views will flourish, and people will flock to these distorted perceptions, causeless doctrines, and heterodox views, accepting and practicing them, thereby moving still farther from wisdom and liberation.

["Thus, Mahāmati, worldly doctrines destroy the collected teachings through various expressions and styles, causes and analogies, and adornment. They expound non-Buddhist matters, cling to their own causes and conditions, and lack self-realization. Mahāmati, these non-Buddhists have no discourse of self-realization; concerning other worldly doctrines, they extensively expound immeasurable hundreds of thousands of categories of matters. Lacking self-realization, they do not even know that their worldly doctrines are foolish."]

"Cling to their own causes and conditions": they cling to the various illusory appearances of causes and conditions manifested by their own minds. Simply put, they cling to appearances.

Mahāmati, this is how worldly doctrines destroy the true Dharma: through ornate expressions, extraordinary causal connections, vivid analogies, and an imposing

atmosphere, they expound non-Buddhist theories. They cling to all kinds of appearances, yet never penetrate to the fundamental ground of their own nature.

Mahāmati, non-Buddhists cannot penetrate or understand the suchness of their intrinsic nature. They can only elaborate upon worldly theories unrelated to realization of the essential teaching, expounding countless categories of matters. As an ancient Chan master mockingly said: “When speaking of this sack of skin wrapped in a quilt, they speak of other matters with a kingly air.” They neither recognize the root nor realize how foolish the frivolous theories they uphold are.

Here the Buddha criticizes the harm of the heterodox views found in worldly doctrines: the core of all worldly theories is not realization of one’s own mind, which is the reality of no appearance; thus they cannot reveal the true reality of dharmas and can only deceive people through various techniques of speculation and verbal embellishment.

Yet all the words and meanings of Dharma spoken by the Buddha serve only to lead people to awaken to realization of the essential teaching in their own minds. Such realization is the core and central purpose of Buddhism. In contemporary language, this realization of one’s own mind may be called realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature.

Master Yuanyin once said: “All sūtras and treatises, and all Dharma gates, without exception, expound and elucidate this single central point—realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature—so that people may awaken from delusion, eliminate ignorance, turn away from falsity and return to truth, and return home by the direct road. The reason Buddhism differs from other teachings and transcends non-Buddhist paths lies precisely in its direct engagement with the root of sentient beings’ birth and death, and of their cessation and liberation. This root, in turn, lies in whether one realizes the mind and sees one’s true nature. Therefore, realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature is truly the essence of Buddhism and the crucial key to transcending birth and death!”

Thus, if senior teachers throughout Buddhist circles do not dare to advocate realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, and if we, as disciples of the Buddha, are likewise unwilling to apply ourselves earnestly to realization of the essential teaching, then the Buddha Dharma may be reduced to nothing but lofty and abstruse talk. This would precisely confirm the Buddha’s prophecy: in the age of Dharma decline, worldly doctrines and heterodox views will flourish and destroy the true Dharma. Therefore, we disciples of the Buddha should be deeply vigilant.

[At that time, Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, if the various expressions and styles, causes and analogies, and adornments of non-Buddhist worldly doctrines lack self-realization and merely cling to matters of their own

invention, then you too, World-Honored One, speak worldly doctrines. For the devas, humans, and asuras assembled here from many different regions, you extensively expound immeasurable varieties of expressions and styles. Is this not also self-realization? Does it also fall within the category of all non-Buddhist wisdom and discourse?"]

At that time, Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, if the worldly doctrines of non-Buddhists consist only of various expressions, causes and conditions, metaphors, and ornate embellishments, without realization of the essential principle of intrinsic nature, and are merely ceaseless discriminative attachment, then what you teach, World-Honored One, also counts as a worldly doctrine. For you use innumerable and varied words and metaphors to teach the Dharma to the assembled multitudes, devas, asuras, and others who have come from all the worlds in other directions."

"Does this too count as lacking realization of the essential principle of intrinsic nature? Should not your words likewise be classified among the worldly doctrines and heterodox views of all non-Buddhists—their worldly knowledge, cleverness, and sophistry?"

After the Buddha refuted the various rhetorical and speculative techniques of worldly doctrines, Mahāmati again asked: "World-Honored One, you too teach sentient beings through various causes and conditions, metaphors, ornate language, and doctrinal instructions. Why, then, does this not count as worldly doctrine?" In fact, Buddhism does not reject all worldly literary embellishment and reasoning. On the contrary, the Buddhadharma makes skillful use of every worldly expedient. Moreover, every worldly expedient skillfully employed by the Buddha points to realization of the essential principle of intrinsic nature; each enables people to return to their inherent Buddha-nature. This is the essential difference between the Buddha's verbal teachings and worldly discourse.

The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "I do not teach worldly doctrines, nor do I teach coming and going; I teach only no coming and no going. Mahāmati, coming means arising through the convergence of conditions; going means dispersal and destruction. That which neither comes nor goes is neither arising nor ceasing. The meaning I teach does not fall within the categories of the deluded imaginings of worldly doctrines. Why is this so? Because it does not attach to external natures or their absence; it abides where mind itself manifests and cannot be swayed by the deluded imaginings of the two extremes. When one realizes that the objects of experience lack intrinsic nature and are manifestations of one's own mind, the deluded imaginings arising from mind's manifestations do not arise. When deluded imaginings do not arise, one enters the three gates of liberation—emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness. This is called liberation."

The Buddha told Mahāmati: “I do not teach worldly doctrines, nor do I teach dharmas of coming and going. I teach only ‘no coming and no going.’ Mahāmati, if there is coming, there is arising through the convergence of causes and conditions; if there is going, there is cessation through the dispersal of causes and conditions. All dharmas are nothing but the convergence of causes and conditions; in their essential nature, they come from nowhere and go nowhere. Therefore, in their essential nature, dharmas neither arise nor cease. Such is the teaching I set forth, and it does not fall into the deluded attachments of worldly doctrines.”

Why? Because all that I teach is this: outside the mind there is no dharma. All appearances of dharmas are merely illusory manifestations of one’s own mind; thus the wise are not turned by deluded imaginings based on dualistic oppositions such as existence and nonexistence. This is to say that all phenomena are only “mind.”

All appearances whatsoever are false and lack intrinsic nature. When one realizes that all appearances are illusory manifestations of one’s own mind, and that even mind itself is unobtainable, one no longer gives rise to inverted deluded imaginings. This is to say that “mind” too is unobtainable; therefore, “deluded imaginings do not arise.”

Where deluded imaginings do not arise, one naturally enters into the three gates of liberation: emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness. This is what I call liberation.

The Buddha then told another story:

“Mahāmati, I recall that once, while staying in a certain place, a Brahmin who expounded worldly doctrines came to see me. Without first asking whether I was free, he asked me, ‘Gautama, are all things made?’ I replied, ‘Brahmin, to say that all things are made is the first worldly doctrine.’ He again asked, ‘Are all things not made?’ I again replied, ‘To say that all things are not made is the second worldly doctrine.’

He again asked, ‘Are all things permanent? Are all things impermanent? Do all things arise? Do all things not arise?’ I replied, ‘These are six worldly doctrines.’ Mahāmati, he again asked me, ‘Are all things one? Are all things different? Are all things both? Are all things neither? Do all things arise and appear because of various causes and sensations?’ I replied, ‘These are eleven worldly doctrines.’

“Mahāmati, he again asked me, ‘Are all things indeterminate? Are all things determinate? Is there a self? Is there no self? Is there this world? Is there no this world? Is there another world? Is there no other world? Is there liberation? Is there no liberation? Are all things momentary? Are all things not momentary? Is there space? Is there non-analytical cessation? Is there nirvāṇa? Gautama, are these made or not made? Is there an intermediate state, or is there no intermediate state?’”

“Gautama”: the Buddha’s family name before renunciation.

“Space, non-analytical cessation, and nirvāṇa”: non-analytical cessation means cessation not attained through discernment; here these refer to three kinds of the unconditioned.

Mahāmati, I recall that in a certain place a Brahmin who expounded non-Buddhist worldly doctrines came to see me. Without asking whether I was free, he directly called me by my family name and asked, “Gautama, are all dharmas created by a creator?” I replied, “Brahmin, your assertion that all dharmas are created by a creator is the first worldly doctrine.”

He again asked, “Are all dharmas inherently so, rather than created by anyone?” I again replied, “The assertion that all things are not created by anyone is the second worldly doctrine.”

He again asked, “Are all dharmas permanent and unchanging? Are they constantly changing? Do all dharmas arise and cease? Do they neither arise nor cease?” I said, “These already constitute the sixth worldly doctrine.”

He again asked, “Is the essential nature of all dharmas one? Do all dharmas each possess a different essential nature? Are all dharmas completely identical? Are they completely different? Do all dharmas arise and become manifest because of various sensations?” I replied, “These are eleven worldly doctrines.”

Mahāmati, he again asked, “Are all dharmas indeterminate? Are all dharmas determinate? Does a self exist? Does no self exist? Does this life exist? Does this life not exist? Does another life exist? Does another life not exist? Is there liberation? Is there no liberation? Are all dharmas momentary?”

“Or are all dharmas not momentary? Do the three unconditioned dharmas—space, non-analytical cessation, and nirvāṇa—exist? Gautama, are these three unconditioned dharmas produced through activity, or are they not produced through activity? After death, is there an intermediate-state body, or is there no intermediate-state body?”

“Mahāmati, I then replied: ‘Brahmin, all such assertions are worldly doctrines. They are not what I teach; they are your worldly doctrines. I teach only that the beginningless habitual tendencies of false and deluded imaginings are the cause of the various evils and the three realms of existence. Unable to realize the direct manifestation of their own minds, beings give rise to deluded imaginings and cling to external natures. As in the doctrines of non-Buddhists, they hold that consciousness arises through the conjunction of self, sense faculties, and objects.’

“I am not like this. Brahmin, I do not teach a cause, nor do I teach no cause. I teach only the imagined nature of grasping and what is grasped, and provisionally establish dependent arising. This cannot be realized by you or by others who fall into the continuing attachment to the marks of self. Mahāmati, nirvāṇa, space, and cessation are not truly three things; only their number is three.”

“Consciousness arises through the conjunction of self, sense faculties, and objects”: “self” refers to the divine self of non-Buddhists; “objects” refers to external objects; and “consciousness” refers to the eight consciousnesses. This means that non-Buddhists maintain that the eight consciousnesses arise through the conjunction of the divine self, the sense faculties, and external objects.

“I do not teach a cause, nor do I teach no cause”: non-Buddhists uphold doctrines of different causes or doctrines of no cause.

“Nirvāṇa, space, and cessation”: this refers to the three unconditioned dharmas of space, analytical cessation, and non-analytical cessation.

Mahāmati, I then told him: “Brahmin, everything you have said is a worldly doctrine. This is not the Buddhadharma that I teach; it is the worldly doctrine to which you adhere. I teach only this: the habitual tendencies by which sentient beings, since beginningless time, take the false as real and give rise to deluded discrimination. These alone are the cause of all worldly evils and all forms of existence in the three realms.”

Because sentient beings cannot awaken to reality, they give rise to deluded discrimination and then seek dharmas outside the mind. Thus, like non-Buddhists, they believe that the divine self, the faculties, and their objects combine to produce thought, cognition, and all external dharmas.

The Buddhadharma is not like this. Brahmin, I do not teach a different cause, nor do I teach no cause. I teach only that the grasper and the grasped have never arisen, and that views of subject and object are merely the inverted deluded imaginings of sentient beings. All appearances of dharmas arise through causes and conditions and are wholly illusory. This is not something that you and the others who persistently cling to subject and object can understand. Mahāmati, nirvāṇa, space, and non-analytical cessation are not truly existent even as these three unconditioned dharmas. They are provisionally divided into three only as a skillful means to remove sentient beings’ attachments and guide them.”

“Furthermore, Mahāmati, that Brahmin who expounded worldly doctrines again asked me, ‘Do the three realms of existence exist because ignorance, craving, and karma are their causes, or do they exist without cause?’ I replied, ‘Both of these are also worldly doctrines.’ He again asked, ‘Do all natures fall within universal and

particular characteristics?' I again replied, 'This too is a worldly doctrine. Brahmin, even the mind's stream of deluded calculation concerning external objects is wholly worldly doctrine.'"

Mahāmati, this Brahmin who expounded non-Buddhist worldly doctrines later again asked me: "Do the various realms of the three forms of existence arise because ignorance, craving, and karma are their causes? Or do the three realms of worldly existence arise naturally, without cause?" I replied, "Both of these views are still worldly doctrines."

He again asked, "Can the nature of all dharmas be classified as universals and particulars?" I replied, "This too is a worldly doctrine! Brahmin, even the subtle continuities in which consciousness falsely discriminates external objects all fall within the worldly doctrines of non-Buddhists."

"Furthermore, Mahāmati, that Brahmin who expounded worldly doctrines again asked me, 'Is there anything that is not a worldly doctrine? I understand the essential points of all non-Buddhist teachings and can employ various verbal expressions, causes and conditions, metaphors, and embellishments.' I again replied, 'Brahmin, there is. It is not what you possess; it is neither activity, doctrinal establishment, nor speech. Yet it is not the absence of various verbal expressions, nor the absence of causes, metaphors, and embellishments.'"

"Neither activity, doctrinal establishment, nor speech": it is free from contrivance, conceptual establishment, and verbal expression.

Later, this Brahmin who expounded worldly doctrines again asked me: "Is there a dharma that is not a worldly doctrine? I understand the essential points of all non-Buddhist worldly doctrines. I can skillfully employ every technique of verbal embellishment, causal explanation, figurative metaphor, and ornate expression. Is there some other dharma beyond these?"

I again replied, "Brahmin, there indeed is such a dharma. Everything in which you are skilled is unrelated to this dharma. This dharma is free from contrivance, conceptual establishment, and speech; yet it is not devoid of verbal expression, causes and conditions, metaphors, and embellishment."

"The Brahmin said, 'What is that which is not a worldly doctrine? What is neither non-doctrinal establishment nor non-speech?' I replied, 'Brahmin, there is that which is not a worldly doctrine, but none of you non-Buddhists can know it, because you falsely imagine and attach to external natures as real. It is that in which deluded imaginings do not arise and one realizes existence and nonexistence. When one realizes the direct manifestation of one's own mind, deluded imaginings do not

arise. When one does not receive external objects, deluded imaginings cease forever.'

This is called a non-worldly discourse; it is my Dharma, not yours. Brahmin, to summarize your views: whether coming or going, dying or being born, pleasure or suffering, concealment or manifestation, tactile contact or attachment to various appearances, continuity through the conjunction of conditions, desire, or attachment based on causes—Brahmin, such notions are your worldly discourses; they are not mine."

"Neither a non-tenet nor a non-discourse": "neither non-" is a double negation. That is, the Brahmin then said, "Whose, then, is the orthodox tenet? Whose is the correct discourse?" What he implied was: "I stand at the summit of all paths; apart from me, who else could there be?"

The Brahmin further said: "Then what exactly do you mean by a non-worldly discourse? What is the Dharma of the true tenet that you speak of? What kind of discourse counts as your correct discourse?"

I replied at the time: "Brahmin, there truly is an authentic Dharma that is not a worldly discourse. You non-Buddhist adherents cannot know it because, through inverted discrimination, you take illusory and unreal external objects to be real. The Dharma of non-worldly discourse is not giving rise to inverted deluded thoughts; it is clearly realizing that both existence and nonexistence are mere idle theories. All dharmas are manifested by mind alone. Therefore, one gives rise to no inverted deluded thoughts, no longer seeks outwardly beyond the mind, and deluded thoughts cease forever. This is the Dharma of non-worldly discourse. It is the Buddhadharma that I teach, not the worldly teachings in which you are skilled."

"Brahmin, I shall briefly summarize the views of you non-Buddhist adherents: what you speak of is coming and going, birth and death, suffering and pleasure, concealment and manifestation, bodily contact and sensation, the various appearances to which you cling conceptually, the continuous round of rebirth through the conjunction of three conditions, sensual desire, and the causal origins of dharmas to which you cling conceptually. Brahmin, all such discriminative inferences are your worldly discourses, not my Buddhadharma."

"Mahāmati, when the Brahmin versed in worldly discourses asked in this way, I answered in this way. He then fell silent and withdrew without taking leave. Reflecting on what he himself comprehended, he thought: 'This Śākya ascetic speaks beyond the scope of my understanding, teaching non-arising, no appearances, and no causes; he realizes that appearances are manifestations of his own deluded thoughts, and thus deluded thoughts do not arise.'"

“Reflecting on what he himself comprehended” means considering matters according to what he himself had understood—that is, thinking within his own established modes of thought and theoretical framework.

“Beyond the scope of my understanding”: he believed that he understood all dharmas, and so regarded the Buddha’s teaching as lying beyond his own comprehension—as something utterly inconceivable.

Mahāmati, the Brahmin versed in worldly discourses asked in this way, and I answered in this way. He responded with silence and departed without farewell. Then, using what he himself understood, he weighed and analyzed each point of the Buddha’s teaching, finally concluding: “This Śākya ascetic teaches that dharmas are unborn, without appearances, and not of the nature of causes and conditions; he teaches that all appearances are manifested by the deluded thoughts of one’s own mind, and that once one discerns this, no inverted deluded thoughts arise. Such views cannot be reached by my skill in thought and debate. They are truly beyond comprehension!”

This shows that the Brahmin was enthralled by worldly studies of names and appearances and took pride in them. Therefore, although the Buddha used various skillful means to open and guide him, he was unable to awaken in accord with them. Likewise, if ordinary sentient beings become engrossed in relying upon and studying worldly discourses, they will only further strengthen their attachments and find it still harder to realize the true meaning of the Buddhadharma.

“Mahāmati, this is what you previously asked me: why I said that drawing near to and studying the various arguments of worldly discourses leads one to embrace desire, rather than to embrace the Dharma. Mahāmati said to the Buddha, ‘World-Honored One, what is the meaning of embracing desire and embracing the Dharma?’ The Buddha told Mahāmati, ‘Excellent, excellent! You are able to consider and inquire into such a question for the sake of future sentient beings. Listen carefully, listen carefully, and contemplate it well. I shall explain it to you.’ Mahāmati said to the Buddha, ‘Yes, I respectfully receive your instruction.’”

“Mahāmati, this is what you previously asked me: why I said that relying upon and studying the various arguments of worldly discourses only leads one to embrace desire more fully, rather than the true Dharma.”

Mahāmati then asked: “World-Honored One, what does it mean to embrace desire? And what does it mean to embrace the true Dharma?”

In response to this question, the Buddha again explained the difference between the Buddhadharma and worldly discourses:

“The Buddha told Mahāmati: What is called desire is taking or rejecting, contact or savoring, clinging to external objects, falling into the views of the two extremes, and again producing the aggregates of suffering—birth, old age, sickness, death, sorrow, grief, suffering, and affliction. All such troubles arise from craving; this is due to drawing near to worldly discourses and those who uphold them. All Buddhas and I call this desire. This is called embracing desire, not embracing the Dharma.”

The Buddha told Bodhisattva Mahāmati: “What is called desire is discriminating between taking and rejecting, becoming absorbed in sensations such as taste and touch, clinging to external objects, and falling into the discriminative view of dualistic opposition. The five aggregates then accumulate, becoming the cause of all suffering, from which arise birth, old age, sickness, death, sorrow, grief, suffering, and affliction.”

All these faults arise from craving and attachment; they result from being permeated by worldly theories. Or it may be that, because craving and attachment are so intense, the schools of worldly theories are created. All Buddhas and I call this desire. This is what I mean by embracing and accepting desire while being unable to embrace the true Dharma.

“Mahāmati, how does one embrace the Dharma? By clearly realizing that what is directly experienced is manifested by one’s own mind; by seeing the marks of the non-self of persons and the non-self of dharmas; by not giving rise to deluded thoughts; by fully knowing the highest stages, free from mind, intellect, and consciousness; by receiving the wisdom empowerment of all Buddhas; by fully embracing the ten inexhaustible statements; and by attaining unimpeded mastery in all dharmas. This is called the Dharma: namely, not falling into any view, any falsity, any deluded thought, any discrimination, or either of the two extremes.”

“Fully knowing the highest stages” means truly comprehending the most definitive and ultimately consummate state.

“Any discrimination”: all discriminations arise only through conceptual attachment; therefore, it is explained here as “discrimination.” The Tang and Wei translations both use the term “discrimination” at this point.

Mahāmati, what does it mean to embrace the true Dharma? It is to realize that all appearances are manifested by one’s own mind alone; to see clearly the truth of the non-self of persons and the non-self of dharmas; not to give rise to inverted deluded thoughts; to know the ultimate state, free from mind, intellect, and consciousness; to receive the wisdom empowerment of all Buddhas; to fulfill immeasurable practices and vows; and, with regard to all dharmas, to abide nowhere, act without contrivance, and naturally attain unimpeded freedom. This is the Buddhadharma.

The Buddhadharma does not fall into any view, any false unreality, any deluded discrimination, or dualistic opposition.

“Mahāmati, many foolish non-Buddhist adherents fall into the two extremes, whether eternalism or annihilationism; they are not people of keen wisdom. By accepting the theory of no cause, they give rise to eternalism; when external causes perish and causes and conditions are regarded as without inherent nature, they give rise to annihilationism. Mahāmati, because I do not see arising, abiding, or ceasing, I call this the Dharma. Mahāmati, this is what is meant by desire and the Dharma. You and the other great bodhisattvas should cultivate and study this.”

“By accepting the theory of no cause, they give rise to eternalism”: the non-Buddhist theory of no cause holds that the four great elements do not arise from causes and conditions, but are permanent and unchanging; this is eternalism.

“When external causes perish and causes and conditions are regarded as without inherent nature, they give rise to annihilationism”: seeing dharmas change, they assume that the external creative cause has perished and that there are no causes, conditions, or karmic results. This is annihilationism.

Mahāmati, many foolish non-Buddhist adherents cling to dualistic theories, maintaining either eternalism or annihilationism. Such people are not wise. In the final analysis, non-Buddhist views either take the four great elements to be substantially existent and permanent, thereby falling into eternalism, or deny the reality of cause and effect, thereby falling into annihilationism. Mahāmati, as I see it, there have never been marks of arising, abiding, or ceasing. Since all appearances are absent, this is provisionally designated the true mark of the Buddhadharma. Mahāmati, this is the difference I teach between the dharma of worldly desire and the true supramundane Dharma. You and the other great bodhisattvas should cultivate and study it.

This passage explains what it means to “embrace the Dharma”: to be free from all dharmas, with not a single dharma truly existent, is the true Dharma; it is liberation, complete with all virtues and capacities, the supreme state realized by all Buddhas. It is provisionally named “Buddhadharma.” Hence the saying: “The Dharma originally is not a dharma; the no-Dharma dharma is also dharma.” To embrace the Dharma and recognize its principle is to realize “liberation”—yet at this point, even speaking of liberation is mere idle theory.

“At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses: All worldly theories are the false assertions of non-Buddhist adherents. They mistakenly posit agent and action; thus they have no principle of their own.”

The World-Honored One restated this in verse: All worldly doctrines and theories are false assertions of non-Buddhist adherents. They mistakenly conceive of agents, actions, and the dharmas that are produced, without recognizing the root. Therefore, no matter how meticulous their reasoning or ornate their words, they cannot thoroughly comprehend the ultimate principle of intrinsic nature.

“Only my own principle is free from agent and action. I teach it to my disciples so that they may be far removed from all worldly discourses.”

Only this principle of intrinsic nature, complete from the very beginning, is ultimately clear and free from agent and action. Therefore, I explain it in detail to the Buddha’s disciples, enabling you to remain far from worldly discourses.

“The measure of mind cannot be seen; do not examine the two minds. The grasping and the grasped are without inherent nature; both annihilationism and eternalism are abandoned.”

At the place of ultimate principle, not the slightest trace of mind or measure can be seen, nor can the opposing dualities be examined. Both grasper and grasped are not truly existent, and one is free from the two views of annihilationism and eternalism.

“So long as mind continues to flow and turn, this is worldly discourse. One whose deluded thoughts do not turn sees one’s own mind.”

Whenever one follows the flow and transformations of consciousness, or has the slightest abiding attachment, one falls into worldly discourse. An ancient worthy said, “As soon as there is right and wrong, the mind is thrown into confusion.” Conversely, if one can at all times avoid being turned by any deluded consciousness, one sees true reality and thereby sees one’s own original mind.

“What comes is said to be the arising of phenomena; what goes is said to be the disappearance of phenomena. Clearly knowing coming and going, deluded thoughts no longer arise.”

What is called “coming” is the arising of sense objects, and what is called “going” is their dispersal. Once one knows that all coming and going are merely the gathering and dispersal, union and separation of causes and conditions, and are not truly existent, one sees that dharmas are originally quiescent and deluded thoughts no longer arise.

“Eternal and non-eternal, what is made and what is not made, this world and other worlds—such matters are all the scope of worldly discourse.”

As for assertions of permanence or impermanence, of what is made or not made, of this present world or past and future worlds, and the like, such people merely claim

to possess understanding. They are only skilled in the erroneous theories of the world; they have not realized the principle of the Buddhadharma.

Outline of This Section:

This section begins with Mahāmati Bodhisattva's question to the Buddha as to why one should keep far from worldly discourse, and proceeds to distinguish the inner realization of the Buddha-Dharma from the worldly discourse of non-Buddhist paths.

The Buddha first describes the characteristics and nature of worldly discourse, as well as the consequences of relying on it. He then cites the example of disciples of the theory of sound overturning their teacher's thesis, showing that worldly discourse ultimately amounts to vain speculation and has no foundation whatsoever. The Buddha also predicts that, in the Dharma-ending age, the worldly discourse of non-Buddhist paths will undermine the Buddha-Dharma.

Next, the Buddha explains by contrast what is meant by the intrinsic inner realization of the Buddha-Dharma. Taking the episode of a Brahmin who came to question the Buddha as an example, he points out that the difference between the Buddha-Dharma and the worldly discourse of non-Buddhist paths lies solely in the inner realization of one's own mind—that is, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. The Buddha-Dharma offers hundreds and thousands of skillful means, all pointing only to realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature; only this is the Buddha-Dharma.

Finally, the Buddha reiterates the harm in those who draw near to worldly discourse: they embrace craving and desire but do not embrace the true Dharma. He again points out that the true Dharma is the inner realization of one's own mind, inherently complete from the beginning; only this enables one to remain forever free from the erroneous views of annihilationism and eternalism.

XXX. Distinctions in Nirvāṇa

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, when you speak of nirvāṇa, what dharma do you call nirvāṇa, that the various non-Buddhist paths each give rise to deluded conceptions of it?" The Buddha told Mahāmati: "Listen carefully, listen carefully, and ponder this well. I shall explain it to you. The nirvāṇa imagined by the various non-Buddhist paths is not nirvāṇa in accordance with their deluded conceptions." Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "Yes, I respectfully receive your instruction."]

“Not nirvāṇa in accordance with their deluded conceptions” means that those deluded conceptions do not accord with nirvāṇa.

At this time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, the various non-Buddhist paths each give rise to different deluded and mistaken views concerning nirvāṇa. What, then, is true nirvāṇa?” The Buddha told Mahāmati Bodhisattva: “The various non-Buddhist paths give rise to all kinds of deluded discriminations concerning nirvāṇa; these run directly contrary to true nirvāṇa.”

Here the Buddha first makes clear that the nirvāṇa spoken of by the Buddha differs from that spoken of by non-Buddhist paths. Because their unreal and deluded imaginings are so intense, they cannot possibly dream of the true meaning of the nirvāṇa taught by the Buddha.

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: “Some non-Buddhist paths regard the cessation of the aggregates, realms, and sense bases; freedom from desire for objects; seeing dharmas as impermanent; the non-arising of mind, mental factors, and their categories; no thought of the objects of past, future, or present; and the exhaustion of all feeling aggregates—as when a lamp is extinguished or a seed decays, so that deluded thought no longer arises—as nirvāṇa. Mahāmati, seeing destruction is not what is called nirvāṇa.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati: Some non-Buddhist paths consider this to be nirvāṇa: the destruction of all states, including the aggregates, realms, and sense bases; relinquishing the many desires that arise in relation to objects; seeing all dharmas as impermanent; the non-arising of the various minds and mental factors; no thought of the characteristics of the three times—present, past, and future; and the exhaustion of all feeling aggregates. They imagine that deluded thoughts will no longer arise, just as an extinguished lamp will not be rekindled and a decayed seed will not sprout again. Mahāmati, it is not the mere perception that dharmas have “ceased” that is called nirvāṇa.

[Or they regard liberation as going from one place to another, with the conception of objects extinguished, like the stopping of wind.]

“Place” means a location or site; some also interpret it as a category.

“The conception of objects is extinguished”: the extinction of conception is the extinction of thought. Here it means that both external objects and the thinking mind cease.

Mahāmati, some non-Buddhist paths consider liberation to be going from one place to another. For example, mind and objects previously exist and then both cease, like the stopping of wind; they consider this to be liberation.

[Or they regard the destruction of the perceiver, the perceived, and perception as liberation.]

Some non-Buddhist paths take the destruction of both the perceiver and the perceived to be liberation.

[Or, seeing permanence and impermanence, they conceive liberation.]

Some non-Buddhist paths regard not discriminating between permanence and impermanence as liberation.

This is muddled and unclear, confusing things with concepts. Master Ouyi condemned it as “blindly groping Chan.”

[Or they see that conceptions of various appearances bring about the cause for the arising of suffering. Having reflected thus, and not skillfully realizing that the mind itself manifests directly, they fear appearances and perceive no appearance. Deeply delighting in this, they conceive it as nirvāṇa.]

Some non-Buddhist paths believe that perceiving and conceiving all kinds of appearances is the cause that brings about all suffering. Having formed this view, because they cannot realize that all appearances are directly manifested by their own mind, they become afraid of the various appearances. They dare not perceive appearances and only hope to avoid them. They deeply delight in not perceiving appearances and consider this absence of appearances to be nirvāṇa.

Such non-Buddhist paths in fact hold an annihilationist view. They cling to a state without appearances, reject existence in favor of nonexistence, and are attached to inert emptiness.

[Or they realize that the particular and common characteristics of all inner and outer dharmas have an existence that does not perish through past, future, or present, and conceive this as nirvāṇa.]

Some non-Buddhist paths believe that all dharmas, including the inner mind and external objects, each possess their own particular and common characteristics, and that these characteristics truly exist and do not perish in the past, present, or future. They consider realizing this ever-abiding and indestructible nature to be nirvāṇa. This takes an “ever-abiding and indestructible nature” to be truly existent.

[Or they say that the destruction of self, persons, sentient beings, life spans, and all dharmas is nirvāṇa.]

Some non-Buddhist paths believe that the complete annihilation of all dharmas, such as self, persons, sentient beings, and life spans, is nirvāṇa.

[Or, through the evil burning of non-Buddhist wisdom, they see primordial nature and the puruṣa. The two are distinct; primordial nature is said to arise from the puruṣa. Just as with the primordial beginning, the guṇas transform. Taking the guṇas to be the agent, they conceive this as nirvāṇa.]

“Primordial nature and the puruṣa”: primordial nature is the nature of the primordial beginning, while the puruṣa is the spiritual self.

“Just as with the primordial beginning”: the primordial beginning is so called because the spiritual powers of non-Buddhist paths cannot go beyond eighty thousand eons, and thus they take the time before eighty thousand eons ago as the beginning. “Comparison” means analogy or inference by analogy.

“Guṇa”: guṇa refers to a quality or an active agent.

Some non-Buddhist paths, through mistaken views, falsely posit the real existence of primordial nature and the spiritual self. They consider the two distinct, holding that the spiritual self gives rise to the original, primordial nature, from which all things arise in successive order. If one could reverse this process, trace all things back to their source, find the original agent, and return to that original source, they consider this to be nirvāṇa.

[Or they say that merit and non-merit are exhausted; or that all afflictions are exhausted; or that this is wisdom.]

Some non-Buddhist paths believe that evil karma, merit, and afflictions naturally come to an end, and that this is wisdom or nirvāṇa, without relying further on wisdom to eliminate afflictions and attain nirvāṇa.

[Or they see Īśvara as the true agent producing birth and death, and conceive this as nirvāṇa.]

Some non-Buddhist paths believe that Mahāīśvara is the true master who controls birth and death; therefore, they regard returning to Mahāīśvara as nirvāṇa.

[Or they say that things arise successively from one another and that birth and death have no other cause. Thus they cling to causes, yet in their delusion they cannot realize this. Because they do not know, they conceive it as nirvāṇa.]

Some non-Buddhist paths believe that sentient beings arise successively from one another, that birth and death are simply thus, and that there is no other cause. Yet this discriminative attachment to successive continuity is precisely the cause of birth and death. Because such non-Buddhist paths are deluded and cannot discern this, they regard this successive arising as nirvāṇa. For example, the worldly expression “rebirth through nirvāṇa” belongs to this category.

[Or some non-Buddhist paths say that attaining the path of ultimate truth is nirvāṇa.]

Some non-Buddhist paths believe they have ascertained the true nature of all worldly dharmas, cling to it as real, and regard this as nirvāṇa.

[Or they see merit, the arising of merit, and their combination as one, different, both, or neither, and conceive this as nirvāṇa.]

“Merit”: because the guṇas, as agents, can generate all dharmas, this “productive guṇa” is called merit. This means that some non-Buddhist paths believe that the agent producing all things and what it produces are one and the same, possessing such characteristics as unity, difference, both, or neither. They regard awakening to this principle as nirvāṇa.

[Or they see the variegated colors of peacocks, various mixed jewels, and the nature of sharp thorns as arising from primordial nature; having seen this, they conceive it as nirvāṇa.]

Some non-Buddhist paths see the patterns and colors of birds and beasts, various treasures, and all things as marvels of natural creation. They consider this way of nature to be nirvāṇa.

[Mahāmati, some realize the twenty-five realities.]

“The twenty-five realities” are the twenty-five principles established by the Sāṃkhya non-Buddhist school. It holds that the spiritual self is the essential substance of spirit, while primordial nature is the essential substance of matter. The relationship between the spiritual self and primordial nature is like that between a lame person and a blind person: the spiritual self has awareness but cannot act, while primordial nature can act but cannot generate the motive for action.

The spiritual self directs primordial nature to act, and primordial nature acts to fulfill the spiritual self’s motive. From these two principles arise the other twenty-three principles, making twenty-five in all. From these twenty-five principles all dharmas arise.

Specifically, the “spiritual self” acts upon “primordial nature,” giving rise to awareness; awareness gives rise to conception; and conception gives rise to the five subtle elements—form, sound, fragrance, taste, and touch—the five cognitive faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—the five faculties of action—speech, hands, feet, the reproductive organ, and the anus—and the mind faculty. From the five subtle elements arise the five great elements—space, wind, fire, water, and earth.

Mahāmati, some non-Buddhist paths believe that realizing the twenty-five true principles is attaining nirvāṇa.

[Or they regard a king's protection of the country through upholding the six categories as nirvāṇa.]

"A king's protection of the country": "king" means one who takes responsibility for sentient beings, while "protecting the country" means protecting the sentient beings of a region.

"The doctrine of six categories": this refers to the six categories, or six meanings, posited by the Vaiśeṣika non-Buddhist school. All dharmas are said to arise from these six meanings. The six categories are: first, substance, the primary principle, referring to the entities of dharmas, of which there are nine: earth, water, fire, wind, space, time, direction, self, and mind.

Second, quality, the dependent principle, referring to the attributes and functions of the category of substance: color, fragrance, taste, touch, number, quantity, distinctness, conjunction, disjunction, otherness, thisness, cognition, pleasure, pain, desire, anger, and exertion. Third, action, the principle of function, referring to the movement of substances: taking, relinquishing, contracting, extending, and moving.

Fourth, universality, the principle of common characteristics, referring to existence, which is shared by all dharmas. Fifth, particularity, the principle of distinct characteristics, referring to the differentiating qualities of dharmas. Sixth, the category of inherence, also called the principle of nonobstruction. This means that the five categories of substance, quality, action, universality, and particularity mutually encompass one another without separation.

Some non-Buddhist paths believe that upholding these six categories and protecting sentient beings enables one to attain nirvāṇa.

[Or they see time as the agent, and time periods as the world; those who realize this conceive it as nirvāṇa.]

Some non-Buddhist paths believe that time is the creator and that time periods determine the arising, cessation, and transformations of all worldly dharmas. They regard realizing the principle that time creates as nirvāṇa.

[Or they speak of nature.]

Some non-Buddhist paths believe that all dharmas truly exist and that realizing the source of the universe to be "real existence" is nirvāṇa.

[Or they speak of non-nature.]

Some non-Buddhist paths hold that all dharmas are truly nonexistent, and that awakening to "true nonexistence" as the source of the universe is nirvāṇa.

[Some say that the knowing nature is not a nature.]

Some non-Buddhist paths hold that knowing the coexistence of "being" and "nonbeing," and awakening to being and nonbeing as jointly present at the source of the universe, is nirvāṇa.

[Some see a distinction between awareness and nirvāṇa, and conceive of it as nirvāṇa.]

Some non-Buddhist paths hold that there truly exists what they call "obscure awareness." This dim awareness differs from the nirvāṇa taught by other schools. Only by realizing this obscure awareness, they say, does one attain the true ultimate nirvāṇa.

Such deluded and erroneous views concerning nirvāṇa are inexhaustible; there are far more than merely twenty-one kinds. Yet, when all these deluded conceptions of nirvāṇa are reduced to their essence, there is really only one: that there is birth and death to be ended and nirvāṇa to be attained.

[Such are the various deluded conceptions taught by non-Buddhist paths. What they seek to attain cannot be attained; the wise reject them.]

All these many deluded and erroneous views are taught by non-Buddhist paths. Relying on these delusions in cultivation will not enable one to attain the so-called nirvāṇa they imagine. The wise reject them.

Mahāmati, all these fall into the play of the two extremes, yet they conceive them to be nirvāṇa. In all these deluded conceptions of nirvāṇa held by non-Buddhist paths, there is neither arising nor ceasing.

"In all these, there is neither arising nor ceasing": "therein" refers to nirvāṇa itself, which is empty. Not only can either arising or ceasing not be found; nirvāṇa itself cannot be found. This is called true nirvāṇa. Non-Buddhist paths, however, cling to the marks of arising and ceasing, believing that there is a truly existent nirvāṇa to attain and truly existent birth and death to end. They do not understand that arising and ceasing are unreal deluded conceptions; therefore, the "nirvāṇa" they attain is likewise a deluded conception.

Mahāmati, all that these non-Buddhist paths teach falls into the play of the two extremes, though they themselves take it to be nirvāṇa. They give rise to many deluded and erroneous views of nirvāṇa, whereas in truth no arising or ceasing can be found in any dharma.

Mahāmati, regarding each and every nirvāṇa of the non-Buddhist paths, when their own theories are examined with wisdom, none has any valid basis. Their deluded mind, manas, and consciousness come and go, drifting, racing, and flowing on; none of them attains nirvāṇa.

Mahāmati, the various non-Buddhist views of nirvāṇa are all deluded and erroneous. Examined with wisdom, none can stand. The deluded minds of these non-Buddhist paths merely drift back and forth and race along in continuous flow; not one of their theories of nirvāṇa accords with true nirvāṇa.

Above, the World-Honored One has enumerated the many deluded conceptions of nirvāṇa held by non-Buddhist paths and identified the crucial cause of these erroneous views: all such mistaken views of nirvāṇa are constructs of delusion, discriminating mind, and consciousness; they are not true nirvāṇa. What follows reveals the characteristics of true nirvāṇa.

Mahāmati, the nirvāṇa of which I speak is this: thoroughly and correctly knowing the manifestations of one's own mind; not clinging to external characteristics; being free from the four propositions; seeing the realm as it truly is; not falling into the two extremes of deluded conceptions manifested by one's own mind; knowing that grasper and grasped cannot be found; not seeing any of the measures and calculations as established; and not accepting the deluded projections of the ignorant concerning reality.

Having abandoned these, one attains the noble Dharma of self-realization, knows the twofold selflessness, departs from the two afflictions, completely removes the two obscurations, and is forever free from the two forms of birth and death. The higher and higher bhūmis, the ground of the Tathāgata, and profound samādhis such as those like an illusion, free from mind, manas, and consciousness—these are called nirvāṇa. Mahāmati, you and the other bodhisattva mahāsattvas should cultivate and learn in this way, and swiftly abandon all non-Buddhist views of nirvāṇa.

Mahāmati, the nirvāṇa of which I speak is realization and thorough comprehension of the manifestations of one's own mind. Outwardly, one does not grasp the "characteristics" of external objects; inwardly, one is free from discriminating attachment to the "names" of the four propositions. One sees the true reality, does not fall into the two extremes of deluded conceptions arising from one's own mind, and knows that both grasper and grasped cannot be found. One does not regard as established any principles produced through the discriminating calculations of consciousness, for these are the various false projections that ordinary people make concerning true reality; the wise do not grasp or accept them.

Names, characteristics, and deluded conceptions: once these deluded and erroneous views have been abandoned, one accords with the noble Dharma of self-realization. One then realizes the twofold selflessness of persons and dharmas, departs from the fundamental and subsidiary afflictions, completely removes the afflictive and cognitive obscurations, and is forever free from the two forms of birth and death—segmented and transformational. This is “right wisdom.”

Endowed with such right wisdom, one transcends all the bhūmis, directly realizes the ground of the Tathāgata, and attains profound samādhis such as those like an illusion. Thus one is free from mind, manas, and consciousness; this is provisionally called the nirvāṇa of suchness.

Mahāmati, you and the other great bodhisattvas should cultivate and learn in this way, and should immediately abandon the many erroneous non-Buddhist views of nirvāṇa.

At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:

Non-Buddhist views of nirvāṇa—
each gives rise to deluded conceptions.
These arise from the mind’s imaginings;
they provide no means to liberation.

Non-Buddhist paths give rise to various deluded conceptions of nirvāṇa. These delusions are all established on the basis of the deluded activity of the eight consciousnesses. If one relies on these non-Buddhist paths, one will certainly not attain liberation.

Those ignorant of what binds and is bound
are far from skillful means.
Non-Buddhist conceptions of liberation—
liberation will never arise from them.

The ignorant are deeply bound by subject and object. Not knowing that these are all deluded conceptions, they remain far from the many skillful means that lead to liberation. The erroneous non-Buddhist view of liberation is founded on the delusions of mind, manas, and consciousness, and thus can never bring about true liberation.

The paths pursued by each form of knowledge differ;
non-Buddhist views nevertheless converge.
None of them has liberation,
because of ignorant deluded conceptions.

People's erroneous views of nirvāṇa differ from one another, yet they also have something in common: these erroneous views of nirvāṇa are all ignorant deluded conceptions, and none is true transcendence and liberation.

All ignorant non-Buddhist paths
falsely see an agent and its actions.
Their doctrines concern being and nonbeing;
none of them has liberation.

Non-Buddhist paths are ignorant and falsely see an agent and its actions. Their theories cannot escape the play of the two extremes of being and nonbeing. They do not know that discriminations between the two extremes are false, and they mistake delusion for truth; therefore, none of them attains genuine liberation.

Ordinary ignorant beings delight in deluded conceptions
and do not hear true wisdom.
Words are the root of the three kinds of suffering;
reality is the cause of extinguishing suffering.

Ordinary people are ignorant. They cling to deluded conceptual speech and never tire of it, while turning a deaf ear to true wisdom. They do not know that speech is the root of the three kinds of suffering—suffering of suffering, suffering of change, and pervasive suffering of conditioned existence—nor do they know that realizing true reality is the proper cause of freedom from suffering.

Like an image in a mirror,
though it appears, it does not exist.
In the mirror of their deluded minds,
the ignorant see the two as existent.

This is like an image appearing in a mirror: though it appears, it is not truly existent. Ordinary people are the same. Within the illusory appearances of the mirror of their deluded minds, they falsely give rise to the dual view of subject and object and take it to be real.

Not knowing mind and its conditions,
one gives rise to the two deluded conceptions.
When mind and its objects are understood,
deluded conceptions do not arise.

Because they do not thoroughly understand that the conditioning mind and the conditioned objects are originally illusory appearances and originally quiescent, they falsely give rise to the dual views of subject and object. If they thoroughly

understand that mind and objects are originally empty and illusory, then deluded conceptions do not arise.

Mind itself is the various things,
free from the characteristics of subject and object.
Phenomena appear, yet there is no appearance—
not as the ignorant falsely imagine.

The various dharmas are not separate from mind and are originally free from the characteristics of subject and object. All objects are like dreams and illusions: though they appear, nothing is actually manifested. The dharmas are not as ordinary people falsely imagine them to be, as truly existing consciousnesses and external objects.

The three realms are only deluded conceptions;
external objects do not exist at all.
Deluded conceptions manifest in many ways,
but ordinary ignorant beings cannot understand.

The three realms are mind-only, established solely through delusion. Outside mind, not a single dharma can truly be found, and mind itself likewise cannot be found. Even the various appearances and realms, including nirvāṇa, manifest in dependence on deluded conceptions, but ordinary people cannot understand this.

The sūtras all speak of deluded conceptions,
which never go beyond names.
If speech is abandoned,
there is likewise nothing that can be spoken.

If ordinary people cannot understand the true meaning, then the various sūtras and treatises also become, for them, nothing but deluded discrimination; they never go beyond the deluded conceptions of verbal names and terms. If one can understand the true reality beyond the delusions of speech, one will know that the Buddhas have taught nothing.

Summary of This Section:

This section examines what nirvāṇa is. In response to Bodhisattva Mahāmati's question about nirvāṇa, the Buddha first enumerates and refutes twenty-one erroneous non-Buddhist views of nirvāṇa, pointing out that these mistaken views have not departed from deluded conceptions and the play of the two extremes, and are rejected by the wise. The Buddha then explains that the Buddha's nirvāṇa is free from mind, manas, and consciousness.

Finally, in verse form, the text briefly explains that non-Buddhist paths cannot attain liberation because they are carried along by deluded conceptions. Thus, liberation is

attained by departing from deluded discrimination. It also points out that, if sentient beings did not cling to provisional names and doctrines of speech, the Buddha would never have taught any Dharma.

Thirty-One: The Tathāgata's Awakening-Nature

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, I pray that you will explain samyaksaṃbuddha. May I and the other mahāsattva bodhisattvas become skilled in the Tathāgata’s intrinsic nature, awakening ourselves and awakening others.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Ask whatever you wish, and I shall answer according to your questions.” Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, is the Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Awakened One, something made or not made? Is it an effect or a cause? Is it that which characterizes, or that which is characterized? Is it the speaker or that which is spoken? Is it the knower or that which is known? Are such terms as these different from it, or not different from it?”]

“Samyaksaṃbuddha”: samyak means “correct”; saṃ indicates universality; and buddha means awakening. Put simply, samyaksaṃbuddha means correct, universal, awakening.

“Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One”: Tathāgata, Worthy One, and Perfectly Awakened One are three titles denoting the virtues of the Tathāgata’s dharmakāya. The dharmakāyas of all Buddhas possess ten such titles of virtue, including “Tathāgata,” “Worthy One,” and “Perfectly and Universally Knowing.” Here, the Tathāgata is referred to briefly by three titles, with emphasis on the wondrous virtues of “equal, correct, and awakened.” This section is therefore called “the Tathāgata’s awakened nature.”

“Is it made or not made?”: Is it attained through cultivated and contrived practice, or is it originally thus, without reliance on cultivated and contrived practice?

The preceding section explained the meaning of the nirvāṇa that is realized. In this section, Mahāmati further asks what is meant by the Tathāgata who realizes nirvāṇa: “World-Honored One, I pray that you will explain for us what the Tathāgata’s correct and equal awakening is, so that I and the other bodhisattvas may understand the Tathāgata’s true ultimate meaning, awaken ourselves, and awaken others.”

The Buddha said: “Whatever doubts you have, ask freely. I shall answer them one by one.”

Mahāmati asked: “World-Honored One, is the Tathāgata of correct awakening attained through cultivated and contrived practice, or is it originally so without reliance on practice? Is it the result of what is done, or the cause that does? Is it the one that produces characteristics, or the characteristics produced? Is it the one who speaks, or the meaning that is spoken? Is it the wisdom that awakens, or the dharma that is awakened to? Does the Tathāgata’s correct and equal awakening accord with such verbal descriptions as these, or does it not?”

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Awakened One, is neither an effect nor a cause in relation to such terms as these. Why? Because both involve errors. Mahāmati, if the Tathāgata were an effect, then it would either be made or impermanent. If it were impermanent, then all effects should be Tathāgatas—something neither I nor all Buddhas would accept. If it were not made, then, because nothing could be attained, skillful means would be empty, like rabbit horns or the child of a barren woman, for they do not exist.”

Mahāmati, if it is neither effect nor cause, then it is neither existent nor nonexistent. If it is neither existent nor nonexistent, then it transcends the four propositions. The four propositions are worldly discourse. To transcend the four propositions is not to fall into the four propositions; and because one does not fall into the four propositions, this is what the wise apprehend. The meanings expressed by all Tathāgatas are likewise. Those with wisdom should understand this.”]

“The child of a barren woman”: In other versions, “barren woman” is rendered as “stone woman.” Like rabbit horns, the child of a barren woman is a metaphor for something impossible, something certainly nonexistent.

The Buddha replied: The Tathāgata’s correct and equal awakening is neither an effect nor a causal agent; it is neither that which produces characteristics nor the characteristics produced. In all such respects, the Tathāgata’s wisdom and virtuous characteristics are not what you have described. Why? Because all such conceptual verbal formulations entail error.

“Mahāmati, if the Tathāgata were an effect, then it would either be made or impermanent. If it were impermanent, then all effects should be Tathāgatas—something neither I nor all Buddhas would accept”—Mahāmati, if the Tathāgata were something made, it would be produced through contrivance. Whatever is produced through contrivance must decay and perish; it must be impermanent.

Then the “Tathāgata” would also become an impermanent dharma that necessarily decays and perishes. If the Tathāgata were an impermanent dharma, and all things in the world are impermanent dharmas, then every worldly dharma could be Buddhadharma. Buddhadharma would then have nothing uniquely transcendent

about it. Thus, this view slanders the Buddha and harms the Way; neither I nor all Buddhas can accept it.

“If it were not made, then, because nothing could be attained, skillful means would be empty, like rabbit horns or the child of a barren woman, for they do not exist”—If the Tathāgata were not attained through cultivated and contrived practice, then there would be nothing to realize. The Buddha’s eighty-four thousand skillful dharma gates would then be like rabbit horns and the child of a barren woman: castles in the air, empty arrangements devoid of all meaning. Then Buddhadharma would offer no practical means of entry, and we sentient beings would forever sink into saṃsāra, never able to attain liberation.

Chan Master Huairang once answered the Sixth Patriarch Huineng: “Practice and realization are not absent, but defilement is unobtainable.” These two passages first state that the Tathāgata is not produced through contrivance; this is “defilement is unobtainable.” They then indicate that the Tathāgata does not exclude the many skillful means and methods of practice; this is “practice and realization are not absent.”

Having refuted these two mistaken assertions, the Buddha then reveals the truth:

“Mahāmati, if it is neither effect nor cause, then it is neither existent nor nonexistent”—Mahāmati, the Tathāgata’s correct and equal awakening belongs neither to the effect nor to the causal agent. It is far removed from conditioned contrivance and has nothing to do with arising, abiding, change, and cessation. The Tathāgata’s correct and equal awakening is neither truly existent nor annihilated into nothingness. It is true emptiness and wondrous presence, beyond existence and nonexistence.

“If it is neither existent nor nonexistent, then it transcends the four propositions. The four propositions are worldly discourse. To transcend the four propositions is not to fall into the four propositions; and because one does not fall into the four propositions, this is what the wise apprehend. The meanings expressed by all Tathāgatas are likewise. Those with wisdom should understand this”—Neither existent nor nonexistent means to be free from discriminating among the four propositions. Discrimination among the four propositions is worldly speech and deluded thought.

If one can be free from the deluded thoughts and discriminations of the four propositions, one will not fall into extreme or erroneous views. The wise understand this: they do not fall into the deluded thoughts of the four propositions and do not abide in verbal discrimination. Mahāmati, the meaning of all the Tathāgatas’ words is like this: free from the four propositions, cutting off the hundred negations, and unrelated to verbal expression. Those with wisdom should understand.

In summary, in this passage the Buddha first rejects all the questions as inapplicable, then answers Mahāmati's questions, "Is it made or not made? Is it an effect or a cause?": the Tathāgata is neither made nor not made, neither effect nor cause.

From this, he further answers the question of whether the Tathāgata is "the speaker or that which is spoken": the Tathāgata's true meaning is not bound to written words or speech and is far removed from the deluded thought of the four propositions. As Chan Master Shenhui's verse says: "The Buddhas, as numerous as motes of dust in three thousand great thousand-world systems, each teach the Dharma. They do not speak of existence, do not speak of nonexistence, do not speak of neither existence nor nonexistence, and do not speak of both existence and nonexistence. Why? Free from the four propositions, cutting off the hundred negations—when they meet, few people know to raise their eyes! Last night, the frosty wind brought tidings; plum blossoms still adorn the cold branches."

["As I have said, all dharmas are without self. Know that this meaning of 'without self' is that their nature is without self. All dharmas have their own natures, not the natures of others. Take cattle and horses, Mahāmati: the nature of a cow is not that of a horse, and the nature of a horse is not that of a cow. Yet in truth they are neither existent nor nonexistent; they are not without their own natures. Thus, Mahāmati, all dharmas are not without their own characteristics; they have their own characteristics. But foolish people who do not understand no-self cannot know this, because of deluded thought. Thus, know that all dharmas are empty, unborn, and without self-nature."]

Regarding "nature," the Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom speaks of two kinds of nature: universal nature, which is nature as essence, and particular nature, which consists of each thing's distinctive features:

1. Universal nature

This means that the nature of all dharmas is originally empty and quiescent: neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going, neither entering nor leaving. It is therefore called universal nature.

2. Particular nature

This means that a person who delights in doing evil takes evil as his nature, while one who delights in accumulating good deeds takes goodness as his nature. Fire takes heat as its nature, and water takes wetness as its nature. This is therefore called particular nature.

“Their nature is without self”: The “nature” here, in contrast to the “all dharmas have their own natures, not the natures of others” and “the nature of a cow is not that of a horse” below, refers here to universal nature, or essence. The latter “nature” refers to particular nature, or distinctive features. “Their nature is without self” means that the essence of all dharmas has no governing self and no substantial self-nature; that is, the essence of all dharmas is not truly existent.

“All dharmas have their own natures, not the natures of others, like cattle and horses”: Here, “nature” refers to particular nature, or each thing’s distinctive characteristics. All dharmas have their own natures means that all dharmas have their respective features: this is this, and that is that; they are clearly distinct from one another, and thereby differ from other things. For example, a cow has the characteristics of a cow and therefore is not a horse; a horse has the characteristics of a horse and therefore is not a cow.

“As I have said, all dharmas are without self. Know that this meaning of ‘without self’ is that their nature is without self”—Just as I have said, all dharmas are “without self.” One should understand that “without self” means that the essential nature of all dharmas is without self and lacks any substantial reality. Thus the Heart Sūtra says, “All dharmas are marked by emptiness.” Here, “nature” means nature as essence, the universal nature of all things.

“All dharmas have their own natures, not the natures of others, like cattle and horses, Mahāmati: the nature of a cow is not that of a horse, and the nature of a horse is not that of a cow.”

“Yet in truth they are neither existent nor nonexistent; they are not without their own natures”—Although the essential nature of all dharmas is “without self,” this is not the annihilationist view that nothing whatsoever exists. Rather, where causes and conditions converge, myriad forms manifest in profusion, each possessing its own characteristics and clearly distinct from the others—for example, a cow is a cow and a horse is a horse.

Mahāmati, a horse possesses the characteristics proper to a horse and therefore is not a cow; a cow possesses the characteristics proper to a cow and therefore is not a horse. Mahāmati, all dharmas are likewise: because their essence is without self, they are not existent; though not truly existent, they manifest in myriad forms through the convergence of causes and conditions, and therefore are not nonexistent. Thus, the no-self of dharmas is not an annihilationist view that nothing whatsoever exists.

On the contrary, precisely where not a single dharma arises, the myriad forms stand forth in their full array, each with its own characteristics. As the Heart Sūtra says: “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Feeling, perception, formations, and

consciousness are likewise." And as the Inscription on Faith in Mind says: "Existence is precisely nonexistence; nonexistence is precisely existence. If it is not thus, there is no need to hold to it."

"Thus, Mahāmati, all dharmas are not without their own characteristics; they have their own characteristics. But foolish people who do not understand no-self cannot know this, because of deluded thought"—Mahāmati, the meaning of the "no-self" of all dharmas is not the annihilationist void of nothing whatsoever existing. The myriad manifestations of all dharmas are precisely "no-self." But the "no-self" understood by ignorant ordinary beings is an annihilationist, inert emptiness set in opposition to "self." Therefore, they cannot understand the true emptiness and wondrous presence of the no-self of all dharmas.

"All dharmas are thus empty, unborn, and without self-nature; they should be understood in this way"—the original meaning of all dharmas being thus empty, unborn, and without self-nature should be understood in this way.

This passage further explains that the nature of all dharmas is "selfless," yet not annihilated. Put simply, it is true emptiness and wondrous presence.

In the following two passages, the Buddha again answers the question of the Tathāgata's awakened nature and appearances in two parts: on the one hand, the Tathāgata's perfect and equal awakening is neither identical with nor different from worldly appearances; on the other hand, the Tathāgata and the appearance of supramundane liberation are likewise neither identical nor different:

[Thus, the Tathāgata is neither identical with nor different from the aggregates. If he were identical with the aggregates, he would be impermanent. If he were different, the means of access would be empty. If they were two, there should be difference; yet a cow's horns are similar, and thus not different. They differ in length, and thus are different. All dharmas are likewise. Mahāmati, just as a cow's right horn differs from its left horn, and its left horn differs from its right horn, so their various forms and lengths each differ. Mahāmati, the Tathāgata is neither identical with nor different from the aggregates, elements, and sense-fields.]

Likewise, the Tathāgata and the body of the five aggregates are neither identical nor different. If the Tathāgata were the same as the five aggregates, then, like them, he would be a dharma subject to impermanence, arising, and ceasing; but the Tathāgata is not such a dharma. If the Tathāgata differed from the five aggregates, then he should have no form that could appear, no visible appearance, and nothing whatever that could be apprehended. In that case, the Tathāgata and the five aggregates would become two unrelated dharmas. Then, no matter how the body of the five aggregates cultivated, it could never attain fruition; there would be no

expedient gateway into the Buddhadharma, and the Buddhas would have no virtue of benefiting living beings.

“If they were two, there should be difference; yet a cow’s horns are similar, and thus not different. They differ in length, and thus are different. All dharmas are likewise”—further, if the Tathāgata and the five aggregates were two dharmas, they should be utterly different from one another.

Yet both the Tathāgata and the five aggregates are manifestations of the mind of the tathāgatagarbha, just as both of a cow’s horns grow from the cow; therefore, they are not related as different. But although both are cow’s horns, the two differ in length and point in markedly different directions. The Tathāgata’s perfect and equal awakening and the five aggregates are likewise: though one body, they differ in delusion and awakening, and their appearances and functions differ vastly. Thus, they are also different. Similarly, the Tathāgata and all dharmas are neither identical nor different.

“Mahāmati, just as a cow’s right horn differs from its left horn, and its left horn differs from its right horn, so their various forms and lengths each differ. Mahāmati, the Tathāgata is neither identical with nor different from the aggregates, elements, and sense-fields”—Mahāmati, just as a cow’s left and right horns differ, each having a distinct length and form, the Tathāgata’s perfect and equal awakening is neither identical with nor different from not only the five aggregates but also the six sense-fields, the twelve sense bases, the eighteen elements, and all other worldly appearances.

Therefore, the Tathāgata says in the Lotus Sūtra: “All livelihoods and worldly occupations do not contradict ultimate reality.” Ultimate reality does not conflict with any worldly activity; this is the principle of their both being “cow’s horns.” Again, as soon as our original teacher manifested in this world, he declared: “In heaven above and earth below, I alone am honored.” This expresses that the wisdom, liberation, and breadth of heart of the supramundane cannot possibly be compared with the ordinary worldly mind, just as a cow’s left and right horns each differ from the other.

This passage says that the Tathāgata’s perfect and equal awakening and the body of the five aggregates are neither identical nor different. By further extension, the Tathāgata is so related not only to the five aggregates but also to the six sense-fields, the eighteen elements, and all worldly appearances: they are neither identical nor different.

[Thus, the Tathāgata and liberation are neither identical nor different. Thus, the Tathāgata is spoken of by the name “liberation.” If the Tathāgata differed from liberation, he would be constituted by material appearance; and being constituted

by material appearance, he would be impermanent. If they were not different, the appearances attained by practitioners should be without distinctions; yet practitioners perceive distinctions. Therefore, they are neither different nor not different.]

The Tathāgata and the appearance of supramundane liberation are likewise neither identical nor different. Liberation means liberation from the two extremes of difference and non-difference; thus, the Tathāgata is commonly designated by the name “liberation.” Yet the Tathāgata and supramundane liberation are likewise neither one nor different.

If the Tathāgata differed from supramundane liberation, then, since liberation is formless, the Tathāgata should have form and should be constituted by material appearance. But if the Tathāgata were constituted by material appearance, he would be a dharma of impermanence, whereas the Tathāgata’s dharma is truly eternal and abiding. Therefore, the Tathāgata and liberating nirvāṇa are not different.

“If they were not different, the appearances attained by practitioners should be without distinctions; yet practitioners perceive distinctions”—if the Tathāgata and supramundane liberation were the same, then the appearances attained by practitioners should contain no distinctions. Yet the manifestations seen in practitioners differ: arhats differ from arhats, bodhisattvas from bodhisattvas, and even the pure lands of the various Buddhas each differ in their abundant variety. As a sūtra says: “All noble beings differ by virtue of the unconditioned dharma.”

Therefore, the Tathāgata and the appearance of supramundane liberation are neither identical nor different.

[Thus, wisdom and its objects are neither identical nor different. Mahāmati, wisdom and its objects are neither identical nor different: they are neither permanent nor impermanent, neither made nor maker, neither conditioned nor unconditioned, neither knower nor known, neither mark-maker nor marked, neither the aggregates nor different from the aggregates, neither speaker nor spoken, neither one nor different, neither together nor not together.]

“Wisdom and its objects”: “its objects” refers to the objects known, or to principles that can be known.

“Neither mark-maker nor marked”: it is neither that which makes marks nor a mark that is made.

“Neither the aggregates nor different from the aggregates”: it is not the five aggregates, yet neither is it different from the five aggregates.

Wisdom and the knowledge and principles that may be learned are likewise neither identical nor different. Why is this so, Mahāmati? Because the noble wisdom of self-realization is free from all discriminative comparisons: it is neither permanent nor impermanent; neither maker nor made; neither conditioned nor unconditioned; neither knower nor known; neither that which makes marks nor a mark that is made; neither the five aggregates nor different from the five aggregates; neither speaker nor spoken. Thus, wisdom and all knowledge and principles are likewise neither one nor different, neither the same nor distinct.

It is worth noting that Mahāmati advances arguments based on deluded views arising from conceptual thought. Thus, he speculates in every direction about the Buddha's instructions and refuses to abandon words and cut off delusion directly. In this section, therefore, the Buddha refutes Mahāmati's arguments through the logic of inference, using his own spear to attack his own shield, so that Mahāmati may recognize that the views and conjectures he himself has established cannot withstand close examination and are inherently self-contradictory errors. Having cleared away Mahāmati's pervasive discriminatory attachment concerning the Tathāgata's awakened nature, the Buddha next reveals the Tathāgata's true meaning:

[Because they are neither one nor different, neither together nor not together, they are wholly free from all measures. Being free from all measures, there is no speech. Where there is no speech, there is no arising; where there is no arising, there is no ceasing; where there is no ceasing, there is quiescent extinction; quiescent extinction is nirvāṇa of self-nature; nirvāṇa of self-nature has neither effect nor cause; where there is neither effect nor cause, there is no grasping at conditions; where there is no grasping at conditions, one transcends all falsity; to transcend all falsity is to be the Tathāgata; and the Tathāgata is perfect, equal awakening. Mahāmati, this is called perfect, equal awakening. Mahāmati, perfect, equal awakening is free from all measures of the faculties.]

"Nirvāṇa of self-nature has neither effect nor cause": nirvāṇa of self-nature means that all is originally complete and all dharmas are originally pure. It does not belong to a causal act, nor is it the result of an effect; there is not some separate dharma that is nirvāṇa. Therefore, to seek a nirvāṇa obtainable apart from one's self-nature is no different from seeking a Buddha apart from Buddha—there can be no such thing. As an ancient Chan master said, it is "raising a pile of bones on level ground" or "digging a sore into sound flesh."

"Where there is no grasping at conditions, one transcends all falsity": if one does not grasp at circumstances and the grasping mind comes to rest, then this very moment is true direct perception, transcending all false conceptual measurements.

“To transcend all falsity is to be the Tathāgata”: to leave delusion is to be true; truth is the Tathāgata.

Because it is neither one nor different, neither the same nor distinct, the Tathāgata’s perfect awakening is far removed from every measure. To be free from all measures is to be free from words and to cease all thought; both truth and delusion perish. When both truth and delusion perish, no dharma can arise; without arising, there is no ceasing. This neither-arising nor ceasing is serene quiescent extinction; it is nirvāṇa of self-nature. Nirvāṇa of self-nature does not belong to a causal act, nor is it the result of an effect.

Since it is neither an effect nor a cause, what is there still to grasp after? If one does not grasp or chase after things, one is freed from all falsity; this very moment is suchness, is perfect and universal knowledge. Just as Patriarch Dayu chanted: “Originally there is no delusion, nor is there truth; / From the beginning, these two dharmas are empty and without self-nature. / Without self-nature and without marks, do not cling to emptiness; / This is the Tathāgata’s true reality. / See ultimate reality: all dharmas are empty. / In an instant of sudden awakening, the myriad dharmas are one. / Once the scene can no longer be concealed, / Naked and bare, it meets you face-to-face!”

At the end of this section, the Buddha again tells Mahāmati: do not continue to speculate and seek. Perfect, equal awakening transcends all measurements made by the sense faculties and consciousnesses.

[Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke in verse: “Wholly free from the measures of the faculties, / With neither effect nor cause; / Having left behind knower and known, / It also leaves behind mark-maker and marked.”]

The World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke in verse:

The Tathāgata’s true virtues and characteristics are free from all measurements of the faculties. They are not the result of an effect and do not belong to a causal act; they are free from knower and known, and from that which makes marks and marks that are made. This is a general verse praising the Tathāgata’s freedom from all measures.

[“The aggregates and conditioned arising, and perfect awakening— / Neither sameness nor difference can be seen. / If there is no one who sees, / How can there be discrimination?”]

“Conditioned arising” refers to dharmas produced through causes and conditions.

The body of the five aggregates, formed through the conjunction of causes and conditions, and the Tathāgata's dharmakāya of perfect awakening are neither one nor different; they cannot be fathomed by discriminative, deluded thought. Since they cannot be apprehended through speculative discrimination, why persist in clinging to discrimination?

["Neither made nor not made, / Neither effect nor cause; / Neither the aggregates nor apart from the aggregates, / Nor any remaining admixture."]

"Neither the aggregates nor within the aggregates": the translation of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra reads, "neither the aggregates nor apart from the aggregates." In light of the preceding and following text, "apart from the aggregates" appears to be more accurate than "within the aggregates."

The Tathāgata's perfect awakening is neither a dharma produced by fabrication nor a dharma of non-fabrication. It is neither effect nor cause. It is not the five aggregates, yet neither is it apart from the five aggregates. The same applies to the aggregates, elements, sense-fields, and all other residual distinctions: they are neither one nor different.

This passage further sweeps away all of Mahāmati's questions and objections: the Tathāgata's awakened nature is not any of the various verbal formulations or inferential reasonings imagined by Mahāmati.

[Nor is it possessed of any natures, as imagined by deluded views. Know that it is not nonexistent either. So it is with all dharmas.]

"So it is with all dharmas": "this dharma" refers to the Samyaksaṃbuddha. Thus, "so it is with all dharmas" means that the principle of the Samyaksaṃbuddha Dharma is likewise so.

In the final analysis, no dharma possesses a truly existing self-nature. What is called existence is merely what ordinary, deluded people mistakenly perceive and grasp as truly existent. Yet the dharmas are not an annihilated nothingness either. This is the true reality revealed by the Tathāgata: the Tathāgata's perfect and equal awakening is neither existent nor nonexistent, neither arising nor ceasing, and far removed from all calculation and discrimination.

[Because there is "existence," there is "nonexistence"; because there is "nonexistence," there is "existence." If there were no nonexistence, one should not grasp it; if there were existence, one should not conceive of it.]

Ordinary beings falsely cling to "existence," and therefore nonexistence is taught in response. To those who cling to the view of nonexistence, the Tathāgata teaches existence in order to refute nonexistence. Thus, existence and nonexistence arise in

dependence upon each other; neither has any substantial reality. Since they have no substance, what is there to grasp? Therefore, when nonexistence is taught, one should not grasp it and establish the appearance of a real nonexistence; when existence is taught, one should likewise not conceive of it as truly existent. All teachings are no more than skillful means, intended solely to dispel the erroneous views of the deluded. If there were no erroneous and deviant views, right view itself need not be established.

[Whether concerning self or non-self, they linger over verbal discriminations, sink into the two extremes, and ruin themselves and the world.]

Yet ordinary, deluded people always impose false calculations and discriminations upon the true self and non-self taught by the Tathāgata, and thus sink into the two extremes of existence and nonexistence. Those who cling to existence seek through appearances and become deeply mired in birth and death; those who cling to nonexistence deny cause and effect and indulge themselves without restraint. In this way, they not only destroy their own dharma body and wisdom-life, but also undermine the laws of cause and effect in the world.

[To be liberated from every fault, rightly observe the self's unobstructed pervasiveness. This is called right contemplation, and it does not disparage the Great Teacher.]

If one can depart from the errors and afflictions of all dualistic views, including existence and nonexistence, that is liberation. Observing with this liberating right wisdom, one sees that all dharmas are only illusory manifestations of mind, while mind itself cannot be found. Then one is equal and free everywhere, with truly no obstruction; this is called thorough realization. This is right contemplation, and only thus does one refrain from disparaging the Tathāgata, the Great Teacher.

Summary of This Section:

Key terms of this section: "Samyaksaṃbuddha" and "freedom from all faculties and measures." In this section, Mahāmati speculates about what the Tathāgata is: Is he attained through contrivance, or without contrivance? Is he an affair? Is he a cause? And so forth. The Buddha answers each question: the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One, is neither made nor unmade, neither an affair nor a cause, neither existent nor nonexistent. He then reveals the truth: the Tathāgata's perfect awakening cannot be attained through any discriminating inference or measure. One should depart from all calculation and transcend all falsity.

Surveying Mahāmati's many questions, one can only echo the lament of our Fundamental Teacher: "How wondrous! How wondrous! All sentient beings possess

the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata, yet because of deluded thoughts and attachments, they cannot realize them."

Therefore, at the end of this section, the Buddha again speaks of "freedom from all faculties and measures." To be free from all measures is the Tathāgata. But what is it like after one is "free from all faculties and measures"?—In Beijing, birds sing and flowers bloom; in Shenzhen, traffic streams ceaselessly.

32. Neither Arising nor Ceasing

[At that time, the bodhisattva Mahāmati again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, as you have said, the sūtras encompass the unborn and undying. You have also said that 'unborn and undying' is another name for the Tathāgata. World-Honored One, do you say 'unborn and undying' because things lack inherent nature, or because it is another name for the Tathāgata?" The Buddha told Mahāmati: "When I say that all dharmas are unborn and undying, the categories of existence and nonexistence do not appear."

Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, if all dharmas are unborn, then no dharma can be encompassed, since all dharmas are unborn. If there is a dharma within this name, I beseech you to explain it." The Buddha told Mahāmati: "Excellent, excellent! Listen carefully and reflect well upon this. I shall distinguish and explain it for you." Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "Yes, I shall receive your instruction." The Buddha told Mahāmati: "I say that the Tathāgata is not without inherent nature; nor does 'unborn and undying' encompass all dharmas. Nor does it depend on conditions; therefore it is unborn and undying. Nor is it without meaning."]

"The sūtras encompass the unborn and undying": Sūtra literally means "thread"; in Chinese translation, it means "scripture." It refers to the scriptures spoken by the Buddha, which thread together the meaning of the Dharma so that it is not lost. That the sūtras encompass the unborn and undying means that the Buddhadharma teaches us the principle of the unborn and undying.

Mahāmati Bodhisattva further asked: "World-Honored One, as you have said, the Buddhadharma points us to the meaning of the unborn and undying; you have also said that the Tathāgata has another name, namely, 'unborn and undying.' Then it must be because all dharmas lack any substantial inherent nature that you speak of the unborn and undying."

But if they lack inherent nature, then there should be nothing at all; all should be free of the marks of names, and there should be no need for the name and mark "unborn and undying." Why, then, do you also say that "unborn and undying" is

another name for the Tathāgata? If unborn and undying is another name for the Tathāgata, this name must have an actual meaning and an actual referent.

That is, if unborn and undying lacks a substantial inherent nature, it falls into "nonexistence," and there should be no Dharma term called "unborn and undying." But if unborn and undying is another name for the Tathāgata, it falls into "existence." So is the unborn and undying of which the Buddha speaks ultimately "nonexistence" or "existence"?

"The categories of existence and nonexistence do not appear": here, "categories" means kinds.

The Buddha told Mahāmati: "When I say that 'all dharmas are unborn and undying,' it is neither existence nor nonexistence."

But if it is neither existence nor nonexistence, what exactly is it? Mahāmati therefore continued: "World-Honored One, if unborn and undying means that there is nothing at all, then the meaning of the Buddhadharma does not exist either, since everything is 'nonexistent.' Yet you also say that the Tathāgata has another name, unborn and undying. Clearly, unborn and undying cannot be merely an empty name; it should truly have an actual dharma and an actual referent. I beseech you to explain."

"I say that the Tathāgata is not without inherent nature; nor does 'unborn and undying' encompass all dharmas. Nor does it depend on conditions; therefore it is unborn and undying. Nor is it without meaning." The Buddha told Mahāmati: What are called the Tathāgata and unborn and undying are not mere nothingness, nor is there a truly existing dharma of unborn and undying. Still less does unborn and undying await the full convergence of causes and conditions in order to arise. Therefore it is called "unborn and undying"; nor is unborn and undying without meaning.

In this passage, Mahāmati takes "unborn and undying" to be either a truly existing dharma or annihilation into nothingness. The Buddha therefore first refutes this generally: unborn and undying does not fall into existence or nonexistence, nor does it arise in dependence on conditions; nor is this expression empty of real meaning. The Buddha then directly reveals the true meaning of the Tathāgata's unborn and undying:

["Mahāmati, I speak of mind-born bodies, the Dharma body, and the names of the Tathāgata. That 'unborn' is not within the realm of all non-Buddhist paths, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, or bodhisattvas at the seventh stage."]

The Buddha told Mahāmati that not only “unborn,” but also the “mind-born body” and the “Dharma body” of which he spoke, are names of the Tathāgata. Thus, the true principle of unborn and undying is not known by any followers of non-Buddhist paths, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, or even bodhisattvas at the seventh stage.

Note that “unborn” here is entirely different from the “unborn and undying” as Mahāmati understands it. Mahāmati takes unborn and undying to be an unbornness of annihilation, such that even names should have no real meaning. But the Tathāgata’s “unborn” can precisely give rise to mind-born bodies of complete and varied kinds, freely transforming. Mahāmati understands “unborn and undying” as dead water, whereas for the Buddha it is wondrous numinous efficacy.

Why, then, is the realm of “unborn” said to be beyond even bodhisattvas at the seventh stage? Because bodhisattvas at the seventh stage still retain mental appearances and apply conditioned remedies; they cannot yet be wholly without action or doing. The eighth bhūmi transcends both doing and non-doing, arriving at the practice of truly effortless action.

Therefore, upon attaining the eighth bhūmi, one can manifest countless mind-born transformation bodies, just as Chan Master Yongjia said: “If it is truly unborn, there is nothing that is not born.”

Yet the wondrous functioning of countless transformation bodies is ordinary even for an eighth-bhūmi bodhisattva. It is like human growth: as the body matures, wearing adult clothing is entirely normal. A true adult knows that maturity of mind and aspiration is the measure of growth; changes in clothing size are perfectly ordinary and not at all extraordinary. Thus, even though Buddhas and bodhisattvas manifest countless transformation births, their essential nature remains “unborn,” and no ripples of “having been born” ever arise in their minds.

After refuting the error in the preceding passage, the Buddha here directly reveals that the Tathāgata’s “unborn”—namely, the unborn and undying about which Mahāmati asks—is not annihilation, but an “unborn” that is numinously efficacious and fully endowed with immeasurable skillful means for liberating sentient beings.

[“Mahāmati, that ‘unborn’ is another name for the Tathāgata. Mahāmati, for example, Indra, Śakra, and Purandara: such things each have many names. Yet many names do not mean many natures, nor do they mean the absence of an inherent nature.”]

“Indra, Śakra, and Purandara” are alternative names for Lord Indra. Lord Indra has many appellations: “Śakra” means “the capable and benevolent one”; “Indra” means lord or emperor; and “Purandara” was Indra’s name when he was formerly a human

being. The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra says: “For example, Lord Indra is also called Kauśika and also called Purandara.”

The World-Honored One next gives an example: “Mahāmati, Lord Indra is called Indra, Śakra, Purandara, and so forth.” Likewise, all such things have many names. Taking Lord Indra again as an example: though the names are many, Lord Indra is one.

Multiple names do not mean multiple Indras; the many names merely reveal different characteristics of the one Indra. Yet this certainly does not mean that there is no Indra. The Tathāgata is the same: just as with “unborn,” “mind-born body,” and “Dharma body,” the Tathāgata does not have multiple bodies because there are many names, nor is the Tathāgata an annihilated nothingness.

[“Thus, Mahāmati, in this Sahā world I have three asaṃkhyeyas of hundreds of thousands of names. Ordinary people have all heard them and each speaks of me by name, yet they do not understand that these are alternative names for the Tathāgata.

Mahāmati, some sentient beings know me as the Tathāgata; some as the All-Knowing One; some as Buddha; some as Savior of the World; some as Self-Awakened One; some as Guide; some as Great Guide; some as Guide of All; some as Sage; some as Brahmā; some as Viṣṇu; some as Sovereign; some as Victor; some as Kapila; some as the Ultimate Reality; some as

the Moon; some as the Sun; some as Lord; some as Unborn; some as Undying; some as Emptiness; some as Suchness; some as Truth; some as Ultimate Reality; some as Dharma-nature; some as nirvāṇa; some as Eternity; some as Equality; some as Nonduality; some as Signlessness; some as Liberation; some as the Way; and some as Mind-Born. Mahāmati, these three asaṃkhyeyas of hundreds of thousands of names neither increase nor decrease. In this and other worlds, all know me as being like the moon reflected in water: neither coming forth nor entering.”]

“Sahā world”: Sahā means “endurance,” because the sentient beings of this world endure suffering and do not seek liberation from it.

“Asaṃkhyeya” is translated as “innumerable” or “countless.” It denotes the ultimate in numerical magnitude. According to the Buddhist Dictionary, if one hundred million is counted as one yi, and ten thousand yi as one zhao, then one asaṃkhyeya equals ten million times ten thousand times ten thousand times ten thousand times ten thousand times ten thousand zhao. Expressed mathematically, it is 10 to the forty-seventh power.

“Brahmā” means purity.

“Viṣṇu” is another name for Nārāyaṇa or Īśvara.

“Kapila”: the Buddha was born in the city of Kapilavastu and is therefore named after the city.

Mahāmati, likewise, I too have immeasurably many names and alternative appellations in this Sahā world. Ordinary people have all heard them and have each spoken of me by different names, yet they do not know that these are all my alternative names and appellations.

Some know me as the Tathāgata; some as the All-Knowing One; some as Buddha, Savior of the World, Self-Awakened One, Guide, Great Guide, Guide of All, Sage, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Sovereign, Victor, Kapila, Ultimate Reality, Moon, Sun, Lord, Unborn, Undying, Emptiness, Suchness, Truth, the Real, Dharma-nature, nirvāṇa, Eternity, Equality, Nonduality, Signlessness, Liberation, the Way, Mind-Born Body, and so forth.

The Buddha briefly lists thirty-three of the Tathāgata’s names, then tells Mahāmati that these three asaṃkhyeyas of hundreds of thousands of names are all alternative names for the Tathāgata. Though these immeasurable names differ one by one, they neither add the slightest function to nor diminish the slightest virtue of the Tathāgata’s true inherent nature. This is because the Tathāgata’s true inherent nature cannot be grasped, yet its wondrous functioning is inexhaustible.

It is like the moon in water: illusory and impossible to grasp, yet complete in form and clear in radiance. Thus, however many alternative names there may be, such as “mind-born” or “unborn,” they neither increase nor diminish or alter the Tathāgata’s true meaning and true inherent nature itself.

[Those foolish people cannot know me, for they fall into the two extremes. Yet they all reverently honor and make offerings to me, while failing to understand well the meaning and import of words and phrases. They do not distinguish names, nor do they comprehend the direct realization of the essential teaching. They grasp at various words, expressions, and passages; regarding the unborn and unceasing as devoid of nature, they do not know the distinctions among the Tathāgata’s names, such as Indra, Śakra, and Purandara. They do not understand that direct realization of the essential teaching converges in the ultimate. With respect to all dharmas, they cling according to what is said.]

Because they fall into the two extremes of annihilation and eternalism, foolish people cannot truly understand the Tathāgata’s real meaning. Although they reverently honor and make offerings to me, they do not understand the true import of the words I speak. Unable to realize the essential teaching of intrinsic nature, they

cannot properly distinguish the similarities and differences among its various names.

They discriminate and cling to all kinds of words and writings, believing that the unborn and unceasing must mean that nothing whatsoever exists. Or else they suppose that, because names differ, their essential reality must likewise differ. They do not know that although the Tathāgata has many different names, his essential nature is not manifold.

It is like Indra, Śakra, and Purandara: though their names differ, they all refer to the same Lord Indra. Because ignorant ordinary beings have not penetrated the essential teaching of intrinsic nature, they cannot comprehend the ultimate principle that true reality is without marks. Not only do they generate arbitrary distinctions regarding my teaching of "the unborn and unceasing"; with respect to all dharmas, they also grasp and cling to words and phrases, generate arbitrary distinctions, and misunderstand my meaning.

Here, from the question of the Tathāgata's different names, the Buddha draws out the crucial source of foolish people's wrong views: they misunderstand the unborn and unceasing because they have not penetrated thoroughly within and have not realized the mind and seen their true nature. Thus they take what is false for what is real, cling to various words and phrases, and misconstrue the various meanings of the Dharma that I teach. Next, the World-Honored One criticizes the errors of clinging to verbal discourse and conceptual analysis, and admonishes the assembly to rely on the meaning, not on the words.

[Mahāmati, those deluded people say this: "Meaning is the same as verbal expression; meaning and expression are not different." Why is this so? They say that meaning has no body; therefore, apart from verbal expression there is no other meaning, and meaning consists solely in verbal expression. Mahāmati, those whose wisdom is burned by evil do not know the nature of verbal expression. They do not know that verbal expression arises and ceases, whereas meaning neither arises nor ceases. Mahāmati, all verbal expression falls into written characters, but meaning does not fall into them, for it is apart from being and nonbeing, has no arising into birth, and has no body.]

"Meaning has no body": "body" means a bodily mark or outward form. That meaning has no body means believing that meaning is simply meaning, and that no other medium apart from language can express its true import.

"We can only speak of it": in ancient usage, zhi ( ) is interchangeable with zhi ( ), meaning "only." (The Donkey of Guizhou: "Its skills go no further than this.") "We can only speak of it" thus means that its meaning exists only in verbal expression.

Mahāmati, those foolish people say: “Meaning is language; meaning and language are no different.” Why? They say that meaning has no other embodied form or medium, and can be conveyed only through the outward forms of speech. Therefore, verbal expression is equivalent to meaning: apart from verbal expression, there is no other meaning, no meaning that can exist apart from speech.

This is an intensely burning wrong view. They do not know that the appearances of verbal expression arise through the coming together of causes and conditions, and that their essential nature is empty and unobtainable. They do not know that verbal appearances are dharmas of arising and ceasing, whereas the Tathāgata’s true meaning neither arises nor ceases.

“Mahāmati, all verbal expression falls into written characters, but meaning does not fall into them, for it is apart from being and nonbeing, has no arising into birth, and has no body”—Mahāmati, all verbal doctrines fall into the marks of written characters, whereas true meaning does not. This is because true meaning is neither of a nature that exists nor of a nature that does not exist.

Because true meaning is apart from deluded discriminations such as being and nonbeing, it does not arise and cease through the conditioned arising and ceasing of verbal doctrines; this is what “has no arising into birth” means. Nor does true meaning disappear merely because it is apart from the embodied medium of language and theory. True meaning is ever present and is unrelated to the medium of written characters; therefore, true meaning “has no body.”

Here we can see that the Buddha’s statement that “meaning has no body” differs from the foolish view of “meaning has no body” above. The foolish view holds that meaning has no body because true meaning is wholly identical with its linguistic medium; there should be no meaning that transcends verbal discourse, and verbal doctrines themselves should be meaning. Thus, they believe that there is nothing wrong with clinging to verbal expression.

The Tathāgata’s statement that “meaning has no body,” however, means that ultimate true meaning is inherently complete: unborn and unceasing, neither increasing nor decreasing, wondrous and inconceivable. Although written characters may be provisionally used to evoke it, it is ultimately unrelated to words, written characters, and the marks of arising-and-ceasing dharmas. There are in truth no verbal doctrines to which one can cling; hence, it “has no body.”

[Mahāmati, the Tathāgata does not teach dharmas that fall into written characters, because written characters, whether existent or nonexistent, are unobtainable—except for those that do not fall into written characters. Mahāmati, if anyone says that the Tathāgata teaches dharmas that fall into written characters, that is false speech, for dharmas are apart from written characters. Therefore, Mahāmati, all we

Buddhas and bodhisattvas neither speak a single word nor answer a single word. Why is this so? Because dharmas are apart from written characters.]

Mahāmati, the Tathāgata does not teach dharmas that fall into written characters; that is, the Buddhadharma does not establish a view of dharmas through doctrines. This is because verbal and written doctrines are marks of impermanence and change: both the supposed existence and nonexistence of written characters are illusory and unobtainable. Only by leaving behind attachment to verbal discourse, names, marks, and doctrines can one enter true meaning through the Tathāgata's words.

Mahāmati, if someone says that the Tathāgata's teaching falls into written characters and verbal discourse, and that the Buddhadharma truly contains a view of dharmas established through doctrine, this is an erroneous and fallacious claim. The ultimate principle taught by the Tathāgata transcends words and written characters. Therefore, I, together with all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, have never spoken a single word and have never answered a single word. Why say this? The Buddha again emphasizes that the ultimate true reality taught by the Tathāgata is apart from verbal and written doctrines.

[This is not to say that one does not speak for the benefit of others. Verbal expression exists because sentient beings have deluded thoughts. Mahāmati, if one did not teach any dharmas, the teaching of the Dharma would perish. If the teaching of the Dharma perished, there would be no Buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, or śrāvakas. If there were none, who would teach, and for whom would they teach?]

"This is not to say that one does not speak for the benefit of others": "benefit" means enabling others to receive benefit. Thus, this means teaching the Dharma provisionally in order to reveal true meaning.

"Sentient beings with divergent understandings": sentient beings who lack correct understanding and views of the Tathāgata's teaching.

"To cause them to leave behind mind, intellect, and consciousness": to enable sentient beings to leave behind mind, intellect, and consciousness. Mind, intellect, and consciousness were explained previously: that which gathers is called mind; that which deliberates is called intellect; that which discerns is called consciousness. In terms of the eight consciousnesses of Consciousness-Only, "mind" refers to the eighth, the ālaya consciousness, which accumulates the seeds of all dharmas and is therefore called mind. "Intellect" refers to the seventh, the manas consciousness, which constantly deliberates and firmly clings to attachment to self, and is therefore called intellect. Here, "consciousness" generally refers to the first six

consciousnesses, which can cognize and discern external objects and are therefore called intellect and consciousness.

The preceding passage says that Dharma is apart from written characters and verbal doctrines. Yet, although wisdom cannot be found in being or nonbeing, it gives rise to great compassion; thus, the Tathāgata does not abandon language as a skillful means of teaching. Verbal doctrines are originally the firmly held deluded thoughts of sentient beings, but one may also use illusion to break through illusion.

Therefore, the Tathāgata does not remain silent. Rather, in accordance with conditions and with the extent to which sentient beings can understand and enter, he skillfully uses verbal expression to guide them. If, when sentient beings have the conditions for seeking liberation, nothing at all were said, the Tathāgata's teaching would perish. If the teaching perished, Buddhas, bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas would no longer appear in the world. Then who would teach the Dharma to liberate sentient beings? And for whom would it be taught—whom would it liberate from birth and death? In that case, the Buddhadharma's great compassionate function of opening sentient beings' innate wisdom could not be manifested.

[Therefore, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas should not cling to verbal expression. In accordance with what is suitable, they should use skillful means to teach the sūtras and Dharma extensively, because sentient beings' hopes, desires, and afflictions are not the same. I and all Buddhas teach all dharmas for sentient beings of various divergent understandings, in order to cause them to leave behind mind, intellect, and consciousness—not for those who have attained the realm of the noble wisdom of direct realization. Mahāmati, realize that in all dharmas there is nothing whatsoever; realize that they are manifestations of one's own mind, and leave behind the two deluded discriminations. Bodhisattva mahāsattvas rely on the meaning, not on written characters.]

Therefore, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas should not cling to verbal expression, but neither should they remain silent. Rather, according to conditions and according to the capacities of their listeners, they should teach the sūtras and Dharma. Because sentient beings' aspirations, desires, and afflictions differ, bodhisattva mahāsattvas must teach flexibly, accommodating circumstances and employing skillful means in accordance with what suits them.

Śākyamuni Tathāgata and all Buddhas teach skillful means for sentient beings who lack the Tathāgata's right view in various ways, all for the purpose of enabling them to leave behind the discriminating grasping of the eight consciousnesses. These skillful verbal teachings are not spoken for those who have already realized the noble wisdom of direct realization. Since all dharmas are ultimately without anything

whatsoever, and all dharma-marks are illusory appearances manifested by the deluded thoughts of one's own mind, the ultimate meaning of the Buddhadharma is apart from every dualistic view. Therefore, bodhisattva mahāsattvas should not rely on the marks of words and writings, nor should they be deluded by written doctrines; they should rely on the ultimate meaning of the Buddhadharma.

[If good men and good women rely on written characters, they destroy the highest meaning themselves and cannot awaken others. They fall into the continuity of evil views and teach others accordingly. They do not properly understand all dharmas, all stages, or all marks, nor do they know the meaning of passages and phrases. If they are skilled in all dharmas, all stages, and all marks, penetrate passages and phrases, and fully possess the meaning of intrinsic nature, then they can delight themselves in the true bliss of signlessness and establish sentient beings in the equal Mahāyāna.]

"Fully possess the meaning of intrinsic nature": "nature" means intrinsic nature or essence. To fully possess the meaning of intrinsic nature is to fully possess ultimate, true meaning.

"The true bliss of signlessness": at the place of true reality, which is without marks, one leaves all falsity and excludes every partiality and even every fixed notion of correctness. This is true correctness, and is therefore called true signlessness. This true signlessness can remove all suffering; it is genuine and not false, and is therefore supreme great bliss.

If good men and good women merely rely on the marks of written characters, verbal expression, and doctrines, they not only harm themselves and lose the highest meaning, but cannot awaken others. Such people have already fallen into an unbroken succession of evil views characterized by grasping and calculating. Therefore, they cannot penetrate the ultimate reality of all dharma gates, all stages of inner realization, and all externally manifest appearances; nor can they understand the true meaning indicated by the Buddha's words, passages, and phrases.

If the wise can master the ultimate true reality of all dharmas, all stages, and all appearances, and understand how to express their principles through chapters, sentences, and language, they can themselves benefit from the joy of proper realization—the reality of no appearance within true reality. Moreover, relying on the ultimate, equal truth of the Mahāyāna, they can skillfully use language in accordance with the capacities of sentient beings to benefit them through teaching the Dharma, helping sentient beings of diverse dispositions attain ultimate liberation. This is benefiting others.

But how can one master all dharmas, stages, and appearances? It was said earlier, “Nothing whatsoever exists; realize that it is the manifestation of one’s own mind.” Since one has thoroughly realized that all dharmas are originally nonexistent, then all dharmas, stages, and appearances are nothing but illusion, nothing but manifestations of one’s own mind and one’s own tools. Using them is as natural as raising one’s hand, moving one’s feet, lifting one’s eyebrows, or blinking one’s eyes. How could one fail to master them?

Therefore, if practitioners can directly realize the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena, stand firmly where not a single dharma is established, and diligently remove their habitual attachments and views—retaining no ordinary feelings anywhere and establishing no sacred-mindedness—utterly naked and pure, with not the slightest thing hanging in their hearts, then differentiated wisdom will fully manifest. It is precisely then that, amid blazing wordlessness, they manifest the broad and long tongue.

Just as Xuefeng attained the Way at Aofeng Mountain, where Yantou shouted at him: “Have you not heard it said, ‘What enters through the gate is not a family treasure’?” Xuefeng said, “Then what will it be in the future?” Yantou said, “If in the future you wish to spread the great teaching, let every word flow from your own breast. In time, it will cover heaven and earth with me!”

“Mahāmati, to embrace the Mahāyāna is to embrace all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and śrāvakas. To embrace all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and śrāvakas is to embrace all sentient beings. To embrace all sentient beings is to embrace the true Dharma. To embrace the true Dharma is to ensure that the seed of Buddhahood does not cease. When the seed of Buddhahood does not cease, one can know the excellent means of entry.”

“Knowing the excellent means of entry, bodhisattva mahāsattvas are constantly born through transformation. They establish the ten sovereign powers of the Mahāyāna, manifest various forms and appearances, understand the various kinds, aspirations, afflictions, and appearances of sentient beings, and teach the Dharma in accordance with reality. ‘In accordance with reality’ means without difference; ‘in accordance with reality’ means free of the appearance of coming and going. When all falsity ceases, this is called accordance with reality. Mahāmati, good men and good women should not embrace attachment based on what is said, for reality is free from words.”

“The ten sovereign powers” are the ten kinds of powers possessed and freely exercised by the Tathāgata; hence they are called the ten sovereign powers.

1. The power of wisdom that knows what is possible and impossible: knowing the principles and non-principles of all things;

2. The power of wisdom that knows the karmic retributions of the three times: knowing the karmic causes and effects of all sentient beings throughout the three times;

3. The power of wisdom that knows all dhyānas, liberations, and samādhis: knowing the various meditative absorptions, liberations, and samādhis;

4. The power of wisdom that knows the superiority and inferiority of all faculties: knowing the greater or lesser capacities of sentient beings and the magnitude of their attainments;

5. The power of wisdom that knows various understandings: universally knowing the differing understandings of sentient beings;

6. The power of wisdom that knows various realms: universally knowing the differing states of sentient beings;

7. The power of wisdom that knows all paths leading to destinations: knowing the causes and effects of every path followed by sentient beings;

8. The power of wisdom that knows the unobstructed heavenly eye: being able, through the heavenly eye, to see the birth and death of sentient beings and the conditions of their wholesome and unwholesome karma without obstruction;

9. The power of wisdom that knows past lives and the undefiled: knowing the past lives of sentient beings and knowing undefiled nirvāṇa;

10. The power of wisdom that knows the eternal elimination of habitual tendencies: knowing as it is that the residual influences of all deluded afflictions have been forever cut off and will not arise again.

This is explained in continuation of the preceding discussion of the “Mahāyāna.” The Buddha exhorts practitioners to believe in and embrace the Mahāyāna, returning to “all dharmas are nonexistent; realize that they are manifestations of one’s own mind,” and thereby attaining the wisdom of equality. To believe in and embrace the Mahāyāna in this way is to believe in and embrace all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas, and to turn from the lesser toward the great, benefiting all sentient beings.

Only this is genuine right faith in the Buddhadharma; only thus will the seed of Buddhahood not be cut off. Those who can ensure that the seed of Buddhahood does not cease are Mahāyāna bodhisattvas who understand the supreme meaning of the Mahāyāna and enter thereby. Here, Mahāyāna bodhisattvas are without appearances yet leave no appearance aside. Therefore, they do not abandon the various expedient means of entry. At the place of no birth, they are exceptionally

born through transformation; through expedient means, they establish the sovereign freedom of the ten Mahāyāna powers, manifest forms according to the different kinds of beings, soothe their afflictions, dispel their longings, and demonstrate for sentient beings, by diverse expedient means, the Dharma in accordance with reality.

What, then, is the Dharma in accordance with reality? It is free from the distinctions of sameness and difference, devoid of the appearance of coming and going, and rejects all falsehood and its faults. This is accordance with reality.

Therefore, good men and good women should embrace this Mahāyāna Dharma in accordance with reality, and should not follow verbal expressions in attaching to written words and theoretical formulations. For the reality of the Tathāgata is free from the frivolous discourse of words and language.

This passage says that, at its ultimate point, Mahāyāna Buddhadharma establishes not even the slightest thing. Only this is the true Buddhadharma. To believe in and embrace Buddhadharma, one should believe in and embrace no appearance and the Mahāyāna. Because Mahāyāna bodhisattvas deeply realize this ultimate truth, they can give rise, without obstruction, to wondrous expedient functions that benefit others. The most crucial point here is to penetrate the true, ultimate ground of Mahāyāna principle.

The true ground of principle of the Tathāgata transcends sameness and difference, is free from coming and going, and is far removed from inverted deluded thoughts; it has nothing to do with words and language. This is fundamental. Therefore, practitioners should use the Tathāgata's expedient words to comprehend reality, rather than cling to and discriminate over the appearances of verbal expressions and written characters.

"Mahāmati, suppose a foolish person is shown an object by someone pointing a finger at it. The foolish person looks at the finger and does not obtain the true meaning. Likewise, foolish people follow the finger of verbal expression, embrace and cling to it, and never abandon it. In the end, they cannot attain the supreme true meaning, which is free from the finger of verbal expression. Mahāmati, it is like an infant, who should eat cooked food and should not eat raw food. If the infant eats raw food, it will become ill and lose its senses, because it does not yet know the proper sequence and expedient means of cooking."

Mahāmati, suppose someone points out an object to a foolish person with a finger. That foolish person looks only at the finger and does not see the object being indicated; therefore, he can never know the reality that is being indicated.

It is the same when foolish people hear the Buddha teach the Dharma. They embrace and cling to the appearances of words and written characters, never abandoning them. Thus, they see only the theoretical terms and appearances of the Tathāgata's verbal and written expressions, and can never accord with the supreme true meaning toward which the Tathāgata's teaching points. For the Tathāgata's true principle is removed from the appearances of words and language; it has nothing to do with all notions and principles. This uses the analogy of looking at the finger and losing sight of the object to show that those who cling to the conceptual appearances of verbal expression will surely lose the true meaning.

Furthermore, Mahāmati, an infant should eat cooked food. If an infant eats raw food, it will become ill. Therefore, those who feed it should understand the proper sequence: they must know that an infant's digestive capacity is weak and that it must first be fed cooked food, only gradually changing to raw food when it is safe.

Mahāmati, the Tathāgata's Dharma is like this for foolish ordinary beings or those who have only just begun to seek liberation: it is like an infant eating raw food. Because their deluded thoughts are firm and they are sunk in birth and death, direct instruction at this time may instead easily lead them to fall into annihilationism or eternalism, deny cause and effect, and act recklessly. The Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra, in discussing the bodhisattva's four errors, says: "To teach profound Dharma to beings who are not vessels for it is a bodhisattva's error." The analogy of "an infant eating cooked food" thus warns bodhisattvas that, in teaching the Dharma and liberating beings, they must also be skillful in expedient means and teach according to their capacities.

"Mahāmati, if one does not cultivate [the teaching of] neither arising nor ceasing through expedient means, this is unskillful. Therefore, one should skillfully cultivate expedient means and not follow verbal expressions, as one who looks only at the tip of a finger. Therefore, Mahāmati, with regard to the true meaning, one should cultivate through expedient means."

Mahāmati, just as an infant should be fed cooked food, so with the Tathāgata's ultimate truth of neither arising nor ceasing: if one does not understand how to use expedient means to indicate the means of entry and the practice, this is incorrect. Therefore, one should skillfully employ expedient means. One must not, because of the moon, discard the finger, or because of meaning, discard language. On the other hand, practitioners should not be like foolish people who abandon the moon and look only at the fingertip, taking expedient means for the ultimate, following the words of scriptures and teachings to attach themselves to names, appearances, and empty principles, and ultimately running counter to the Buddhadharma's ultimate seal of no appearance.

Therefore, Mahāmati, one should use expedient methods in practice in order to attain the true, ultimate truth. This is how one should study and practice the Buddhadharma.

“The true meaning is subtle and quiescent; it is the cause of nirvāṇa. Verbal expression is a conjunction of deluded thought. Deluded thought gathers birth and death. Mahāmati, the true meaning is obtained from those of broad learning. Mahāmati, ‘broad learning’ means being skilled in meaning, not skilled in verbal expression. Those skilled in meaning do not follow any scriptures or treatises of non-Buddhist paths; they themselves do not follow them, nor do they cause others to follow them. Such a person is called one of great virtue and broad learning. Therefore, those who seek meaning should draw near to those of broad learning—that is, those skilled in meaning. Those who do the contrary, clinging to verbal expression, should be kept at a distance.”

“The true meaning is subtle and quiescent; it is the cause of nirvāṇa”: true meaning is beyond all faculties and their objects. It is quiescent without falling into annihilation; therefore, it is subtle and quiescent. If one can understand it, it becomes a cause for entering nirvāṇa.

“Verbal expression is a conjunction of deluded thought”: as explained previously, sounds and sentences are conditioned dharmas of arising and ceasing, produced by the conjunction of deluded thoughts.

“Deluded thought gathers birth and death”: deluded thought is the cause that accumulates the cycle of birth and death.

“The true meaning is obtained from those of broad learning”: broad learning generally means having heard much. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “When Ānanda saw the Buddha, he bowed at his feet and wept sorrowfully, regretting that from beginningless time he had pursued broad learning alone and had not yet fully attained the power of the Way.” Here, however, “broad” means being skilled; “broad learning” means being skilled at comprehending the essential meaning from verbal expression.

Because the Tathāgata’s true meaning is beyond all faculties and their objects, subtle and quiescent, it is the fundamental causal ground for ultimate nirvāṇa. Yet the appearances of verbal expressions and principles are conjunctions of deluded thought; to cling to them as real is precisely to make them the root of birth and death. Therefore, one should not cling to the appearances of words and speech. Mahāmati, true meaning is obtained from “broad learning.”

What is broad learning? Broad learning is being skilled at comprehending the meaning of what one hears, rather than merely hearing many literary expressions

and verbal teachings. Such wise people understand that all indications are no more than expedient means, and that the Tathāgata's reality has nothing to do with written words. Thus, they will not be deceived by any names or appearances, will not be led astray by the scriptures and treatises of any non-Buddhist path, and will not only refrain from following them themselves, but can also skillfully use expedient means to prevent others from following them. Such are wise people of broad learning.

For example, in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Ānanda diligently followed the World-Honored One and diligently listened to the Buddha's teachings. Yet he did not undertake practice and realization or understand his original mind, and so he was seduced and bewildered by the woman Mātaṅgī. After the Buddha rebuked him, Ānanda suddenly repented and awakened: "Only today do I realize that, though one may have heard much, if one does not practice, it is the same as not having heard. It is like someone speaking of food: in the end, one cannot be satisfied."

Therefore, the "much learning" displayed by Ānanda in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra was not genuine "much learning." Another example is the butcher Guang'e, who slaughtered a thousand sheep each day. One day, he happened to encounter the Buddha teaching at an assembly on nirvāṇa. He immediately laid down his butcher's knife and declared, "I too am among the thousand Buddhas of this Fortunate Eon!" Having heard the Dharma, this butcher Guang'e understood at once, without the Buddha needing to say another word. How direct, swift, and liberating! This is genuine "much learning": it lies not in the quantity one hears, but in understanding the meaning well.

This also provides a model for us later students: if we genuinely arouse the resolve to leave saṃsāra, we should seek a dharma gate and a good spiritual teacher suited to ourselves, go deeply into one method, and engage in practice and realization in which conceptual understanding comes to an end. In this way, it is easiest to cast off the accumulated habitual attachments of many eons and directly realize the ultimate true meaning. This is what it means to understand the meaning well. Conversely, if one is always selecting this eloquent wording or that profound theory, taking endless delight in studying words and phrases, yet does not return to the reality of one's own mind or practice and realize for oneself, then one is headed in the direction opposite to the path of liberation.

At the end of this passage, the Buddha further admonishes: therefore, if one wishes to comprehend the true meaning, one should draw near to wise persons who are skilled at comprehending the Tathāgata's true meaning. Conversely, there are those who cannot comprehend the meaning through words and instead arbitrarily give rise to attachments to verbal formulations. Such persons, even if their eloquence blossoms into marvelous phrases, should be avoided.

[At that time, the bodhisattva Mahāmati, again sustained by the Buddha's spiritual power, addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, what the World-Honored One teaches as neither arising nor ceasing is nothing remarkable. Why is this so? The causes posited by all non-Buddhist paths are likewise neither arising nor ceasing. The World-Honored One also teaches that space, cessation not produced by conditions, and the realm of nirvāṇa are neither arising nor ceasing."

"World-Honored One, non-Buddhist paths say that causes give rise to all worlds. The World-Honored One likewise says that ignorance, craving, karma, and deluded thought serve as conditions that give rise to all worlds. Their causes and conditions differ only in name. The causes and conditions of external things are likewise so; there is no difference between the World-Honored One's teaching and the doctrines of non-Buddhist paths."

"Atoms, the Supreme Excellent, the Sovereign, the Lord of Beings, and the like—these nine entities are neither arising nor ceasing. The World-Honored One likewise teaches that the nature of all things is neither arising nor ceasing, and that existence and nonexistence cannot be apprehended. Non-Buddhist paths likewise say that the four great elements are indestructible, that their intrinsic nature is neither arising nor ceasing, and that the four great elements are permanent. These four great elements thus circulate through all destinies without relinquishing their intrinsic nature. What the World-Honored One teaches is likewise so. Therefore, I say that there is nothing remarkable."

"I only pray that the World-Honored One will explain the distinction by which this teaching is remarkable and superior to all non-Buddhist paths. If there is no distinction, then all followers of non-Buddhist paths would also be Buddhas, since they teach neither arising nor ceasing. Yet the World-Honored One says that in one world there cannot be many Buddhas appearing in the world. According to what has just been said, there should be many Buddhas in one world, since there is no distinction."]

"The causes posited by all non-Buddhist paths are likewise neither arising nor ceasing": the causes of arising for all dharmas established by non-Buddhist paths are likewise neither arising nor ceasing.

"Non-Buddhist paths say that causes give rise to all worlds": non-Buddhist paths say that truly existent distinct causes, such as a divine self, give rise to all worlds.

"Atoms, the Supreme Excellent, the Sovereign, the Lord of Beings, and the like—these nine entities": "Lord of Beings" means the divine self. Non-Buddhist paths generally hold that a distinct cause gives rise to the four great elements, and that the mutual combination and dispersal of the four great elements in turn produces all phenomena. Therefore, these distinct causes themselves are neither arising nor

ceasing. Such distinct causes may be summarized in nine kinds: first, time; second, direction; third, space; fourth, atoms; fifth, the four great elements; sixth, Mahābrahmā Heaven; seventh, the Heaven of the Supreme Excellent; eighth, the Heaven of the Great Sovereign; and ninth, the Lord of Beings (the divine self).

Mahāmati, sustained by the Buddha's spiritual power, asked: "I consider what the World-Honored One teaches as neither arising nor ceasing to be no different from that of non-Buddhist paths. Why is this so?" Mahāmati raised four objections:

First, all non-Buddhist paths say that all dharmas in the world have truly existent causes of arising, such as a divine self, and that these productive causes are neither arising nor ceasing. The World-Honored One likewise speaks of three supramundane unconditioned dharmas: the uncreated unconditioned nature of space, the conditioned unconditioned cessation not produced by calculation, and the wisdom-unconditioned nature of the realm of nirvāṇa. The World-Honored One says that these three unconditioned dharmas are also, in essence, neither arising nor ceasing. Since both are neither arising nor ceasing, what the World-Honored One teaches seems no different or more remarkable than the teachings of non-Buddhist paths.

That is to say, non-Buddhist paths maintain that the causal nature of worldly things is neither arising nor ceasing, while the Buddha teaches that the causal nature of supramundane things is neither arising nor ceasing; the two have no substantive difference.

Second, non-Buddhist paths say that truly existent creators are distinct causes that give rise to all phenomena in the world. The World-Honored One likewise says that, with ignorance, craving, karma, and deluded thought as conditions, all worlds appear. The arising from distinct causes such as the divine self, as taught by those non-Buddhist paths, and the appearance through causes and conditions, as taught by the World-Honored One, differ only in their names. Therefore, there is no difference between the teachings of the World-Honored One and those of non-Buddhist paths.

That is to say, non-Buddhist paths hold that distinct causes give rise to all dharmas, while the Buddha teaches that the twelve links of dependent origination give rise to all dharmas. Thus, the names differ, but in substance there is no difference.

Third, the various non-Buddhist paths say that atoms, the Supreme Excellent, the Sovereign, the Lord of Beings (the divine self), and the like—the nine entities—can give rise to all phenomena. The myriad dharmas arise and cease, but these nine entities neither arise nor cease. The World-Honored One likewise teaches that the nature of all phenomena neither arises nor ceases, and that neither existence nor nonexistence can be apprehended.

That is, non-Buddhist paths hold that the nine entities neither arise nor cease, while the Buddha likewise teaches that the intrinsic nature of all dharmas neither arises nor ceases. Therefore, the two are no different.

Fourth, non-Buddhist paths say that the four great elements are indestructible; that the intrinsic nature of the four great elements neither arises nor ceases; and that the four great elements are permanent. Thus, the nature of the four great elements enters into all phenomena: though phenomena change in countless ways, the intrinsic nature of the four great elements does not change. World-Honored One, you say the same. Therefore, Mahāmati considers the Buddha Dharma to have nothing remarkable in comparison with non-Buddhist paths.

But if you say there is no difference from the doctrines of non-Buddhist paths, then all followers of non-Buddhist paths should be Buddhas, since they all teach neither arising nor ceasing. Yet you also say that one Buddha-field can be transformed only by one Buddha, and that it is incorrect for many Buddhas to appear in the world simultaneously within one world. Therefore, Mahāmati asks: “I only pray that the World-Honored One will explain the distinction by which the Buddha Dharma is extraordinarily superior to all non-Buddhist paths.”

Earlier, in discussing neither arising nor ceasing, the Buddha mainly answered that all verbal formulations and theories are provisional indications and should not be misunderstood or grasped at through deluded attachment.

But Mahāmati feared that people might remain confused and misunderstand neither arising nor ceasing, so he continued his inquiry. First, with respect to internal causes and conditions: do the Buddha and non-Buddhist paths both hold that truly existent causes of arising neither arise nor cease—whether a truly existent cause or the twelve links of dependent origination gives rise to all worlds? Second, with respect to the causes and conditions of external things: non-Buddhist paths hold that either the nine entities or the four great elements neither arise nor cease, while the Buddha teaches that the intrinsic nature of all dharmas, or the intrinsic nature of the four great elements, neither arises nor ceases. Are these the same? The Buddha refutes these wrong views below:

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: “What I teach as neither arising nor ceasing differs from the neither arising nor ceasing taught by non-Buddhist paths. Why is this so? Those non-Buddhist paths posit an existent intrinsic nature and thereby arrive at the characteristic of neither arising nor changing. I do not fall into the categories of existence or nonexistence. Mahāmati, I am free from the categories of existence and nonexistence, free from arising and ceasing; neither possessing intrinsic nature nor lacking intrinsic nature. Since things appear like various illusions and dreams, they are not without intrinsic nature. In what sense do they lack intrinsic nature? Forms

lack an intrinsic-nature characteristic that can be grasped, whether they appear or do not appear, whether they are grasped or not grasped. Therefore, all things lack intrinsic nature, yet are not without intrinsic nature. Simply awaken to the immediate manifestation of your own mind; then deluded thoughts will not arise, and there will be peace and happiness, while worldly affairs will forever cease."]

"Those non-Buddhist paths posit an existent intrinsic nature and thereby arrive at the characteristic of neither arising nor changing": non-Buddhist paths consider the essential nature of all dharmas to be truly existent. Thus, they take neither arising nor ceasing to mean the characteristic of a truly existent barren quiescence that does not arise, or of an eternal, unchanging state that neither ceases nor decays. This is what they call neither arising nor ceasing.

The Buddha told Mahāmati: "What I teach as neither arising nor ceasing differs from the neither arising nor ceasing taught by non-Buddhist paths. Why is this so? Those non-Buddhist paths hold that all dharmas are truly existent, and therefore that 'neither arising nor ceasing' must likewise possess a truly existent characteristic of not arising or not ceasing. Mahāmati, what the Tathāgata teaches as neither arising nor ceasing is not like this. The Tathāgata's teaching of neither arising nor ceasing does not fall into existence or nonexistence, is free from the categories of existence and nonexistence, and transcends the characteristics of arising and ceasing. It neither possesses intrinsic nature nor lacks intrinsic nature. Why is this so?"

"Since things appear like various illusions and dreams, they are not without intrinsic nature. In what sense do they lack intrinsic nature? Forms lack an intrinsic-nature characteristic that can be grasped, whether they appear or do not appear, whether they are grasped or not grasped." For example, various dreams and illusions appear. Although they cannot be obtained, they have nevertheless appeared and therefore differ from what has not appeared. Neither arising nor ceasing is likewise so: the illusory appearances of arising and ceasing are not absent, and thus it is not the annihilationist void in which nothing whatsoever exists.

This refutes the view of nonexistence. Why, then, do things lack intrinsic nature? Because none of the forms that appear possesses an intrinsic-nature characteristic that can be grasped. Though various appearances arise, in substance they are empty; though one may attempt to grasp them, in the end they cannot be grasped. Take dreams again as an example: though illusory appearances arise in profusion, after waking, one cannot retrieve them however one tries. As Chan Master Yongjia said: "In dreams, the six destinies appear vividly; upon awakening, the great thousandfold world is utterly empty." Therefore, neither arising nor ceasing is also without intrinsic nature. This refutes the view of existence.

“Therefore, all things lack intrinsic nature, yet are not without intrinsic nature. Simply awaken to the immediate manifestation of your own mind; then deluded thoughts will not arise, and there will be peace and happiness, while worldly affairs will forever cease.” Therefore, all dharmas lack any substantial intrinsic nature, yet this is not the annihilationist emptiness in which nothing whatsoever exists. Mahāmati, if one understands that all dharmas are neither existent nor nonexistent, but are merely manifestations of one’s own mind, what deluded thoughts could arise? As Chan Master Shou’an said: “It is not that one stills the mind to eliminate deluded thoughts; it is simply that there is nothing to deliberate.” In this way there is peace and happiness, and worldly affairs forever cease.

This directly refutes Mahāmati: the intrinsic nature of all dharmas is neither existent nor nonexistent; from the outset, it neither arises nor ceases and is free from all characteristics.

[Deluded ordinary beings fabricate affairs through deluded thought; this is not so for the noble sages. Unreal deluded thoughts are like a city of gandharvas or illusory people. Mahāmati, in a city of gandharvas or among illusory people, various beings and merchants seem to enter and depart. Foolish people, through deluded thought, take this to be real entering and departing, but in truth there is no one who departs and no one who enters; it is only their deluded thought.

“So it is, Mahāmati: deluded ordinary beings give rise to confusion concerning neither arising nor ceasing. There is in fact no conditioned or unconditioned dharma there, just as illusory people do not truly arise or cease. Intrinsic nature and lack of intrinsic nature are nonexistent. All dharmas are likewise so, free from arising and ceasing. Deluded ordinary beings fall away from reality and give rise to deluded thoughts of arising and ceasing; this is not so for the noble sages.”]

Deluded ordinary beings indulge in false thoughts and discriminations, and therefore believe that there truly exist various causes that produce things and the things so produced. The noble sages are not like this. They understand that all dharmas are unreal projections, like an illusory city and illusory people conjured by a magician. Within the illusory city are illusory people, various vivid living beings, and merchants coming and going. Deluded ordinary beings mistakenly take this coming and going to be real, yet in fact no one is coming or going; it is merely the false imagination of the deluded.

“Thus, Mahāmati, deluded ordinary beings give rise to the delusion of unborn and undying. Yet there are neither conditioned nor unconditioned dharmas, just as with illusory people: in truth, there is neither arising nor ceasing.” The same applies to unborn and undying. Deluded ordinary beings mistakenly suppose that “unborn and

undying" means either conditioned and fabricated permanence, or unconditioned and unfabricated annihilation.

In fact, "unborn and undying" is neither the arising produced by conditioned fabrication nor the stagnant, annihilationist death of what is unconditioned and unfabricated. "Unborn and undying" is like an illusory city and illusory people: although their forms and appearances are vivid, and they undergo arising, ceasing, and change, there is actually no arising or ceasing.

"Their nature is without nature, because nothing exists in itself. All dharmas are likewise apart from arising and ceasing. Deluded ordinary beings fall away from what is true and give rise to false thoughts of arising and ceasing; the noble sages do not." This means that all dharmas, in their essential nature, possess nothing at all; no fundamental, substantial self-nature can be found. The true nature of all the myriad, ever-changing phenomena is apart from and transcends arising and ceasing. Yet deluded ordinary beings take illusion for reality and falsely assume that dharmas truly arise and cease. This is not the way of the noble sages.

This further criticizes the non-Buddhist paths: they hold such wrong views because of false discrimination and mistaking the false for the real, thereby taking the illusory realm of arising and ceasing to have real existence.

Those who are not in accord with reality are not so. They falsely discriminate regarding the nature and self-nature of things, neither the same nor different. Those who falsely discriminate cling to the nature and self-nature of all things and do not see quiescence. Those who do not see quiescence will never be free from false discrimination. Therefore, Mahāmati, the view free of appearances is superior; it is not the view of appearances. The view of appearances is a cause of rebirth and therefore is not superior. Mahāmati, when one is free of appearances, false thoughts do not arise; there is no arising and no ceasing. This I call nirvāṇa. Mahāmati, nirvāṇa is seeing reality as it truly is, being free from the previously arisen, falsely imagined mind, mental factors, and dharmas, and attaining the Tathāgata's self-awakened noble wisdom. This I call nirvāṇa.

"Being free from the previously arisen, falsely imagined mind, mental factors, and dharmas": "mind, mental factors, and dharmas" refers to the mind-king dharmas, namely the eight consciousnesses, together with the associated mental-factor dharmas, namely the fifty-one mental factors. This means being free from the deluded consciousnesses and associated mental factors that have arisen from false thoughts since beginningless kalpas.

Those who are not in accord with reality differ from the noble sages described above. They falsely discriminate about the self-nature and essential reality of all dharmas, vainly arguing that this is the same and that is different. They do so

because they impose notions of existence and nonexistence upon the fundamental self-nature and essential reality of dharmas, mistaking the false for the real and adding false discriminations. Thus, they cannot themselves see the original quiescence. Those who do not see this original quiescence can never be free from false discrimination, afflictions, and clinging.

“Therefore, Mahāmati, the view free of appearances is superior; it is not the view of appearances. The view of appearances is a cause of rebirth and therefore is not superior.” Thus, for one who truly sees their nature, there is no nature to be seen: seeing itself is already that nature, and there is no other characteristic of nature to be seen. Therefore, seeing free of appearances should be regarded as superior; one should not cling to appearances in seeing. If one sees through appearances, clinging to appearances and seeking through them, one will sink with circumstances and thereby create the cause for rebirth in the three realms. Therefore, one should not cling to appearances.

“Mahāmati, when one is free of appearances, false thoughts do not arise; there is no arising and no ceasing. This I call nirvāṇa.”

“Mahāmati, nirvāṇa is seeing reality as it truly is, being free from the previously arisen, falsely imagined mind, mental factors, and dharmas, and attaining the Tathāgata’s self-awakened noble wisdom. This I call nirvāṇa.” Mahāmati, one whose wisdom penetrates freedom from appearances realizes that the arising and ceasing of all false thoughts is, in that very moment, non-arising: they have never arisen and have nowhere from which to cease. This is the unborn and undying nirvāṇa of which I speak. Mahāmati, what is called “nirvāṇa,” when seen in its true meaning, is freedom from the various discriminations and mental activities of beginningless kalpas and the recovery of the Tathāgata’s self-awakened noble wisdom, inherently complete from the beginning. This is “nirvāṇa.”

This is a summary. One should not falsely calculate the two extremes with regard to unborn and undying, but should leave behind discriminating conceptualization. Only then can one penetrate the true reality free of appearances, directly realize unborn and undying, and attain ultimate quiescent nirvāṇa. As Layman Fu said: “No birth is no cessation; no self, and no person. Forever removing the hindrance of afflictions, long departing from the body of future existence. When objects vanish, mind also ceases; greed and anger no longer arise. Without compassion, there is only empty wisdom; at ease and alone, one bears the truth.”

Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke in verse: “Eliminating their doctrine of arising, I establish the meaning of non-arising. I teach such a Dharma, but foolish people cannot understand it.”

The World-Honored One restated the matter: non-Buddhists falsely suppose unborn and undying to be the real characteristic of either barren, quiescent non-arising or permanent non-ceasing. In this way, the characteristic of arising blazes forth, and this is called a “doctrine of arising.” To eliminate this wrong view of the non-Buddhists’ doctrine of arising, the Buddha teaches non-arising in accordance with their capacities, as medicine suited to the illness. Deluded ordinary beings cannot understand this.

All dharmas are unborn, without self-nature and without anything possessed. Like gandharva cities, illusions, and dreams, that which has a nature has no cause.

“That which has a nature has no cause”: “nature” here refers to characteristics and phenomena. “No cause” means that although illusory appearances manifest, in essence there is no arising. Since there is no arising, how could there be a cause of arising? Therefore, “non-arising” is also called “without cause.” Thus, the overall meaning of “that which has a nature has no cause” is that all dharmas, although displaying the appearance of arising and ceasing, are in fact unborn and undying.

This verse means that the unborn and undying of all dharmas taught by the Buddha is that their self-nature is originally empty and fundamentally without anything possessed. They are like an illusory city or events in a dream: illusory appearances are not absent, but no substantial entity exists.

Since non-arising has no self-nature, for what reason should emptiness be taught? Because it is apart from conjunction: when one knows and perceives, its nature does not appear. Therefore, emptiness is unborn; I teach it to be without self-nature. Each and every conjunction manifests a nature, yet it does not truly exist.

“For what reason should emptiness be taught?” is an ancient inverted-object construction. That is: “For what reason should emptiness be taught?”

This passage means: Why is it said that dharmas lack self-nature, have never arisen, and are originally empty? Because the various consciousnesses of seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing do not arise from themselves, from another, or from both together; they arise through the conjunction of causes and conditions. Apart from the conjunction of causes and conditions, seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing cannot manifest. All dharmas are the same: they appear to exist through the conjunction of causes and conditions, and when the causes and conditions are absent, the dharmas are likewise absent. Therefore, all dharmas have no substantial self-nature.

When analyzed, there is no conjunction; it is not as the non-Buddhist paths perceive it.

Moreover, the individual dharmas that constitute causes and conditions, even when analyzed down to minute particles, each arise through the conjunction of causes and conditions and each lacks a substantial self-nature. Therefore, no real conjunction can be found. The Diamond Sūtra says: “What the Tathāgata calls a single conjunction is not a single conjunction.” But the unborn and undying perceived by the non-Buddhist paths is not like this. They fall into the two extremes of existence and nonexistence, taking unborn and undying to mean annihilationist non-arising or permanent non-ceasing.

The foregoing verses begin with the causes and conditions for the meaning of non-arising: in order to refute the non-Buddhists’ doctrine of arising, the Buddha teaches non-arising. They then explain that the Tathāgata’s “non-arising” is without cause, empty, and without self-nature, yet is not annihilation. Rather, it manifests illusorily in accordance with the conjunction of causes and conditions.

Dreams, illusions, and hairs hanging before the eyes; mirages and gandharva cities; the various affairs of the world manifest in appearance without cause.

Wild horse: in ancient times, ma (, “horse”) was a phonetic-loan character for mei ( ). Yemei (, written) means “wild dust,” a term used in Buddhist scriptures as a metaphor for a mirage.

Deluded non-Buddhists cling to dreams as real, mistake the hairs seen through an eye disorder for actual hanging hairs, take a mirage to be water, and regard an illusory city as real. But when observed with the Tathāgata’s right wisdom, the various phenomena of the world, though their illusory appearances are not absent, have no real self-nature. Therefore, although dharmas manifest appearances, they do not in fact arise from causes.

To subdue the doctrine of existent causes and expound the meaning of non-arising: those who expound non-arising cause the Dharma stream never to be cut off. The blazing doctrine of no cause terrifies the non-Buddhist paths.

Because non-Buddhists cling substantially to existence and nonexistence, they either maintain that dharmas are produced by some other cause, such as a divine self, or they maintain that everything is naturally so, that all things have no first cause, and that they arise and exist spontaneously. Whether they posit an alien cause such as a divine self or a natural absence of cause, they all regard the arising and ceasing of dharmas as real. They explain the causes of the arising of dharmas by means of either a distinct existent cause or annihilating nonexistence. Thus, at bottom, every non-Buddhist path propounds the wrong theory that something real can arise.

Therefore, the Tathāgata teaches non-arising in order to refute the non-Buddhists' wrong theories that things arise either from causes or naturally without causes. Dharmas do not arise from causes, nor do they arise naturally without causes; fundamentally, they have never arisen at all, so how could one further speak of a cause of arising? Thus, only by expounding the Tathāgata's true meaning of non-arising can the stream of the true Dharma flow on without interruption. If a wise person can teach this prajñā Dharma of non-arising and no cause in the world, it is like a fiercely blazing mass of fire that destroys all things: ordinary beings and sages alike become ashes, and no non-Buddhist who hears it fails to be alarmed and terrified.

This passage explains that the Buddha's teaching of no cause and non-arising directly refutes the non-Buddhists' wrong view of real arising. Mahāmati next asks about the specific causes and conditions for the Buddha's teaching of the doctrine of no cause.

How and for what cause? Why do they arise? On what conjunction is the doctrine of no cause established? Observe conditioned dharmas: they are neither without cause nor with cause. For those who maintain arising and ceasing, what they perceive is thereby extinguished.

Mahāmati asked: "Why does the World-Honored One speak of no cause? In what context does he teach no cause? If there is no cause, then how can dharmas arise? On the basis of what reasoning and conjunction does the World-Honored One arrive at the conclusion of no cause?"

The World-Honored One replied: "When all conditioned dharmas are observed with right wisdom, they are apart from existence and nonexistence, arising and ceasing. Thus, they are neither without cause nor with cause. This is the correct doctrine of no cause that I teach; by means of it, the non-Buddhists' wrong view of arising and ceasing can be extinguished." This means that the Buddha's teaching of no cause is spoken to refute the non-Buddhists' wrong views. In fact, dharmas have fundamentally never arisen, so there is no such thing as either cause or no cause; nor is there any conclusion of "no cause" to be reached.

What is non-arising? Is it the absence of self-nature? Or is it that, in dependence upon conditions, a dharma is called non-arising? The name should not be without meaning; it is taught only for the sake of discrimination.

Having finished discussing "uncaused," Mahāmati then goes on to ask about "non-arising." Here he advances four views concerning non-arising: "Then what is non-arising?"

1. Is it non-arising because all dharmas are annihilated and empty, without anything at all?

2. Or, although all dharmas arise, are they called non-arising because they can arise only by relying on causes and conditions?

3. Or is there in fact a dharma called non-arising?

4. Since there is the name “non-arising,” must there necessarily be a real meaning of non-arising?

May the World-Honored One kindly explain these distinctions for us.

[Non-arising is not the non-arising of sheer nonexistence, nor does it mean attending to conditions. It is not a name for an existent nature, yet the name is not without meaning. This is not the sphere of all non-Buddhist paths, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, or even bodhisattvas at the seventh bhūmi. This is called the characteristic of non-arising.]

The World-Honored One replied: The non-arising spoken of by the Tathāgata is not the annihilationist non-arising in which everything is utterly nonexistent. Nor does it mean that dharmas arise only when the conditions of causes and conditions are complete. Nor is there actually a dharma of non-arising that is named “non-arising.” Yet the name non-arising is not without meaning. All non-Buddhist paths, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and even bodhisattvas at the seventh bhūmi cannot directly realize the realm of non-arising. This is the characteristic of the dharma of non-arising.

Here the Buddha first refutes Mahāmati’s questions. Neither arising nor ceasing falls into existence or nonexistence; therefore, none of Mahāmati’s questions is correct. He next indicates non-arising by means of the level of realization: non-arising is not annihilation, and only those at the eighth bhūmi and above know the subtle wonder of the realm of non-arising.

[Far removed from all causes and conditions, and apart from all phenomena, only the subtle mind abides. Both thought and what is thought are relinquished. As one’s body undergoes transformation, I call this non-arising.]

The non-arising of which I speak is removed from all causes, conditions, and karmic results. Only the subtle mind ever abides. What is this subtle mind? Chan Master Shishuang composed this verse: “The mind turns with the myriad circumstances; where it turns is truly profound. Following the stream, recognize one’s nature: neither joy nor sorrow.” “Profound” means the subtle mind.

This subtle mind is quiescent and non-arising, yet it is not annihilated into empty nothingness. It cannot be fathomed by any thinking mind. All that exists is wholly empty in its very nature, and emptiness in its very nature is existence. Everything seen as good or bad, favorable or adverse, is nothing other than intrinsic nature. Therefore, there is nothing to delight in and nothing to grieve over—"Following conditions, recognize one's nature: neither joy nor sorrow."

This continues the preceding passage and reveals the realm of the forbearance of non-arising dharmas: free from all causes and conditions, and free from mind, consciousness, and mentation, one no longer wavers in the lucid state where not a single dharma exists. Even non-arising is itself non-arising. Then the karmically retributive body accordingly transforms into boundless wondrous functions for liberating sentient beings. This is non-arising. ("As one's body undergoes transformation" is translated in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra as "transforming the forms of oneself and one's environment," and in Tam Shek-wing's version as "being able to transform that upon which one relies." Taken together, these indicate that this line does not refer to a change in outward bodily appearance.)

This answers Mahāmati's fourth view, that "the name should not be without meaning." Non-arising is not annihilated nonexistence; fundamentally, nothing arises, yet boundless transformative functions for liberating beings appear outwardly.

[There is no external nature and no inherent nature; nor is there a mind that apprehends them. Having severed all views, I call this non-arising. Thus, non-self-nature and emptiness should be distinguished. It is not because there is an emptiness that it is called empty; it is because of non-arising that it is called empty.]

Externally, all dharmas fundamentally possess no substantial inherent nature. Internally, there is likewise no mind capable of grasping or rejecting all dharmas. Thus, when subject and object both fall away inwardly and outwardly, and all deluded views and discriminations are severed, this is the non-arising taught by the Tathāgata.

Therefore, realizing non-arising is realizing non-self-nature and emptiness. One should note here that emptiness is not spoken of because there is truly some dharma called "emptiness"; rather, it is spoken of because all dharmas are originally non-arising. These dharmas naturally include emptiness, non-arising, non-self-nature, and so forth; one must not take these as real either.

This answers Mahāmati's questions whether non-arising is non-self-nature and whether there is truly a dharma called non-arising. Non-arising is beyond existence and nonexistence, and one must not suppose that there is a real dharma of "non-

arising." The text next discusses whether non-arising means "attending to conditions."

[When the multiplicity of causes and conditions combines, there is arising and ceasing. Apart from the multiplicity of causes and conditions, there is no separate arising or ceasing.

When the multiplicity of causes and conditions is relinquished, there is no further distinct nature. To speak of oneness or difference is the deluded thought of non-Buddhist paths.

The natures of existence and nonexistence do not arise; they are neither existent nor nonexistent. Apart from their changing multiplicity, none of these can be obtained.

There is only the conventional multiplicity, which successively becomes interlocking links. Apart from those links of causes and conditions, the meaning of arising cannot be obtained.

Arising is without self-nature and does not arise. This is free from the errors of non-Buddhist paths. It merely speaks of the interlocking links of conditions, which ordinary deluded people cannot understand.]

"Multiplicity of causes and conditions": "multiplicity" refers to the provisional appearances of distinctions and changes. Volume 2, page 4 of the Compendium of Abhidharma states: "Multiplicity means that, with respect to each distinct conditioned phenomenon, a multiplicity is provisionally posited." Thus, the multiplicity of causes and conditions refers to the many provisional appearances of change produced by the coming together of causes and conditions.

"Conventional multiplicity": conventional refers to conventional truth. Conventional multiplicity means that all worldly appearances are provisional appearances.

"Interlocking links" refers to mutual connection and linkage, in which one link fits into another without interruption. When foolish people mistake the false for the real in a single thought, cause and effect continue in circulation, and birth and death stretch on without end. Thus, the deluded discriminations of ordinary beings are the interlocking links of saṃsāra and the bonds of the three realms.

"When the multiplicity of causes and conditions combines, there is arising and ceasing. Apart from the multiplicity of causes and conditions, there is no separate arising or ceasing"—because of the provisional appearances of differentiated changes arising from the combination of causes and conditions, appearances of arising and ceasing occur. Apart from changes in causes and conditions, no appearances of arising and ceasing can manifest.

“When the multiplicity of causes and conditions is relinquished, there is no further distinct nature. To speak of oneness or difference is the deluded thought of non-Buddhist paths”—when the many changes of causes and conditions are relinquished, there fundamentally exists neither a dharma of oneness nor one of difference—that is, none of all dharmas. To say that dharmas such as oneness or difference exist apart from changes in causes and conditions is the erroneous view of non-Buddhist paths.

“The natures of existence and nonexistence do not arise; they are neither existent nor nonexistent. Apart from their changing multiplicity, none of these can be obtained”—the two natures of existence and nonexistence have never actually arisen; all dharmas are neither existent nor nonexistent. There are only the differentiated changes of causes and conditions, through which the appearances of dharmas display their various differences. In essence, all dharmas are illusory, without self-nature, and unobtainable.

“There is only the conventional multiplicity, which successively becomes interlocking links. Apart from those links of causes and conditions, the meaning of arising cannot be obtained.

Arising is without self-nature and does not arise. This is free from the errors of non-Buddhist paths. It merely speaks of the interlocking links of conditions, which ordinary deluded people cannot understand”—all appearances of difference and sameness, arising and ceasing, and change are unreal, provisional appearances. These provisional appearances are mutually connected, like waves continually driving one another onward; they give rise to and cease in relation to one another, becoming a continuity of cause and effect, like unbreakable interlocking links that continuously change without rest.

Apart from these interlocking links of cause and effect and the combination of causes and conditions, no dharmas of arising and ceasing can be obtained. Yet when examined with right wisdom, all dharmas have no substantial inherent nature and have never arisen. Therefore, the causal interconnections among them are also illusory. In reality, there is non-arising; there are only outwardly manifest, changing provisional appearances of causes, conditions, and karmic results. In this way, one is free from all the errors of deluded views held by non-Buddhist paths. Ordinary deluded people cannot know this profound Dharma.

This means that all dharmas appear through the combination of causes and conditions; apart from that combination, no dharmas of arising and ceasing can be obtained. The combination of causes and conditions is itself an illusory appearance. Sentient beings are inverted and mistake the false for the real, and thus turn the successive changes of this provisional appearance of combined causes and

conditions into karmic force that locks their own minds in interlocking links. Therefore, the dependent arising of dharmas is precisely non-arising.

[If, apart from the interlocking links of conditions, there were a separate nature of arising, this would be the doctrine of no cause and would destroy the meaning of the interlocking links.

Just as a lamp reveals the many images, so too the interlocking links make things appear. If this were so, then apart from the interlocking links there would be other separate natures.]

"If, apart from the interlocking links of conditions, there were a separate nature of arising, this would be the doctrine of no cause and would destroy the meaning of the interlocking links"—if one believes that dharmas can arise apart from the interlocking links of causes and conditions, one denies cause and effect. This is called the erroneous non-Buddhist view of no cause. Such a view destroys the meaning of the interlocking links of causes and conditions.

"Just as a lamp reveals the many images, so too the interlocking links make things appear. If this were so, then apart from the interlocking links there would be other separate natures"—just as a lamp shining upon things can reveal their many images and colors: the lamp is not color, yet without its illumination the various colors cannot appear. The interlocking links of causes and conditions are the same: causes and conditions are not real dharmas; they are merely illusory manifestations.

Yet it is precisely because the illusory manifestation of combined causes and conditions occurs that the appearances of phenomena can manifest. Apart from this combination of causes and conditions, no separate dharma can manifest. To believe that dharmas can arise apart from the interlocking links of causes and conditions is an erroneous view of non-Buddhist paths.

[Without self-nature, there is no arising, just as the nature of space. If one departs from the interlocking links, wisdom has nothing to discriminate.

There is also another non-arising, the dharma realized by sages and noble ones. That arising which is non-arising is the forbearance of non-arising.

If all worldly beings were to observe the interlocking links, they would all be free from those links and thereby attain samādhi.]

Dharmas possess no substantial inherent nature and have never arisen. Their nature is like space: utterly unobtainable. They merely display the provisional appearances of arising and ceasing through the combination of causes and conditions. If one holds that dharmas can truly arise apart from the interlocking links of causes and conditions, this is the ignorant view of one without wisdom.

There is another view of non-arising: it is the view of the wisdom of sages and noble ones. Wisdom sees that dharmas produced by the combination of causes and conditions are, at that very moment, non-arising and uncaused. This is the Mahāyāna view of the forbearance of non-arising dharmas.

If worldly beings observe the interlocking links of causes and conditions with right wisdom, they will discover that every principal element in those links is empty and non-arising in its very nature. Thus, there is in fact no matter of things mutually locking one another; all dharmas are originally free from interlocking links. The so-called interlocking links are not interlocking links. If one can abide in this right wisdom of observation, one realizes the samādhi of non-arising.

[Deluded attachment, karma, and the like are internal interlocking links. Fire-drills, clay lumps, wheels, seeds, and the like are called external.

If there were another nature that arose from causes and conditions, that would not be the meaning of interlocking links; thus, it could not be established.]

If what arises has no inherent nature, whom could it bind in the chain of links? Since things arise successively from one another, know this to be the meaning of causes and conditions."

"Ignorance, craving, the various karmas, and the like are the inner links; producing fire by drilling wood, shaping a clay lump into a vessel by turning it on a wheel, and seeds producing rice and wheat are called the outer links"—the subjects of the causal links include inner and outer kinds. The various karmas of sentient beings, such as ignorance and craving, are the inner links of the Dharma of causes and conditions. Drilling wood can produce fire; turning a round wheel to shape clay can make a jar; and seeds can produce rice, wheat, and so forth. These external objective phenomena constitute the outer links of the Dharma of causes and conditions. When inner and outer causes and conditions come together, the changing appearances of phenomena manifest outwardly.

"If there were another inherent nature that arose from causes and conditions, that would not be the meaning of links; thus it could not be established"—if one holds that, beyond the inner and outer causes and conditions, there are other inherently real dharmas that can arise through causes and conditions—for example, the non-Buddhist paths maintain that all worldly things arise from different causes such as a "divine self" or "nature"—then this is not the meaning of causal links. Such a principle of causal links cannot be established.

(For if this were so, the natures of cause and effect would be wholly different: dissimilar causes could produce similar results. One could plant beans and harvest

melons, or press sand and obtain oil. This denies cause and effect; everything would become confused and indiscernible, and nothing could be established.)

“If what arises has no inherent nature, whom could it bind in the chain of links? Since things arise successively from one another, know this to be the meaning of causes and conditions”—when examined with right wisdom, all the inner and outer subjects of the causal links—sentient and insentient beings and all other dharmas—lack any substantial inherent nature and have never truly arisen. Therefore, what actual causal links could there be? Whom could causal links and karmic retribution bind? It is only that the illusory manifestations of dharmas proceed according to the pattern whereby causes and effects successively give rise to one another. This is the true meaning of the Dharma of causes and conditions.

The foregoing points explain in detail the meaning of dependent arising as non-arising: all dharmas originally lack any substantial inherent nature and are originally unborn, yet illusory appearances manifest outwardly through the provisional conjunction of causes and conditions. To hold that, apart from causal links, there are inherently real dharmas that can arise is the view of non-Buddhist paths. To hold that all dharmas truly can arise, undergoing real arising and ceasing through the conjunction of causes and conditions, is likewise the view of non-Buddhist paths.

The preceding passages have elaborated on the question of “causes and conditions” and answered the second point raised by Mahāmati: “Does it depend upon observing the various conditions?” Mahāmati means: do all dharmas arise only through causes and conditions, so that apart from causes and conditions they cannot arise, and is this why they are called “unborn”? The Buddha answers: all dharmas do indeed manifest through the conjunction of causes and conditions, but all manifested appearances and the laws of cause and effect are also merely provisional appearances. In their very nature, all dharmas are unborn; fundamentally, they have never arisen.

The properties of solidity, moisture, warmth, and movement give rise to deluded thoughts in ordinary fools. Apart from enumeration, there is no separate dharma; this is what is called lack of inherent nature.”

Likewise, solidity, moisture, warmth, and movement are the characteristics of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind. Deluded ordinary people also hold that the four great elements are inherently real, and that the real conjunction of these four elements produces all dharmas. In fact, these four great elements are also provisional appearances; they have no substantial inherent nature. The myriad dharmas in all their variety are illusory and lack inherent nature. This is the lack of inherent nature taught by the Tathāgata.

At this point, let us return to the question Mahāmati raised at the beginning of this section: the Buddha Dharma's non-arising and non-ceasing seems very similar to the non-arising and non-ceasing of the non-Buddhist paths. These questions are exceedingly subtle. If ordinary Buddhist disciples rely solely on speculative thought to understand the Dharma taught by the Buddha, they too can easily stray onto the same wrong paths of non-Buddhist views. Up to the line, "The properties of solidity, moisture, warmth, and movement," this repeated verse has in fact answered each of Mahāmati's questions above in careful detail:

1. The non-Buddhist paths hold that the myriad dharmas are inherently real and undergo arising and ceasing; therefore, there must be an initial cause of their arising, and this causal nature neither arises nor ceases. Yet the Buddha says that the supramundane cause—specifically, the three unconditioned dharmas, which point through three kinds of unconditionedness to the true Dharma of empty quiescence, free from fabrication and conditioning—neither arises nor ceases. Thus, they claim, there is no essential difference between the two. This mistakes causal nature and non-arising and non-ceasing for an inherently real permanence. In fact, the myriad dharmas have never arisen in the first place, so still less can there be a permanently unextinguished causal nature.

2. The non-Buddhist paths say that different causes produce all dharmas, while the Buddha speaks of the twelve links of dependent origination as producing all dharmas. Thus, they claim, the names differ but the substance is no different. Yet the twelve causes and conditions taught by the Buddha are not inherently real; even the various links of causes, conditions, and karmic retribution are all illusory and unreal, not inherently real and permanent.

3. The non-Buddhist paths maintain that the nine substances neither arise nor cease, while the Buddha likewise says that the inherent nature of all dharmas neither arises nor ceases. Thus, they claim, there is no difference between the two. Yet the inherent nature of dharmas is neither existent nor nonexistent and is originally unobtainable; it is not inherently real and permanent like the divine self or Creator imagined by the non-Buddhist paths.

4. The non-Buddhist paths say that the four great elements are indestructible, that the myriad dharmas are formed by their conjunction, and that although the myriad dharmas change in countless ways, the nature of the four great elements remains unchanged. The World-Honored One says the same. Mahāmati therefore believes that the Buddha Dharma has nothing distinctive in comparison with the non-Buddhist paths.

The non-Buddhist paths regard the four great elements as inherently real basic elements, distinct in nature, that make up all material things; the myriad dharmas

may perish, but the subtle four great elements do not. The Buddha Dharma also seems to say this—for example, as Pūrṇa says in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra: “Moreover, the Tathāgata says that the inherent natures of earth, water, fire, and wind are perfectly interfused, pervading the dharma realm, serene and ever-abiding.”

In fact, the Buddha responded in this way: “When one contemplates appearances, they are originally delusive and cannot be indicated; it is like seeking flowers in empty space and expecting them to bear empty fruit. How, then, can one question the meaning of their mutual destruction? When one contemplates nature, it is originally true and is solely wondrous awakening and luminosity. The mind of wondrous awakening and luminosity is not originally water or fire, so why again ask why they are incompatible?” This sūtra, however, says: “The properties of solidity, moisture, warmth, and movement give rise to deluded thoughts in ordinary fools. Apart from enumeration, there is no separate dharma.

This is what is called lack of inherent nature.” That is, the four great elements are not inherently real; they are illusory, and the four natures of solidity, moisture, warmth, and movement are unobtainable. Yet the provisional appearances of the four great elements are also expressions of the wondrous true suchness of the Tathāgata-garbha. Buddha-nature inherently possesses the seven great elements; the wondrous true suchness of the Tathāgata-garbha is originally neither empty nor existent, wondrously numinous and perfectly unobstructed. This is why it is said that they “do not mutually destroy one another and pervade the dharma realm.”

“Just as in treating many illnesses, there are no several doctrines; because illnesses differ, various remedies are prescribed.

For sentient beings, I destroy the various afflictions. Knowing whether their faculties are superior or inferior, I teach them gates of liberation.

It is not because afflictions and faculties differ that there are various dharmas. I teach only the One Vehicle Dharma; this is the Mahāyāna.”

The Buddha concludes: all the dharma gates that I teach for sentient beings are taught as skillful means.

It is like a physician treating many illnesses: the sole purpose is to bring about recovery; there is no other aim. Once a patient has recovered, medicines and medical treatises need no longer be used. Yet because people’s illnesses differ, various remedies and medical teachings are established for treatment suited to each case.

It is the same when the Buddha removes the afflictive illnesses of sentient beings submerged in saṃsāra. The Tathāgata teaches various dharma gates of liberation

according to the differences in sentient beings' capacities. Although the teachings may be indirect or direct, gradual or sudden, this is not because differences in sentient beings' afflictions and faculties mean that there are truly many different Buddhadharmas. All skillful dharma gates of the Buddhadharma point toward ultimate liberation. The markless reality of true suchness and ultimate liberation are the Buddhadharma's one and only One Vehicle. This is the essence of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Overview of This Section:

Key terms of this section: "non-arising and non-ceasing," "extensive learning," and "unborn."

In this section, Mahāmati asks the Buddha whether the Dharma of non-arising and non-ceasing is truly nonexistent or truly existent. The Buddha points out that non-arising and non-ceasing does not fall into existence or nonexistence, nor does it arise in dependence on conditions. It is unborn yet excludes no arising; it is not existent, yet its meaning is indeed present. He further points out that the wrong views and distortions of the Buddha's meaning found among ordinary people of the non-Buddhist paths all result from their pervasive discrimination and attachment to names, appearances, and verbal expression. In truth, everything the Tathāgata teaches is a skillful means. The Tathāgata's true meaning is not dependent on words and letters. Therefore, one should rely on the meaning, not on the words; this is "extensive learning."

Mahāmati further asks: since non-arising and non-ceasing does indeed have meaning, does it have the same meaning as the non-arising and non-ceasing of the non-Buddhist paths? More specifically: 1. Is the non-Buddhist theory of a causal origin the same as the Buddha's teaching of no cause? 2. Is arising from different causes the same as arising through the twelve links of dependent origination? 3. Is the non-arising and non-ceasing of the nine substances, including subtle particles, the same as the Buddha's teaching that the inherent nature of all dharmas neither arises nor ceases? 4. Does the inherent nature of the four great elements truly exist permanently?

The Buddha answers Mahāmati: the meaning of the realm of non-arising taught by the Buddha is wondrous, numinous non-arising. He further answers: 1. The Buddha teaches no cause in order to destroy the wrong view of the non-Buddhist paths that there is a cause. No cause means emptiness, non-arising, and lack of inherent nature; it is not the withered quiescence of utter nothingness. 2. All dharmas arising from causes and conditions are illusorily present but actually nonexistent; this is not the same as the wrong view that they arise from a divine self or other different cause, as maintained by the non-Buddhist paths. 3. Apart from causal links, there

are no dharmas that arise and cease; claims that subtle particles, the nine substances, and the like arise from different causes deny cause and effect and cannot be established. 4. The four great elements likewise have no real inherent nature that can be found.

Finally, the Buddha again emphasizes that his teaching of all dharmas is solely a skillful means for dispelling illusion. Because sentient beings differ, the skillful means of the Buddhadharma also differ. Though there are various differences, the Buddhadharma ultimately has only the One Vehicle, with neither a second nor a third.

This section also concerns the question of cause and effect, which practitioners care deeply about. In explaining dependent arising as non-arising, the Buddha points out that all dharmas reciprocally repay causes and effects and are mutually bound in links, without a single exception. Yet he also says: “Those who observe the links are all free from the links.

Then are the links of cause and effect ultimately existent or nonexistent? Consider the familiar Chan koan of the wild fox: “Does a person of great cultivation still fall under cause and effect?” Chan Master Baizhang’s phrase, “not obscured about cause and effect,” has provoked endless debate among Chan communities, so that even now no definitive conclusion has been reached.

Master Yuanyin also answered: “A person of great cultivation does not fall under cause and effect!” This startled many students at the time. In fact, a person of great cultivation is the cause, and “not falling under cause and effect” is the result—transcending all cause and effect, without falling into even the slightest cause and effect. This is precisely a most excellent supramundane cause and effect! Therefore, how could there be any contradiction between the existence and nonexistence of cause and effect, freedom from and binding by the links, or even all appearances of arising, ceasing, and saṃsāra, and the nature of non-arising and non-ceasing?

33. Distinguishing Impermanence

In the preceding section, the World-Honored One, in response to Mahāmati’s question, refuted the non-Buddhist misconceptions concerning neither arising nor ceasing. In this section, Mahāmati again asks whether the impermanence taught by the Buddha is the same as or different from the impermanence taught by non-Buddhists:

[Then Mahāmati Bodhisattva Mahāsattva again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, all non-Buddhists give rise to deluded conceptions of impermanence. The World-Honored One also says that all conditioned phenomena are

impermanent and are dharmas of arising and ceasing. What is the meaning of this? Is it erroneous or correct? How many kinds of impermanence are there?”]

Mahāmati again asked: World-Honored One, all non-Buddhists mistakenly take all dharmas to be impermanent. Yet the World-Honored One also says that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent and that all dharmas arise and cease. What profound meaning does this contain? How can one distinguish correct from erroneous views of impermanence? Exactly how many kinds of impermanence are there?

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: “All non-Buddhists have seven kinds of impermanence; they are not my teaching. What are the seven? Some say that what is made and then abandoned is called impermanence. Some say that the destruction of form and location is called impermanence. Some say that form itself is impermanence. Some say that impermanence consists in the interval of transformation of form: without interruption, it disperses and decays of itself, as with milk and curds. The interval of transformation cannot be seen; impermanence destroys and decays, and all natures transform. Some say that nature is impermanent. Some say that the impermanence of a nature having no nature is impermanence. Some say that all dharmas are unborn, and that impermanence enters into all dharmas.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati: All non-Buddhists have seven erroneous views of impermanence. None of these seven erroneous views is the correct view of the Tathāgata. What are these seven? According to them, they are as follows:

1. “Impermanence of making and then abandoning.” “Making” means creating. These non-Buddhists believe that there truly is an omnipotent creator who can create all dharmas. Having created them, the creator abandons them and creates no more; this is called impermanence of making and then abandoning. For example, they may hold that a creator god truly exists: the god first creates the sun, moon, and stars; then mountains, rivers, and the great earth; then birds, beasts, flowers, fish, and insects; and finally human beings to govern all these things. When the work of creation has been completed, the creator god rests contentedly. This is a typical example of the “impermanence of making and then abandoning.”

2. “Impermanence through the destruction of form and location.” This view holds that the four great elements produce all material dharmas: the four great elements are the producers, and material dharmas are what they produce. The four great elements that produce them are eternal and unchanging, but the length and outward forms of the material dharmas produced are impermanent and changing. For example, water may change among gaseous, liquid, and solid states, and clay may be molded into all sorts of shapes. Yet, however their outward forms change, water and earth themselves do not change.

3. “Form itself is impermanent.” This view holds that the four great elements produce all material dharmas: the four great elements are the producers, and material dharmas are what they produce. The four great elements that produce them are eternal and unchanging, but the material dharmas produced are mutable and impermanent. For example, they may believe that energy truly exists: even if matter returns to emptiness, energy remains, and thus all things may still have an opportunity to be restored.

4. “Impermanence in the interval of transformation of form.” That is, the interval between two material dharmas is continuously undergoing transformation, and is therefore called impermanence in the interval of transformation. They hold that, after a material dharma comes into being, it changes uninterruptedly and naturally tends toward decay and destruction. For example, cow’s milk turns into curds: the process is continuously changing, and during the interval no fixed form can be seen. Only when it finally becomes curds is there a fixed form. The intermediate process of transformation in material dharmas is impermanent. This resembles the common saying, “A thousand-mile dike collapses because of an ant hole”: the accumulation of quantitative changes leads to a qualitative change.

All four of these erroneous views mistakenly presume that there are real producers and things produced. Although they acknowledge that dharmas bear the marks of impermanence, they maintain that dharmas arise through production, that the dharmas produced are impermanent, and that there is separately an eternal producer—whether the four great elements or a divine self as creator.

5. “Impermanence of nature.” This view holds that the intrinsic nature of all dharmas is impermanent. The nature of this impermanence itself is an eternal substance, capable of causing all dharmas to decay and perish impermanently. This mistakes the principle of impermanence for an eternal dharma. For example, many legends, ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, hold that when a person is about to die, Black and White Impermanence or the god of death comes to claim that person’s life. Human life passes from generation to generation, but Black and White Impermanence or the god of death is held to remain eternally unchanged, with an everlasting mission.

6. “Impermanence of a nature that is without nature.” This view holds that the intrinsic nature of all dharmas is in fact nonexistence; therefore, all dharmas must ultimately perish through impermanence.

7. “All dharmas are unborn; impermanence enters into all dharmas.” This view holds that the essential nature of all dharmas is barren quiescence and non-arising. Because “impermanence” can enter into all dharmas, it causes all dharmas to arise, abide, change, and cease; this is therefore called unborn impermanence.

These last three views all maintain that there is a truly existing eternal nature that causes dharmas to be impermanent.

The Buddha next refutes each of the seven erroneous views. He first refutes views 5, 6, and 7 from the standpoint of intrinsic nature:

["Mahāmati, by the impermanence of a nature having no nature, they mean that the four great elements and the distinctive characteristics of what they produce perish. But the intrinsic natures of the four great elements cannot be obtained; they do not arise."]

"The perishing of distinctive characteristics": "distinctive characteristics" are the dharma characteristics of the four great elements and of the dharmas produced by those elements. Most non-Buddhists believe that the four great elements are the producers and that all worldly dharmas are produced through the changing, combining, and accumulation of these elements. "The perishing of distinctive characteristics" means that both the four great elements, which produce dharmas, and the dharmas produced by them will perish. The worldly erroneous view expressed by "when a person dies, the lamp is extinguished" is similar to this view: human beings can transform the world, but ultimately both human beings and the world will perish.

6. "Impermanence of a nature that is without nature": non-Buddhists hold that the fundamental nature of all myriad dharmas is nonexistence. Therefore, the four great elements that produce them and all the dharmas they produce must inevitably perish. This view is called "impermanence of a nature that is without nature." For example, when a seed becomes a sprout, the seed has already perished; since the seed has perished, the sprout produced by it must necessarily perish as well.

All such transformations show, they say, that a seed is not a seed and a sprout is not a sprout. In other words, they hold that all worldly dharmas undergo impermanent change and ultimately return to extinction because the essential nature of all dharmas lacks any real substance. This view establishes "nonexistence" as real and reduces the intrinsic nature of all dharmas to annihilating nonexistence.

The Buddha further refutes this by saying: the true intrinsic nature of the four great elements is neither existent nor nonexistent; neither existence nor nonexistence can be obtained. Nor have all dharmas ever truly arisen. Thus, since there is no truly existing nature of "nonexistence," no actual marks of "impermanence" can arise. Still less can there be the many explanations of impermanence.

The following passage continues with unborn impermanence. The non-Buddhist view 6, "impermanence of a nature that is without nature," and view 7, "unborn impermanence," are very close: the former holds that the intrinsic nature of

dharmas is truly nonexistent, while the latter holds that their intrinsic nature is truly unborn, and that all dharmas therefore ultimately perish. Both are typical annihilationist views:

["As for their unborn impermanence, it is not eternal impermanence. All dharmas, whether existent or nonexistent, are unborn. When analyzed down to atoms, they cannot be seen; this is the meaning of unborn, not arising. This is called the mark of unborn impermanence. Those who do not realize this fall into the meaning of arising and impermanence held by all non-Buddhists."]

7. The view of "unborn impermanence": this erroneous non-Buddhist view holds that the original nature of dharmas is barren quiescence and non-arising, and that all dharmas therefore ultimately perish and do not arise. The story of Zhuangzi beating a basin and singing upon the death of his wife says that Zhuangzi held: "...examining its beginning, there was originally no birth. ... In the indistinct and nebulous, it changed and there was qi; qi changed and there was form; form changed and there was life."

That is, "non-arising" is the original beginning of all things. Through a vague and elusive transformation, all dharmas arise, abide, change, and cease, and ultimately return to the barren quiescence of non-arising. Thus, when his wife died, Zhuangzi beat a basin and sang, celebrating her final return to the original state of "non-arising."

Yet, as the preceding passage states, all dharmas are neither eternal nor impermanent. Existence and nonexistence cannot be obtained, and dharmas have never truly arisen. This "non-arising" does not give rise to either existence or nonexistence. Even when analyzed down to the smallest particles, existence and nonexistence cannot be obtained, and there is no basis for speaking of existence or nonexistence, arising or ceasing.

"This is the meaning of unborn, not arising. This is called the mark of unborn impermanence. Those who do not realize this fall into the meaning of arising and impermanence held by all non-Buddhists." Thus, true non-arising does not give rise to a nature of "existence" or "nonexistence," nor to marks of "eternity" or "impermanence." So-called marks of impermanence are illusory and false; they have never truly arisen. This alone is the true mark of unborn impermanence. If one does not realize this, one falls into non-Buddhist erroneous views. They take impermanence to be truly existent, and so generate all manner of mistaken theories explaining impermanence.

["Mahāmati, the impermanence of nature is the deluded discrimination of one's own mind, not an eternal nature of impermanence. Why is this so? They say that the intrinsic nature of impermanence does not perish. Mahāmati, this is the operation

whereby the impermanence of all natures that are without nature is produced. Apart from impermanence, there is nothing that can cause the natures of all dharmas to become without nature, just as sticks, tiles, and stones destroy other things."]

"They say that the intrinsic nature of impermanence does not perish": they hold that the nature of dharmas is impermanence, and that this dharma-nature of "impermanence" truly exists, is eternal, and does not perish.

"The operation whereby the impermanence of all natures that are without nature is produced": here, "operation" means "to make" as a verb. This sentence uses inverted Classical Chinese word order. In regular order, it means: impermanence operates to make all natures without nature—that is, truly existing impermanence is the cause that makes all dharmas perish and return to nonexistence.

In view 5, "impermanence of nature," they falsely establish impermanence as a truly existing dharma-nature. This is the deluded discrimination of their own minds. In fact, there is no truly existing dharma-nature of either eternity or impermanence. Why? The Buddha first explains this erroneous non-Buddhist view and then refutes it in detail:

Non-Buddhists who hold the view of impermanence of nature believe that there truly exists a dharma-nature of impermanence. This dharma-nature itself eternally abides and does not perish, while this dharma of "impermanence" causes all dharmas to decay and perish. Apart from this impermanence, no other dharma can cause everything to change from real existence into real nonexistence. It is like using a bamboo stick to strike tiles and stones: the tiles and stones shatter, but the bamboo stick itself remains undamaged. They hold that impermanence is an active, truly existing dharma, eternal and indestructible in itself, which can cause all dharmas to perish.

["What is now seen is in each case no different. This operation of the impermanence of nature is not distinct from agent and object, maker and made. This is impermanence; this is the operation. If maker and made are not different, then the natures of all dharmas would be eternal and without causal nature. Mahāmati, the existence of the causality of all dharmas' lack of intrinsic nature is not known by ordinary foolish people."]

"The nature produces impermanent phenomena": the nature of impermanence itself is not destroyed, yet it can produce all the phenomenal appearances of the impermanence of dharmas.

"There is no distinction between agent and what is made: this is impermanence, and this is a phenomenon": if there is no distinction between the maker and what is

made, one cannot clearly distinguish this as the unchanging substance of impermanence that produces impermanence, and that as the impermanent phenomena that are produced.

Yet, from the perspective of the external appearances of phenomenal results, everything now appears impermanent and changing; no separate, permanent, indestructible substantial agent can be found. For example, do death gods and the Black and White Guardians of Impermanence truly exist in the world? Is there truly a bamboo staff that can shatter all things while itself never being damaged? Clearly, there is no such thing. Thus, with respect to the phenomenal appearances of the impermanence manifest in all dharmas, one cannot clearly distinguish and classify which is an eternally unchanging, substantial impermanence that is the agent, and which are the impermanent phenomena that are destroyed and are the products.

If the agent and what is made have the same nature, and the agent is also permanent and unchanging, then what is made should likewise be permanent in nature. That is, all dharmas should be permanent and unchanging rather than continuously changing; then nothing could perish, nor could anything arise anew. Therefore, the view of a “nature of impermanence” cannot be established.

This is a refutation. Next comes the direct exposition:

“Mahāmati, all natures lack inherent existence and arise through causes; this is not known by ordinary foolish people.” That is: Mahāmati, in reality all dharmas lack a substantial inherent nature; there is not separately a nature of impermanence. The appearances of dharmas arise, abide, change, and cease as illusory appearances in dependence on the law of the convergence of causes and conditions. Thus, all dharmas “lack inherent existence and arise through causes.” The principle involved is subtle and profound, beyond the understanding of deluded ordinary people.

The view of a “nature of impermanence” holds that “impermanence” is the agent, a really existing dharma whose own substance is permanent and indestructible, while “the actual nonexistence of all dharmas” is the phenomenal result that it produces.

Therefore, in this passage the Buddha first refutes it from the perspective of phenomenal appearances: there should be a distinction between the agent and what is made. Yet one now sees only that everything is equally impermanent, and cannot distinguish an impermanent agent that is not itself impermanent and eternally abides. The next passage continues: from the perspective of causal production, if a permanent cause could truly produce an impermanent result, all causality would become confused, and there would no longer be any distinction between agent and object. Yet what we see is precisely that agent and object do differ and stand in contrast. Therefore, a nature of impermanence likewise cannot be established. See the passage below for details:

A result cannot arise from a cause of a dissimilar nature. If it could arise, all natures would be impermanent. Since the phenomena would be dissimilar, there would be no distinction between maker and what is made. Yet distinctions are plainly seen.

Further, from the perspective of cause and effect, a cause and its result must be similar in nature in order to affect one another and constitute causality; dharmas of wholly opposite natures cannot be mutually cause and effect. For example, planting melons yields melons, and planting beans yields beans; one cannot plant beans and obtain melons, or plant melons and obtain beans.

Non-Buddhists posit a nature of impermanence as a really existing permanent dharma that causes all dharmas to turn into impermanence. This means that a permanent cause produces an impermanent result of a wholly opposite nature.

This is like planting beans and obtaining melons. If one carried this reasoning further, sand could be pressed for oil, and all dharmas would become an indistinguishable confusion. What room would there then be to speak of such differences as maker and what is made? Yet what we now see is this: although all dharmas undergo causal transformations, the distinction between maker and what is made is at the same time very clear. All dharmas, as can be seen with the naked eye, each have their own characteristics and order; they are not an undifferentiated confusion.

Therefore, a result cannot arise from a dissimilar cause, leading to a chaotic indistinction among the myriad dharmas. The view of a “nature of impermanence” takes a really existing permanent dharma as its cause and the impermanence of all dharmas as its result. This is producing a result from a dissimilar cause, and thus falls into the non-Buddhist view of dissimilar causes.

If there were a nature of impermanence, it would fall into the characteristic of a causal agent. If it fell into that, the natures of all things would not be ultimate. If the natures of all things fell into the characteristic of causal agents, their own impermanence should be impermanent. Since impermanence is impermanent, the natures of all things would not be impermanent; they should be permanent.

“Fall into the characteristic of a causal agent” means falling into conditioned activity. Whatever is conditioned activity necessarily becomes a cause and thereby falls into the appearance of continuous causal change; hence it is called falling into the “characteristic of a causal agent.”

Moreover, a so-called characteristic or inherent nature should itself be an ultimate, unchanging quality that is always thus. If there truly existed a dharma called a “nature of impermanence” that caused all dharmas to become impermanent and perish, it would fall into conditioned activity. Whatever is produced necessarily

becomes a cause and falls into the continuous transformations of cause and effect. In that case, the “nature of impermanence” would not be an absolute, ultimate, eternally unchanging law of dharma-nature; rather, it would belong to a producing cause.

“If the natures of all things fell into the characteristic of causal agents, their own impermanence should be impermanent. Since impermanence is impermanent, the natures of all things would not be impermanent; they should be permanent.” If the “nature of impermanence” is a cause that produces, then it arises when causes and conditions converge and ceases when they do not converge. Thus, the “nature of impermanence” should itself arise and cease and be impermanent. If the nature “impermanence” is impermanent, then it is permanent; that is, the natures of all dharmas should be permanent rather than impermanent.

This refutes the view from the perspective of causal change: if a nature of impermanence can make all dharmas impermanent, it becomes a causal dharma that produces, and must necessarily conform to the law of causal change, arising, ceasing, and changing impermanently. Thus, the “nature of impermanence” should itself be impermanent; that is, all natures should be permanent.

If impermanence entered into the natures of all things, it should fall into the three divisions of time. Past form has perished together with its destruction; future form has not arisen; and because form has not arisen, present form is conjoined with destruction.

Further, if impermanence could enter into the characteristics of all dharmas, it should undergo the impermanent destruction of the three divisions of time along with those dharmas. For example, since past material dharmas have already perished, the nature of impermanence should likewise have perished with them. Since future material dharmas have not yet arisen, the nature of impermanence should likewise not yet have arisen. If it entered the present, then present dharmas do not abide even for a thought-moment and pass away instant by instant; thus, the nature of impermanence should likewise change along with them and remain unfixed.

If this were so, the causal dharma called the nature of impermanence would not be permanent, but would change impermanently and perish. If it itself changes and perishes, how could it pervade other dharmas and cause them to change?

Form is the differentiated aggregation of the four great elements. The inherent natures of the four great elements and the material forms derived from them are indestructible; because they are neither separate nor nonseparate, all non-Buddhists hold that the four great elements are indestructible. Within all the three realms, the four great elements and derived material form undergo arising and

ceasing within what is known. Apart from the four great elements and derived material form, where do all non-Buddhists contemplate a nature of impermanence? The four great elements do not arise, because the characteristics of their inherent nature are indestructible.

Further, non-Buddhists hold that material dharmas are formed through differentiated aggregations of the four great elements, and that the essential natures of the four great elements and the material forms derived from them are indestructible and eternally constant in character, like the solidity of gold. They hold that there is no question of sameness or difference. Only because a separate "nature of impermanence" pervades all dharmas, they say, do the four great elements and all material dharmas become impermanent and perish.

Yet throughout the three realms in the ten directions, the four great elements and the material forms derived from them, wherever they are known and seen by us, are constantly arising and ceasing impermanently; no indestructibility is seen. Apart from all these impermanently changing four great elements and the material forms derived from them, where have non-Buddhists discovered or found this ever-abiding dharma of a "nature of impermanence"?

I too have said that the inherent nature of the four great elements is indestructible, but this is because the four great elements have never arisen: their essential nature cannot be apprehended. Therefore, they are said to be unborn and undying. In brief, the four great elements are empty in nature, and thus pervade and flow everywhere.

The preceding two passages state that, from the perspective of the three divisions of time, a nature of impermanence should circulate through the three divisions of time and be destroyed impermanently; and that, from the perspective of the realm of visible material dharmas, no dharma can be found that is permanent yet able to make all dharmas impermanent.

Apart from the impermanence that initially produces, there is no entity other than the four great elements that produces the four great elements, for each has its own distinct characteristic and inherent characteristic, and no differentiation can be obtained. Since there is no differentiation, these do not produce again. When the two expedients do not function, know that this is impermanence.

"Apart from the impermanence that initially produces": "apart from" means to relinquish, and "initially produces" means the original act of production. This refers to the first kind of non-Buddhist impermanence discussed at the beginning of this section by the Buddha: "impermanence that relinquishes after acting."

“When the two expedients do not function, know that this is impermanence.” The “two expedients” refer to the expedient of the maker and that of what is made. “The two expedients do not function” means that there is no longer a maker and nothing made, and that one is apart from these two expedients.

This refutes the first view, “impermanence that relinquishes after acting.” This non-Buddhist view holds that there truly is a creator, distinct from the four great elements, who produces the four great elements and all dharmas. After creating all these things, the creator relinquishes them and creates no more; this is called “relinquishing after acting.” For example, some non-Buddhists hold that the world was created by Mahābrahmā, God, a divine self, or the like, and that after creating it they withdrew and ceased creating, leaving all things to operate on their own.

The error of this view lies in its assertion that something distinct from the four great elements produced the four great elements—in other words, that a dissimilar cause produces a dissimilar result. If a dissimilar cause could truly produce a dissimilar result, then everything would become confused: sand could yield oil when pressed, and beans could yield melons when planted. Dharmas would then be mutually indistinguishable, sameness and difference would be confused, and the distinctive meaning of each individual characteristic would be lost.

If dharmas had no individual distinctions in this way, one could not speak of which is the maker and which is what is made. Once the distinction between maker and what is made is absent, one should know that dharmas would have the appearance of being unchanging and permanent, rather than changing and impermanent.

(Note: In the ten-fascicle version of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, this passage is translated as follows: “Because the characteristics of their own substance are eternally indestructible, they say that initiating an act and then not acting in the interim is called impermanence. The great elements further initiate the great elements. Since, apart from those distinct characteristics and identical characteristics, there is no dharma that neither arises nor ceases, and since they see that dharmas neither arise nor cease, they give rise there to the cognition of impermanence.”)

Therefore, with reference to the later translation, this passage may also be understood as follows: the so-called impermanence apart from initial production means that something distinct from the four great elements produces the four great elements and material dharmas. In this way, the natures of the maker and what is made differ. Since the four great elements and material dharmas are both created by the creator, however, the two should have the same nature.

Thus, since all created things have the same essential nature apart from the Creator, there can no longer be any relation of mutual creation or further creation among them, nor can one distinguish what creates from what is created. Once the Creator

no longer creates, all dharmas will lose the distinction between creator and created, remain eternally unchanged, and no longer display the marks of impermanent change."

[As for the view that form and spatial extension perish while impermanence does not: it maintains that the four great elements and derived form do not perish, but are ultimately indestructible. Mahāmati, "ultimately" means that, when one analyzes them down to minute particles, one sees the four great elements and derived form as perishing in their forms and spatial extension; length and shortness cannot be found, but the four great elements are not absent. If the four great elements do not perish while form and spatial extension appear to perish, one falls into Sāṃkhya.]

"The view that the four great elements and derived form perish in their forms and spatial extension": "form and spatial extension" means shape and location. "View" is equivalent to "manifestation." Thus, the forms and spatial extension of the four great elements and derived form appear to undergo change and destruction—that is, the shapes and dimensions of dharmas display change and decay.

"Falling into Sāṃkhya": The non-Buddhist Sāṃkhya school of ancient India established twenty-five principles. From the combination of the two principles of spiritual self and primal nature, the remaining twenty-three principles gradually arise: the great principle, egoity, the five subtle elements, the five great elements, the eleven faculties, and so forth; thus all worlds come into being. The first two principles are: first, the unchanging spiritual essence, the spiritual self; and second, unchanging matter, primal nature. These two are truly immutable, while all the remaining principles undergo impermanent change—that is, what is permanent creates impermanent change.

2. The view that "form and spatial extension perish while impermanence does not" holds that the natures of the four great elements and the derived material dharmas ultimately do not perish. Mahāmati, they maintain that, when analysis is carried to its ultimate point and observation to the minutest particle, the four great elements that create and the material dharmas they create still remain. Thus, only the shapes and dimensions of dharmas undergo arising, abiding, alteration, and cessation: the shapes and lengths and shortness of dharmas cannot be found, but the four great elements cannot be said to be absent.

This view holds that the four great elements that create and the material dharmas they create are truly existent, permanent, and indestructible. It separates the "shape and dimensions" of material dharmas from those material dharmas and establishes them as something separate, maintaining that it is the "shape and dimensions" of material dharmas that impermanently perish. This falls into the erroneous view of the non-Buddhist Sāṃkhya school. For Sāṃkhya teachers divide dharmas into

numerous principles and wrongly regard the “spiritual self” principle that creates and the “primal nature” principle that is created as truly existent and permanent, while all the other principles are impermanent and perishing. In other words, they wrongly claim that permanence produces impermanence.

[As for the view that form itself is impermanent: it maintains that form itself is impermanent. In that case, form and spatial extension are impermanent, not the four great elements. If the four great elements are impermanent, this is not a matter of conventional consciousness and speech. If conventional speech is not intrinsic nature, one falls into worldly discourse, seeing that all natures consist only of verbal expression and failing to see the arising of their own characteristics.]

“Not a matter of conventional consciousness and speech”: consciousness here means cognition. “Conventional consciousness” refers to the deluded consciousness of the world.

“Worldly discourse” is an abbreviation for the Lokāyata school. This non-Buddhist school holds that all sentient and insentient things are made solely of the material particles of the four great elements, and that human beings, both before birth and after death, return to impermanence. Soul and spirit are mere appendages of bodily matter; there is no soul or spirit apart from the body, and no rebirth. The commonly heard assertion that “when a person dies, the lamp goes out” is of this kind. They take sensory experience as the sole source of knowledge, maintaining that nothing beyond the body’s seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing can be trusted.

3. The non-Buddhist view that “form is impermanent” holds that the derived material dharmas are impermanent. It maintains that the four great elements that create are permanent, while the material dharmas they create are themselves impermanent. This is the same as the view that “form and spatial extension are impermanent”: it mistakenly takes the four great elements that create to be truly existent and permanent, while positing some other, opposing impermanence.

“If the four great elements are impermanent, this is not a matter of conventional consciousness and speech.”

“If conventional speech is not intrinsic nature, one falls into worldly discourse, seeing that all natures consist only of verbal expression and failing to see the arising of their own characteristics.” Since the view that “the four great elements that create are permanent” is mistaken, does it follow that it is correct to say that the four great elements too are impermanent? In fact, when the Buddha says that the four great elements are impermanent, he does so in accordance with worldly conventions of speech, as an expedient to dispel sentient beings’ attachment to taking permanence as truly existent.

If one takes this expedient as real and establishes as truly existent doctrines such as the impermanence of the four great elements and the lack of intrinsic nature in all dharmas, one again falls into the erroneous view of the non-Buddhist Lokāyata school. Lokāyata adherents hold that everything is impermanent and perishing, except that their own cognition and speech are not impermanent. This claim—that everything is impermanent while only their own doctrine is permanent and correct—is itself self-contradictory and cannot stand.

[As for the view that transformation is impermanent: it maintains that the differentiated nature of form appears, not that of the four great elements. It is like gold made into ornaments: transformation appears, yet the nature of gold is not destroyed; only the forms and locations of the ornaments perish. The transformations of other natures are likewise.]

"It maintains that the differentiated nature of form appears, not that of the four great elements": this means that the material dharmas created by the four great elements gradually undergo change, and that the nature of impermanence becomes manifest where those material dharmas gradually change, while the four great elements that create remain unchanged.

4. The view that "impermanence lies in the intermediate transformation of form" holds that, after the four great elements produce material dharmas, those material dharmas continually change and alternate in the interim, while the four great elements that create and the material dharmas they create remain unchanged. For example, gold may be made into a vase or transformed into a round bowl, yet the gold itself is held always to remain unchanged.

When the Buddha first cited this non-Buddhist view, he also used the example of cheese: liquid cow's milk becomes solid cheese, and the process continues through successive transformations; yet they hold that the essential milk itself does not change. All other dharmas are likewise: they merely undergo intermediate transformation.

This view actually holds that the four great elements that create and the material dharmas they create do not change, but that there is another dharma called intermediate transformation. It is this intermediate transformation that makes dharmas display the marks of arising, abiding, alteration, and cessation.

[In all such various non-Buddhist views of impermanence, when the fire of conceptual discrimination burns the four great elements, their own characteristics are not burned. If the respective characteristics themselves perish, then the material forms created by the four great elements should cease.]

“When the fire of conceptual discrimination burns the four great elements, their own characteristics are not burned”: the destruction of the world is divided into twenty small kalpas. The destruction of the physical world begins with a fire disaster. Sentient beings are successively destroyed over the first nineteen kalpas. Only the physical world remains empty and open; then, in the final kalpa, the physical world itself is destroyed.

At that time, seven suns first emerge from beneath the sea. The great ocean then completely dries up, Mount Sumeru collapses, and winds drive fierce flames upward to the first dhyāna heaven, reducing everything to ashes. Even the three-thousandfold world-system is burned up at once; this is called the “kalpa of destruction.” Thus, burning the four great elements with fire is used as an analogy for the destruction in the cycle of formation, abiding, destruction, and emptiness of the world.

“When the fire of conceptual discrimination burns the four great elements, their own characteristics are not burned” means that non-Buddhists, relying on conceptual discrimination, maintain that when fire burns the four great elements and the world is utterly destroyed, only the aspects of material dharmas are dispersed; the atomic particles of the four great elements cannot be burned away by the fire. In other words, the four great elements are permanent.

“If the respective characteristics themselves perish, then the material forms created by the four great elements should cease”: if the respective characteristics of the four great elements could be destroyed by fire, then the four great elements and the material dharmas they create should already have ceased and no longer arise.

The non-Buddhist views discussed above—such as “the impermanence of perishing form and spatial extension,” “the impermanence of form,” and “the impermanence of transformation”—all mistakenly posit truly existent creator and created. They mistakenly regard the four great elements as creators, permanent and indestructible.

In their view, the formation of the world results from the differentiated aggregation of the four great elements. When the world is destroyed, material dharmas or their forms perish, but the four great elements that create them do not perish; they merely disperse temporarily. If the respective characteristics of the four great elements were all burned away by fire, then the four great elements and the material dharmas they create should already have ceased, and this world would remain forever destroyed rather than continuing cyclically. They therefore hold that the four great elements that create must be permanent and indestructible, so that the world may continue to undergo change.

This view, which takes the creator to be permanent and posits something else as impermanent, violates the law of cause and effect and cannot account for itself coherently. In truth, all notions in this world of destruction and non-destruction, permanence and impermanence, are sentient beings' deluded imaginings and attachments. They cannot realize that creator and created are conceptual discriminations, and that all dharmas do not arise through the fabrication of the four great elements. All dharmas are a continuous, unceasing illusory appearance manifested according to the law of mind-consciousness—cause and effect.

[Mahāmati, the dharmas I teach arise; they are neither permanent nor impermanent. Why is this? Because external natures are indeterminate. I speak only of the subtle mind of the three realms of existence; I do not say that the various appearances truly arise and cease through the differentiated aggregation of the four great elements. The four great elements and derived form are encompassed by the two matters of conceptual discrimination: that which apprehends and that which is apprehended.]

"Because external natures are indeterminate": "external" refers to everything outside the mind. This means that, in reality, there are no dharmas external to the mind.

"I speak only of the subtle mind of the three realms of existence": this means that the three realms are nothing other than manifestations of the mind. In the ten-fascicle version of the Laṅkāvatāra, this sentence is translated: "I say that the three realms are only mind itself." The Mahāyāna Laṅkāvatāra translates it: "Why is this? Because external dharmas are not apprehended, and because the three realms are mind-only."

Beginning with this passage, the Buddha reveals to Mahāmati the Tathāgata's correct teaching on impermanence: Mahāmati, from the perspective of the Tathāgata's correct eye, all dharmas are neither permanent nor impermanent. Why? Because all dharmas cannot be grasped, do not exist externally, and are solely manifestations of one's own mind. Therefore, the Buddha does not say that various appearances truly arise and cease, nor that the differentiated aggregation of the four great elements produces dharmas.

What the Buddha teaches is neither arising nor ceasing. He teaches that only through the provisional appearance of causes and conditions coming together do the four great elements and all material dharmas appear provisionally. Deluded ordinary beings take this to be real and thus falsely posit truly existent creator and created, falsely positing the four great elements that create and the material dharmas they create as truly existent.

[Know the two kinds of conceptual discrimination; abandon the two views of external nature and no intrinsic nature; and awaken to the direct manifestation of one's own mind. Conceptual discrimination arises through the activity of thought; it is not non-activity. Abandon the conceptual discrimination of the mind's nature as lacking intrinsic nature. All worldly, supramundane, and supremely supramundane dharmas are neither permanent nor impermanent.]

"Activity": the Abhidharmakośa says, "Activity means fabrication."

One should understand that these two matters, creator and created, are conceptual discriminations; one should abandon all erroneous dualistic views, such as existence and nonexistence, permanence and impermanence, and awaken to the illusory realm in which all this is manifested by one's own mind. Deluded ordinary beings falsely take the affairs of karmic activity and fabrication to be truly existent, whereas these are in fact conceptual discriminations. There is no real creator and no real arising of all that is created.

In the realm of ultimate reality, there is, in the end, separation from existence and nonexistence, arising and ceasing, subject and object. Even "the manifestations of one's own mind" is merely a provisional expression; it too cannot be obtained. This is "being free from deluded imaginings of mind, nature, and non-nature." The essential nature of all dharmas—worldly, supramundane, and supremely supramundane—is neither permanent nor impermanent.

[Not recognizing the manifestations of one's own mind, one falls into the continuous succession of pernicious views of the two extremes. All non-Buddhists fail to recognize their own deluded imaginings. Such ordinary beings have no foundation, maintaining that worldly, supramundane, and supremely supramundane dharmas arise from verbalized deluded imaginings. This is not perceived by ordinary foolish beings.]

Foolish ordinary beings do not recognize that all dharmas are manifestations of mind alone. They fall without interruption into pernicious views of the two extremes, such as subject and object, annihilation and permanence. Because non-Buddhists cannot understand the deluded discriminations of their own minds, they mistake the false for the true, lose their foundation, and falsely cling to all dharmas as truly possessing agents and objects of action, or as truly permanent or impermanent, subject to annihilation.

Therefore, relying on these worldly expressions, I teach them the impermanence of worldly dharmas, the true permanence of supramundane dharmas, and the neither-permanent-nor-impermanent nature of supremely supramundane dharmas. These are all provisionally established in order to destroy their wrong views; nor do these themselves truly exist. This is not something ordinary foolish beings can perceive.

Here, “this is not perceived by ordinary foolish beings” may be divided into three kinds: foolish ordinary beings cannot understand the truth of the impermanence of worldly dharmas; practitioners of the two vehicles cannot understand the truth of the true permanence of supramundane dharmas; and likewise, Mahāyāna bodhisattvas cannot understand the truth that supremely supramundane dharmas are neither permanent nor impermanent.

For us disciples of the Buddha, let us speak of supremely supramundane dharmas. When the foolish are deluded, they seek awakening; fortunately, the Buddha of great wisdom appeared in the world to save the multitude of the confused. Only by relying on the Buddha’s teachings and practicing and realizing them step by step with unremitting perseverance can we utterly break through the realm of illusion and realize the ultimate original reality.

This reality of the Tathāgata is not merely remote from the defilements of the dusts; it is vast and empty of even holiness, pure and devoid of all Buddhas. The Diamond Sūtra says: “Those who understand my teaching to be like a raft must relinquish even the Dharma, let alone what is not Dharma!” The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “It is like drilling for fire: the two pieces of wood depend on each other; when fire emerges, the wood is consumed, and the ashes fly away and the smoke vanishes.”

The Laṅkāvatāra says: “It is not that I teach the Mahāyāna, nor is it speech or words; it is neither truth nor liberation, nor is it devoid of realms; yet one rides the Mahāyāna and is sovereign in samādhi.” That is, once worldly dharmas have been swept away, there is no need to posit supramundane dharmas; even the trace of sweeping away what is not posited should be completely swept away.

When the sentiments of ordinary beings and sages alike are emptied, and there is neither defilement nor purity, this is precisely the profound meaning of the Buddha’s teaching that all dharmas are neither permanent nor impermanent. At this point, not only have views attached to the worldly been cleared away; all attached and extreme views concerning supramundane, supremely supramundane, and all other dharmas should likewise be entirely cleared away. Then the whole of reality appears fully: everything is nothing other than the wondrous manifestation and wondrous functioning of the Buddhadharma. This is the supremely supramundane Dharma of the Buddhadharma—true, equal, and unobstructed.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke in verse: “Keep far from primal creation, and from distinctions of form and place; from the impermanence of nature and form—the foolish deluded imaginings of non-Buddhists.”]

This verse summarizes and refutes seven non-Buddhist views of impermanence:

impermanence as separate from primal creation, impermanence of form and place, impermanence through intermediate transformation, impermanence of nature, impermanence of nature and non-nature, impermanence of form, and impermanence without arising. These seven views of impermanence are all foolish deluded imaginings of non-Buddhists and should be abandoned.

[The various natures do not perish; the great elements abide in their own nature. These are non-Buddhists' thoughts of impermanence, submerged in manifold views.]

"Great elements" refers to the various great elements.

All non-Buddhists mistakenly take impermanent phenomena to be truly existent. Thus, apart from impermanence, they falsely posit a permanent dharma to explain impermanence. Some hold that all dharmas possess an indestructible and permanent intrinsic nature that can bring about their arising, ceasing, and impermanence, as in the views of "impermanence of nature," "impermanence of nature and non-nature," and "impermanence without arising."

Others hold that there are truly an agent and what is made, and regard the four great elements, or something other than the four great elements, as the permanent agent of creation, as in the views of "impermanence of form," "impermanence of form and place," "impermanence through transformation," and "impermanence separate from primal creation." This is how non-Buddhists take impermanence as truly existent, give rise to manifold discriminations, and fall into wrong views of the two extremes.

[Those non-Buddhists say: "There is neither arising nor ceasing; the nature of the great elements is inherently permanent. How, then, can one speak of impermanence?"]

These non-Buddhists regard the creative four great elements or the intrinsic nature of dharmas as permanent. They hold that these creative four great elements, or the nature of impermanent dharmas, are permanent and neither arise nor cease. If so, how can they explain the impermanent appearances of arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing in this world? How can what is permanent produce all impermanent appearances? Therefore, the seven non-Buddhist views of impermanence are all wrong views.

[All is the measure of mind alone. The two kinds of mind continue to revolve: that which grasps and that which is grasped. There is no self or what belongs to a self.]

"The two kinds" means the agent and that which is acted upon.

Mahāmati, all dharmas are manifestations of mind alone. Because all dharmas are falsely perceived as involving an agent and an object, one subsequently clings to them in continuous succession and mistakenly takes them to be the great ocean of suffering that is saṃsāra. Foolish non-Buddhists engage in deluded discriminations, falsely taking agents and objects of creation to be truly existent; consequently, they love and hate, grasp and reject, and drift along with karma. When examined with right wisdom, there is in truth no agent or object of creation; the intrinsic nature of dharmas cannot be obtained, and there is nothing to relinquish.

["Brahmā is like the root of a tree, while its branches spread everywhere. So too, what I teach is only the measure of their minds."]

Non-Buddhists hold one wrong view that regards Brahmā as the root of a tree, creating all dharmas. Their views all rest on this model: they suppose that the world must have a fundamental, permanent creative cause that produces all dharmas. Thus they falsely establish wrong views, reasoning in order to explain the impermanent appearances of dharmas. They do not realize that such inferential reasoning is precisely continuous deluded imagining and the root of karmic fetters. According to the Buddha's teaching, all dharmas are nothing but manifestations of one's own mind.

In summary, this verse explains that the seven non-Buddhist views of impermanence all arise from deluded discrimination and falsely posit subject and object. In reality, all worldly, supramundane, and supremely supramundane dharmas are only manifestations of one's own mind: there is neither agent nor object, neither permanence nor impermanence.

Overview of This Section:

Key terms in this section: "impermanence," "permanence," "neither permanence nor impermanence," and "manifestations of one's own mind." In this section, Mahāmati asks the Buddha to elucidate the similarities and differences between non-Buddhist views of impermanence and the Buddha's teaching that conditioned phenomena are impermanent, and how one should correctly discern the Tathāgata's right view.

The Buddha enumerates the seven non-Buddhist views of impermanence one by one. Failing to understand dharmas arising through conditions, these wrong views falsely posit an agent and what is made, and mistakenly take impermanence as real; they therefore establish another "permanent" principle to explain impermanence. The Buddha refutes each of these mistaken views of impermanence and then reveals the meaning of dharmas as they truly are: all dharmas do not truly possess subject and object, and are neither permanent nor impermanent. Therefore, the wise should abandon imaginings of external nature and non-nature, understand that all is manifested by mind alone, and then relinquish deluded imaginings of

mind, nature, and non-nature. Mind itself cannot be obtained. Where not a single dharma can be obtained is the true permanence of the Tathāgata.

34. Direct Realization Upon Entering Nirvāṇa

The preceding two sections have discussed birth and non-birth. In this section, Mahāmati again asks the Buddha to explain his doubts concerning “cessation and quiescence.”

[At that time Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, I only pray that you will explain the successive stages of cessation and meditative absorption attained by all bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas. If I and the other bodhisattvas become skilled in the characteristics of these successive stages of cessation and meditative absorption, we will never wrongly abandon the blissful gate of cessation and meditative absorption, nor fall into the delusion of all śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and non-Buddhist paths.”]

“Cessation and meditative absorption”: meditative absorption is samādhi, and cessation and meditative absorption means the samādhi of cessation and quiescence. Although the samādhi of cessation and quiescence realized in the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna bears the same name, its meaning differs. This was discussed in the sixteenth section above. Because śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas have a strong aversion to separation, they “do not draw near to objective realms”; abiding in mindfulness, they attain samādhi. This is the withered and extinguished meditation of the Hīnayāna and nirvāṇa with remainder. (Nirvāṇa with remainder means that the Hīnayāna takes itself to have realized nirvāṇa, though this is not, in fact, ultimate nirvāṇa.) In the Mahāyāna, however, quiescence is ever illumining: neither defiled nor pure, with neither exit nor entry. Taking non-reception of all feelings as meditative absorption is the true meditative absorption.

Mahāmati again asks the Buddha: “I only pray that the World-Honored One will explain the different successive processes by which śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and all bodhisattvas realize the samādhi of cessation and meditative absorption. May we bodhisattvas never wrongly abandon this Dharma gate of the great bliss of cessation and meditative absorption, nor fall into the withered and extinguished samādhi of the Hīnayāna and non-Buddhist paths, or into deluded ignorance.”

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I shall explain it for you.” Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, I pray that you will explain it.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Sixth-bhūmi bodhisattva mahāsattvas, as well as śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, enter cessation and meditative absorption. Seventh-bhūmi bodhisattva mahāsattvas are in meditative absorption thought after thought; they are in the meditative absorption

that is free from the marks of the self-nature of all natures, unlike śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas."

"All śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas fall into the awareness of conditioned activity and into cessation and meditative absorption marked by grasping and what is grasped. Therefore, on the seventh bhūmi there is meditative absorption without deliberative thought, and one realizes the mark of the nondifference of all dharmas. Those not of this class attain the natures of diverse marks and, discerning the wholesome and unwholesome marks of all dharmas, enter meditative absorption. Therefore, on the seventh bhūmi there is no meditative absorption involving wholesome deliberative thought. Mahāmati, in eighth-bhūmi bodhisattvas, as well as śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, the delusive marks of mind, manas, and consciousness cease."]

The Buddha tells Mahāmati that sixth-bhūmi bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas can all enter the meditative samādhi of cessation and quiescence through cultivation. For seventh-bhūmi bodhisattvas, however, every thought is originally meditative absorption.

Because those on the seventh bhūmi have realized that all dharmas are originally without distinction—without defilement or purity, movement or stillness—they have left behind grasping and rejecting, existence and nonexistence, and abide in non-discriminating right wisdom. As the Sūtra of the Ten Bhūmis says, those on the seventh bhūmi "are always able to abide in the station of ultimate reality." Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are not so. They fall into conditioned activity and therefore still the mind and extinguish knowledge, deliberately suppressing and cutting off all marks of subject and object, grasping and rejecting, in pursuit of withered and extinguished samādhi.

"Therefore, on the seventh bhūmi there is meditative absorption without deliberative thought, and one realizes the mark of the nondifference of all dharmas. Those not of this class attain the natures of diverse marks and, discerning the wholesome and unwholesome marks of all dharmas, enter meditative absorption. Therefore, on the seventh bhūmi there is no meditative absorption involving wholesome deliberative thought." This means that the seventh bhūmi enters the samādhi of cessation and quiescence not through deliberate intention, but by realizing the realm in which all dharma marks are equal and without distinction. Thus, every thought is originally meditative absorption.

"Those not of this class" means those who are not of the seventh-bhūmi class. That is, the other śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles are not like this. They cling to various distinctions, discriminate between the wholesome and unwholesome in all dharmas, reject the suffering of defiled consciousness, and seek the bliss of pure

wisdom. Thus, the samādhi of cessation and quiescence that they realize entails grasping and rejection, exit and entry. The seventh bhūmi, by contrast, is free from such discriminating selection and realizes the great samādhi that has neither exit nor entry.

“Mahāmati, in eighth-bhūmi bodhisattvas, as well as śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, the delusive marks of mind, manas, and consciousness cease.” This means that, for eighth-bhūmi bodhisattvas and fourth-fruit arhats of the two vehicles, the delusive marks of the eight consciousnesses are completely extinguished.

This is divided into three points:

1. Sixth-bhūmi bodhisattvas and practitioners of the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles can all enter cessation through cultivation and thereby realize the samādhi of cessation and quiescence. The Hīnayāna, however, selectively takes up the withered samādhi realm characterized by exit and entry; this is not genuine cessation and meditative absorption.

Bodhisattvas of the first six bhūmis may also realize and enter this samādhi realm of cessation through cultivation. Yet the resolve of Mahāyāna bodhisattvas is ultimately different. The Sūtra of the Ten Bhūmis says that those on the sixth bhūmi also reflect thus: “For the sake of maturing sentient beings, one should not permanently extinguish all conditioned dharmas.” Therefore, sixth-bhūmi bodhisattvas will certainly not abide in the Dharma bliss of Hīnayāna meditation. They will necessarily transcend it and realize the right wisdom that all dharmas are originally equal and without distinction.

2. Seventh-bhūmi bodhisattvas are free from discriminating selection between existence and nonexistence, right and wrong. Thus, they have neither exit nor entry; every thought is meditative absorption, and every thought is originally meditative absorption. As the Platform Sūtra says: “To be free from marks outwardly is Chan; not to be disturbed inwardly is samādhi.” They are free from all discriminating delusions concerning exit and entry, arising and ceasing, movement and stillness.

3. For those on the eighth bhūmi and fourth-fruit arhats of the Hīnayāna, the delusive marks of mind and consciousness are completely extinguished. Yet the realizations of the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna still bear the same name while differing in meaning; this will be explained separately below.

[“From first-bhūmi to seventh-bhūmi bodhisattva mahāsattvas contemplate the measure of mind, manas, and consciousness in the three realms and are free from self and what belongs to self. Through cultivation based on their own deluded discriminations, they fall into the various marks of external natures. Ordinary people, through the two kinds of grasping within their own minds—grasping and

what is grasped—turn toward unknowing and fail to awaken to the beginningless, erroneous, false habitual tendencies by which they have been perfumed."]

Bodhisattvas from the first to the seventh bhūmi skillfully contemplate that the three realms are mind-only and all phenomena are consciousness-only. Thus, they are free from all deluded dualistic discriminations, such as subject and object.

Deluded ordinary beings, however, falsely give rise to distinctions between subject and object, and then to love and hatred, grasping and rejecting. Even what they call cultivation is based on their own deluded discriminations and inverted views. Thus, their practice falls into the wrong paths of various realms and conceptual labels. (For this reason, the Sutra in Forty-two Sections Spoken by the Buddha says: "Be careful not to trust your own mind; your own mind is not trustworthy.") Deluded ordinary beings are this way because, since beginningless time, they have remained obscured and have continually been perfumed by erroneous, unwholesome, and false habitual tendencies.

What, then, are false habitual tendencies? Falsely taking there to be a subject and an object, falsely regarding the appearances of sounds and forms as real, and clinging to marks and pursuing conditions throughout beginningless kalpas—this is falsity; this is ignorance. Worse still is seeking spiritual powers and transformations, titles of sagehood, and extraordinary states. Such people are merely headed toward Māra. Therefore, the Diamond Sūtra says: "Because in truth there is no dharma by which one attains unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening, Dīpaṃkara Buddha gave me the prediction, saying: 'In a future life you shall become a Buddha named Śākyamuni.'"

This passage emphasizes that the crucial point in the ever-ascending cultivation and realization of bodhisattvas who have entered the bhūmis lies in correct view: "contemplate the measure of mind, manas, and consciousness in the three realms" and "be free from self and what belongs to self." Because deluded ordinary beings have fundamentally erroneous views and, in addition, have been perfumed by the habitual tendencies of ignorance since beginningless kalpas, their self-cultivation becomes blind and misguided practice, and they fall into the wrong paths of various conceptual labels and realms.

["Mahāmati, eighth-bhūmi bodhisattva mahāsattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas enter nirvāṇa. Bodhisattvas are sustained by the awakening of samādhi; therefore, delighting in the gate of samādhi, they do not enter parinirvāṇa. If they were not sustained by it, the Tathāgata stage would not be complete. If they abandoned all affairs of conditioned dharmas for the sake of sentient beings, the Buddha seed would then be cut off. The World-Honored Ones manifest the inconceivable and immeasurable virtues of the Tathāgata. Śrāvakas and

pratyekabuddhas, drawn by the bliss gained through the gate of samādhi, conceive of nirvāṇa.”]

Mahāmati, when practitioners of the Hīnayāna cultivate cessation samādhi to its utmost, they enter the Hīnayāna nirvāṇa with remainder, characterized by cessation and quiescence. Although this nirvāṇa with remainder and the nirvāṇa of eighth-bhūmi Mahāyāna bodhisattvas bear the same name, their meanings differ:

Mahāyāna bodhisattvas rely on the power of wisdom and awakening and therefore do not abide in any realm of meditative samādhi; they do not even abide in the bliss of cessation and quiescence. Thus, they ultimately do not enter parinirvāṇa. This is Mahāyāna nirvāṇa.

“If they were not sustained by it, the Tathāgata stage would not be complete.” If one does not rely upon the power of wisdom and awakening but, like those of the two vehicles, says, “This life has ended, the holy conduct has been established, what had to be done has been done, and there will be no further existence,” and enters nirvāṇa with remainder, attachment to dharmas still remains. This is not the ultimate Tathāgata realm, which is originally thusness.

If all were like śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas—attached to quietude and abandoning all the conditioned activities involved in liberating sentient beings—and if this were the realization of nirvāṇa, how could sentient beings later come to know the Buddhadharma? From whom could they learn and seek instruction in practice? In that case, the Buddha seed would already have been cut off.

The Tathāgata, the World-Honored One, does not abandon any sentient being. The Buddhas appear in the world in order to manifest immeasurable skillful means for all, enabling them to awaken to and enter the Buddha’s knowledge and insight. The Lotus Sūtra says: “The World-Honored Buddhas appear in the world solely on account of the one great cause and condition.” Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are not like this. Their understanding still falls into grasping and rejecting; thus, in the course of practice, they are drawn down and held fast by the blissful quietude of samādhi and cannot emerge from it. In truth, this is not ultimate.

This passage explains the difference between eighth-bhūmi bodhisattvas and śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas who have attained the highest Hīnayāna fruition. Though Hīnayāna sages may cultivate diligently and possess deep meditative stability, their view is not correct. They are therefore drawn along by the bliss of samādhi and ultimately attain the samādhi of cessation and enter nirvāṇa with remainder, unable to emerge from it. Mahāyāna bodhisattvas, relying on formless wisdom, do not abide in the Dharma bliss of quietude at the point where mental activity ceases, nor do they enter the nirvāṇa of cessation and quiescence.

(For example, Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva vows, “Until the hells are empty, I vow not to become a Buddha,” though in fact Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva realized Buddhahood long ago. Likewise, Vimalakīrti, appearing as a sick lay practitioner and dwelling amid worldly cities and settlements, is in fact an emanation of the Tathāgata Golden Grain, come to liberate sentient beings.)

[“Mahāmati, I distinguish the seven bhūmis so that one may skillfully cultivate the marks of mind, manas, and consciousness; skillfully cultivate self and what belongs to self; embrace the non-self of persons and dharmas, the individual and shared marks of arising and ceasing; skillfully master the four unobstructed knowledges; and enter the gate of samādhi through decisive power. I establish the successive stages of the bhūmis and entry into the dharmas that aid the path so that bodhisattva mahāsattvas will not fail to awaken to individual and shared marks, will not misunderstand the seventh bhūmi, and fall into the erroneous paths of non-Buddhist traditions.”]

“I distinguish the seven bhūmis”: “distinguish” means to divide into categories. That is, the Tathāgata differentiates and establishes the stages of the seven bhūmis.

“The four unobstructed knowledges,” also called the four unobstructed understandings or wisdoms, are the bodhisattva’s wisdom and eloquence in teaching the Dharma: unobstructed understanding of dharmas, meanings, language, and delight in teaching.

“The gate of samādhi through decisive power”: “decisive” means thorough understanding—that is, thoroughly understanding all Dharma gates of meditative samādhi.

Mahāmati, I expediently establish the successive stages of cultivation through the seven bhūmis so that everyone may skillfully tame the various marks of mind and consciousness, skillfully use the provisional to cultivate the true, and ultimately enter the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena, open fundamental wisdom, and realize the original truth of neither arising nor ceasing. After realizing fundamental wisdom, they gradually open the wisdom of the four unobstructed knowledges, thoroughly understand all meditative samādhis, advance bhūmi by bhūmi to eliminate habitual tendencies and unfold wisdom, and ultimately realize the perfect fruition of Buddhahood.

Therefore, the successive stages of the Ten Abodes were provisionally established for cultivation and realization, together with detailed explanations of such skillful means of practice as the thirty-seven factors of awakening. I have laid out these steps in order to prevent bodhisattvas from being misled by all manner of false and illusory appearances during practice, or from straying onto the mistaken paths of

non-Buddhist teachings because they do not know what they should attend to at each stage of cultivation.

Note that the wording here for the seventh bhūmi differs from that for the eighth: “I distinguish the seventh bhūmi: one skillfully cultivates the characteristics of mind, manas, and consciousness; skillfully cultivates self and what belongs to self; and embraces the selflessness of persons and dharmas, as well as the common and distinct characteristics of arising and ceasing. . . .” But for the eighth it says, “Free from mind, manas, and consciousness, one attains the patience with the non-arising of dharmas.” This shows that from the first through the seventh bhūmi, one must still rely on cultivation as an antidote to eliminate innate habitual tendencies. Thus, after the first bhūmi, Mahāyāna bodhisattvas gradually cultivate and realize the Immaculate Ground, the Luminous Ground, the Blazing Wisdom Ground, and so forth, including the Far-Going Ground of the seventh bhūmi.

“Mahamati, in reality there is neither arising nor ceasing, apart from what is manifested by one’s own mind. The successive stages of the grounds and the various activities of the three realms are not perceived by ordinary people. What ordinary people do not perceive is this: that I and all the Buddhas speak of the successive stages of the grounds and of the various activities of the three realms.”

Mahamati, in reality there is no cessation of one ground and arising of another; there is truly no succession of stages. Everything is only manifested by one’s own mind.

The reason I expound the gradual stages of cultivation and realization, and explain the various forms of suffering, emptiness, and impermanence in the three realms, is that deluded ordinary beings are immersed in false and illusory appearances without recognizing them. I therefore provisionally establish these various skillful means of practice to awaken those lost in delusive dreams.

Yet deluded ordinary beings do not recognize this. Seeing the illusory appearances of all sounds and forms, they take the activities of the three realms to be real. Seeing me say that all conditioned activities are impermanent, they mistakenly suppose that impermanence truly exists. Seeing me speak of the successive grounds, they cling to and mistakenly take the various stages of cultivation as truly existent.

Mahamati, there is in reality no such defilement of the three realms and no such purity of successive grounds. Neither I nor the Buddhas have truly said anything.

These two passages explain that from the first through the seventh bhūmi, one must still cultivate and realize the successive grounds in order to eliminate habitual tendencies and avoid falling into narrow partiality.

However, the successive grounds and stages of practice for bodhisattvas taught by the Buddha are also provisional skillful means, expediently established so that people may avoid wrong paths in the course of practice. Not everyone must pass through every one of these grounds individually. Guang'e the butcher, for example, laid down his butcher's knife and became a Buddha on the spot. Yet the Buddha teaches for sentient beings throughout the ten directions, and so compassionately explains these matters in detail as a warning. Therefore, after finishing his explanation, the World-Honored One again emphasizes that the arrangement of the grounds is also expedient: in reality, there is neither sudden nor gradual, neither wisdom nor attainment.

The following passage again explains the difference between the eighth bhūmi and the Lesser Vehicle, and finally sweeps away all stages and gradations once more. Let us continue:

"Further, Mahamati, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas of the eighth bhūmi delight in the gate of the bliss of the samādhi of cessation. Intoxicated by that bliss, they do not skillfully understand what is manifested by their own minds. Obstructed by the habitual tendencies of common and distinct characteristics, they fall into views that embrace the selflessness of persons and dharmas, imagining nirvāṇa; this is not the awakening of the wisdom of quiescent cessation."

"Intoxicated" is a metaphor for practitioners of the two vehicles becoming disheartened and extinguishing wisdom, craving the wine of quiescent cessation, lying long in the bed of non-contrivance, and remaining unawakened for countless eons. This is why they are called "intoxicated."

The quiescent meditative absorption realized by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas can, at the ultimate fruition of the absorption of cessation, cause mind and consciousness to wither away completely and not arise. Its force resembles the state of quiescent nirvāṇa of a bodhisattva at the eighth bhūmi. Yet they become attached to the bliss of the absorption of cessation and cannot emerge from it.

This is because they do not skillfully recognize that everything is manifested by their own minds. Obstructed by habitual tendencies of grasping, rejecting, and discriminating, they believe the two forms of selflessness to be truly existent and fall into the annihilationist view of "no self." They therefore mistakenly regard entering the absorption of cessation, in which all mind and consciousness cease to arise, as nirvāṇa. This is an erroneous view and certainly not the awakening of wisdom in true quiescent cessation.

Note that since "intoxication" is spoken of here, there must eventually be a time of awakening. That is, once practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle suddenly realize that this absorption of cessation is ultimately not nirvāṇa, arouse the resolve to turn from the

Lesser Vehicle toward the Great Vehicle, and emerge from nirvāṇa with remainder, they may even directly realize the eighth ground of the patience with the non-arising of dharmas.

“Mahamati, bodhisattvas see the bliss of the gate of the samādhi of cessation. Through their original vows, compassion, and perfected great compassion, they understand the ten inexhaustible statements. They do not imagine a nirvāṇa to be attained, nor do they think, ‘I have entered nirvāṇa.’ Since deluded thoughts do not arise, they are free from the deluded thoughts of grasping and what is grasped; they awaken to what is manifested by their own minds. Deluded thoughts concerning all dharmas do not arise, and they do not fall into deluded thoughts that cling to the characteristics of the external nature and inherent nature of mind, manas, and consciousness. The cause of Buddhahood does not fail to arise; following the arising of wisdom, they attain the ground of the Tathāgata’s self-awakening.”

Mahamati, Mahāyāna bodhisattvas, by contrast, arouse a vast resolve and possess the correct view of wisdom; therefore, they are not drawn along by the bliss of samādhi.

From the perspective of the causal stage, bodhisattvas vow to perfect the unsurpassed pure conduct through great compassion and fulfill their deep and vast original vows through the ten inexhaustible statements. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says that bodhisattvas “arouse bodhicitta to save and liberate all sentient beings, not to seek the unsurpassed path for themselves.” Therefore, bodhisattvas do not imagine that there is a fruition of nirvāṇa to be realized, nor do they entertain the thought, “I have entered nirvāṇa.”

“Since deluded thoughts do not arise, they are free from the deluded thoughts of grasping and what is grasped; they awaken to what is manifested by their own minds. Deluded thoughts concerning all dharmas do not arise, and they do not fall into deluded thoughts that cling to the characteristics of the external nature and inherent nature of mind, manas, and consciousness”—from the perspective of fruition, because their resolve at the causal stage is vast, Mahāyāna bodhisattvas do not fall into the erroneous views of discriminating, grasping, and rejecting. Thus they cultivate without cultivating and do not cultivate yet cultivate, ultimately…

They are free from all grasping and rejecting by subject and object. Inwardly, they have no attachment; outwardly, they do not seek after conditions. They realize that all inner faculties and external objects are merely illusory manifestations of their own minds, and they do not even establish the two forms of selflessness. Thus, they give rise to no deluded discrimination regarding any dharma; no longer confused or obscured, they give rise to immeasurable wondrous functions for liberating sentient beings. (Note that “deluded thoughts do not arise” here means that one’s view is

correct and does not fall into the mistaken views of mental and cognitive discrimination. It does not mean the non-arising of thoughts like stagnant water. Here, “deluded thoughts do not arise” is precisely the nonduality of compassion and wisdom, and is no different from deep vows and no-mind.)

“The cause of Buddhahood does not fail to arise; following the arising of wisdom, they attain the ground of the Tathāgata’s self-awakening”—therefore, this non-arising of deluded thought is not annihilationist withering quiescence. When the cause of cyclic rebirth, namely deluded thought and discrimination, is extinguished, the seed of the path to bodhi has precisely arisen. As it is said, “Resting is itself bodhi,” and “because there is nothing to attain, bodhisattvas. . . .”

At this quiescent point of “non-arising,” bodhisattva mahāsattvas manifest immeasurable mind-born bodies to liberate sentient beings. Where there is utterly nothing to be done, they display boundless wondrous functions to benefit beings. This is the wisdom of true quiescent cessation. Relying on this wisdom of “non-arising,” all bodhisattvas advance ever higher and attain the “arising” of the ground of the Tathāgata’s self-awakening. This is the crucial difference between the nirvāṇa of bodhisattvas at the eighth bhūmi and the nirvāṇa with remainder of the Lesser Vehicle.

These two passages again explain in detail, from the standpoint of inner realization, the difference between the Great and Lesser Vehicles in realizing nirvāṇa. In the latter, attachment to dharmas still remains, and practitioners fall into the annihilationist view of no self. In practice, they still the mind and extinguish wisdom, piling rocks upon grass; thus they are confused by the bliss of annihilative, quiescent meditative absorption and enter nirvāṇa with remainder. Mahāyāna nirvāṇa begins from a vast resolve, is free from the deluded thoughts of subject and object, and does not abide even in the bliss of the Dharma of nirvāṇa. As the Vimalakīrti Sūtra says, “Without rising from the absorption of cessation, one manifests all deportments,” and “Without cutting off afflictions, one enters nirvāṇa.”

All bodhisattvas take such Mahāyāna wisdom as their cause and thereby are born into the family of the Tathāgata. This is the state of nirvāṇa of Mahāyāna bodhisattvas.

“It is like a person who, in a dream, uses expedient means to cross water but awakens before having crossed. Upon awakening, the person reflects: Was it right, or was it wrong? It was neither right nor wrong. From beginningless time, through imagined causes of seeing, hearing, awareness, and cognition, with various habitual tendencies and various forms and circumstances, one falls into thoughts of existence and nonexistence; mind, manas, and consciousness appear in a dream.

Mahamati, thus bodhisattva mahāsattvas, at the eighth bodhisattva ground, see deluded thoughts arising. Advancing from the first ground to the seventh, they see all dharmas as like illusions. Having completed the practice of expediently crossing beyond the deluded thoughts of grasping and what is grasped, they employ Buddhist skillful means to enable those who have not attained to attain. Mahamati, this is the nirvāṇa of bodhisattvas: skillful means are not destroyed. Free from mind, manas, and consciousness, they attain the patience with the non-arising of dharmas. Mahamati, in ultimate truth there is no teaching of successive stages, nor is there any deluded thought of a dharma of quiescent cessation."

For example, someone in a dream uses various methods to cross water, but awakens before fully crossing it. Bodhisattvas at the eighth bhūmi are likewise. "Not yet crossed" metaphorically indicates that, even at the eighth bhūmi, the appearances of two remaining grades of ignorance not yet eradicated still manifest. "Yet awakens" means that at the eighth bhūmi one is ultimately greatly awakened, directly realizing that both "crossing" and "not crossing" are dream events, and that correct wisdom and mistaken views are no more than dream babble.

Bodhisattvas at the eighth bhūmi are likewise. Upon awakening, they reflect: Were the events in the dream just slept through right or wrong? Then they awaken to this: in the dream they were not nonexistent, but after awakening they are not existent; therefore, they are neither right nor wrong.

From beginningless time, beings have taken ignorance as the cause and fallen into various forms of seeing, hearing, awareness, and cognition. They have also continually accumulated habitual tendencies of seeking after conditions. Thus, externally, they fall into the circumstances of various forms, while inwardly they are trapped in deluded thoughts discriminating existence and nonexistence. They thereby experience an "I" that knows, along with all the mountains, rivers, lands, and other things known by that I. In truth, all of this is manifested by the eight consciousnesses. Though vivid as a dream, it is not truly existent.

"Mahamati, thus bodhisattva mahāsattvas, at the eighth bodhisattva ground, see deluded thoughts arising. Advancing from the first ground to the seventh, they see all dharmas as like illusions. Having completed the practice of expediently crossing beyond the deluded thoughts of grasping and what is grasped, they employ Buddhist skillful means to enable those who have not attained to attain.

Mahamati, this is the nirvāṇa of bodhisattvas: skillful means are not destroyed"—Mahamati, all bodhisattva mahāsattvas uphold the view that nothing exists and that all dharmas are like illusions as they cultivate and realize. They proceed from the first through the seventh bhūmi, and by the time they reach the eighth bhūmi, they

have thoroughly realized that all worldly and supramundane dharmas are inverted deluded thoughts. Yet they do not abandon cultivation and realization.

For Buddhist cultivation and realization are nothing more than skillful means for liberating sentient beings from their various inverted deluded thoughts of grasping and rejecting; they are provisionally established so that deluded people may ultimately awaken and return to their original minds. Mahamati, this is the nirvāṇa realized by Mahāyāna bodhisattvas: although the characteristics of mind are quiescent, none of the skillful means for liberating sentient beings are destroyed.

“Free from mind, manas, and consciousness, they attain the patience with the non-arising of dharmas”—though they liberate sentient beings, in reality there are no sentient beings to liberate and no function to perform. They are free from all deluded discriminations of mind and consciousness. This is the quiescence of Mahāyāna nirvāṇa. At this point, because they have thoroughly realized that everything is originally “unborn” and can no longer be shaken, they begin precisely to manifest immeasurable wondrous births. Therefore, they “attain the patience with the non-arising of dharmas.”

“Mahāmati, in the ultimate meaning there is no teaching of successive stages; there is no dharma of the cessation of deluded thoughts.” That is, Mahāmati, at the ultimate point of the Buddhadharma, not even the slightest thing is established and no dharmas remain; in truth, there are no successive stages. At the most ultimate point of the Buddhadharma, there is in truth no dharma by which to extinguish deluded thoughts, and no dharma by which nirvāṇa may be realized.

Here, after the World-Honored One has explained in detail the inwardly realized realm of cessation at the eighth bhūmi of the Mahāyāna, he again sweeps away entirely the successive stages from the eighth bhūmi up to Buddhahood.

[At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses: The measures of mind are nonexistent. So too are these stages of abiding and the Buddha-ground, the past, the future, and the present, as taught by the Buddhas of the three times.]

Restating the preceding meaning, the Buddha said: All that is measured by consciousness, and all deluded thoughts and discriminations, are originally false and are in truth nonexistent. Therefore, in the Buddhadharma as well, there is truly not a single dharma to be obtained. Thus, the ten grounds of abiding and the Buddha-ground are in truth grounds in which there is nothing to abide. This is the ultimate principle jointly proclaimed by all Buddhas of the three times—past, present, and future.

[The measure of mind is the seventh ground; nonexistence is the eighth. These two grounds are called stages of abiding. The Buddha-ground is called supreme.]

At the seventh ground, one fully realizes that all is mind-only, equal and without distinction; yet the habitual traces of the shadow-dust of "measuring" remain. At the eighth ground, one thoroughly realizes that all is truly nonexistent, yet "nonexistence" itself still remains, and one cannot yet employ the whole body in its full functioning. Thus, although these two grounds are sublime, they still retain an abiding attachment to patient endurance; nevertheless, they are also relatively typical stages on the path of practice. Only the self-awakened wondrous wisdom of the Buddha-ground, which abides nowhere, is supreme.

[Self-awakened wisdom and purity—this is my ground, the freely sovereign and supreme realm: pure, wondrously adorned, shining like a blazing fire, its light reaching everywhere. Though its flames burn fiercely, they do not harm the eyes. It transforms the three existences throughout the entire sphere; it transforms the three existences of the present, and at times those of the past. There it expounds the vehicles. All these are the ground of the Tathāgata.]

This continues the preceding verse with a detailed praise of the realm of the Tathāgata's self-awakened noble wisdom:

In the realm of the Tathāgata, all is originally pure, naturally and inherently so, and has never been lacking. This is the virtue of the Tathāgata's dharmakāya.

Once all defilements of accumulated habits have been removed, the light of inherently possessed wisdom shines forth in full, illuminating without remainder. It is supremely free and sovereign, fully endowed with inconceivable purity and wondrous adornment. Like a blazing fire illuminating everything, its light pervades the ten directions; although its flames burn brightly, they are pleasing and cool and do not harm anyone's eyes. This is the virtue of the Tathāgata's wisdom sambhogakāya.

The Tathāgata turns the great Dharma wheel throughout the ten directions, liberating the three existences. With a single voice, he universally enters the three times without obstruction. He may liberate sentient beings of the past or transform the three existences of the present; in accordance with sentient beings' capacities, he expounds the prajñā teaching of the empty nature of appearances. All such sublime activities belong to the realm of the Tathāgata-ground. This is the virtue of the Tathāgata, the World-Honored One, in his compassionate nirmāṇakāya.

The verses in this section first directly reveal that all grounds, including the Buddha-ground, are entirely nonexistent. They then explain the characteristics of mind from the first through seventh grounds, as well as the virtues of the mind at the eighth

ground and the Buddha-ground. Finally, the Buddha once more sweeps away the succession of grounds:

[The tenth ground is the first; the first is the eighth. The ninth is the seventh, and the seventh is also the eighth. The second is the third; the fourth is the fifth; the third is the sixth. If all is nonexistent, what succession can there be?]

The distribution of these grounds that I have described is merely an expedient teaching provisionally established so that no one will go astray in practice. The various distinctions among stages are originally interpenetrating; they are not fixed dharmas.

For example, "upon first arousing the resolve, one immediately attains perfect enlightenment"—is this not the meaning that "the tenth ground is also the first"? "The first ground is the eighth": the eighth ground is the Immovable Ground, but the first ground too is immovable. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra also says, "A bodhisattva abides on the Ground of Joy because it accords with immovability." "The ninth is the seventh": the ninth ground is the Ground of Good Wisdom, while seventh-ground bodhisattvas likewise "perfect skillful wisdom" and "bring all things to completion." "The seventh is also the eighth": the Avataṃsaka Sūtra says that "at the seventh abiding, the merits of bodhi are complete," while at the eighth ground, "all that is done is entirely pure."

The same applies to "the second is the third, the fourth is the fifth, and the third is the sixth." In principle, awakening is sudden; in phenomena, obstructions must gradually be removed. The succession of stages is provisionally established to remove all deluded thoughts marked by mental appearances. But if mental appearances are absent, there is originally nothing to be done—so what successive stages could there be to remove?

Therefore, since all is originally nonexistent, how can there be distinctions between delusion and awakening, or between sudden and gradual? If students, having heard the Buddha explain the succession of grounds, then select and discriminate among names and appearances, attach themselves to particular stages, and regard the grounds of practice as substantially real and impossible to surpass, they have gone completely contrary to the Buddha's original intent. At this point, the warning of Patriarch Linji is precisely borne out: "Even one whose mind has fulfilled the ten grounds is like a hired laborer; those of equal enlightenment and wondrous enlightenment are men bearing cangues and chains!"

Conversely, if one realizes that one is originally Buddha, that mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are without distinction, and if one abandons all discriminating mental appearances—discarding both ordinary beings and sages, relinquishing both defilement and purity—then one does not abide even in the Buddha-ground, yet

does not abandon cultivation and realization. Only then can one correspond and accord with the stages of the Buddhadharma, advancing ever higher. This is why “all worthy ones and sages differ by means of the unconditioned dharma.”

Therefore, the World-Honored One has disclosed and provisionally established these many successive grounds for no other purpose than to teach people to let go of attachment—even to let go of “letting go.” Thus, if one is wise, on hearing this one immediately ceases the frantic mind and abides nowhere in anything. Then, at that very moment, one is the original face of Buddha. What more need one seek?

Summary of This Section:

Key terms in this section: “cessation of proper absorption,” “the successive continuity of the grounds,” and “in the ultimate meaning there is no teaching of successive continuity.” This section explains the distinction between the proper absorptions of the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, as well as the differing successive grounds of bodhisattvas abiding on the grounds:

Those of the Hīnayāna arouse a narrow resolve. Their attachment to dharmas is not severed, and they do not depart from grasping and rejection; at most, they can realize nirvāṇa with remainder.

Those of the Mahāyāna, by contrast, arouse a vast resolve, and their view in practice is free from all discriminating deluded thoughts of mind and consciousness. Yet when fundamental wisdom first opens, most people still have accumulated defiled habits that have not been removed.

To remove the accumulated habits of attachment to appearances and safeguard the view of signlessness, one should not wholly discard the gradual practice involving appearances. Therefore, there is progressive advancement from the first to the seventh ground. Within this progression, one may also enter the meditative absorption of cessation; but Mahāyāna bodhisattvas rely on wisdom and awakening and do not abide in any meditative absorption. They therefore advance further to realize the eighth ground of forbearance with the unborn dharmas, an awakening from the great dream. This is Mahāyāna nirvāṇa.

At the Buddha-ground, not the slightest trace of either ordinary beings or sages is established, while the wondrous functioning of wisdom is inexhaustible.

Furthermore, in this section the Buddha repeatedly emphasizes that the division into successive grounds is an expedient provision, established to prevent students from going astray in practice and realization. In truth, experiences in practice and the stages and levels are not fixed dharmas; at the ultimate point, there are truly no successive grounds. If one clings to the grounds as solid realities and becomes

attached to them, one falls once more into the view of ordinary beings, turning the Dharma of liberation into a worldly study of inverted discrimination.

Thus Chan Master Huangbo said: “Even if you have mastered the three worthy stages and four fruits, and your mind has fulfilled the ten grounds, you are still only sitting within the categories of ordinary beings and sages. Have you not seen it said: ‘All conditioned activities are impermanent; they are dharmas of arising and ceasing’ . . . How can that compare with the gateway of the unconditioned true reality, through which one leaps beyond in a single bound and enters directly into the ground of the Tathāgata?”

35. The Meaning of Permanence and Impermanence

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, is the Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Awakened One, permanent or impermanent?” The Buddha told Mahāmati: “The Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Awakened One, is neither permanent nor impermanent, for both entail errors. If permanent, there is the error of being a creator-lord. Permanence is asserted by all non-Buddhist paths. A creator has no created object; therefore, the Tathāgata’s permanence is not the permanence of a creator, for that entails error.”]

In the thirty-third section, the Buddha refuted seven non-Buddhist views of impermanence; in the thirty-fourth, he further refuted the two vehicles’ view of nirvāṇa with remainder. Yet he did not specifically expound the meaning of the Tathāgata’s true permanence. In this section, Mahāmati asks again: Is the Tathāgata ultimately permanent or impermanent?

The Buddha tells Mahāmati Bodhisattva: The Tathāgata is neither permanent nor impermanent. The Tathāgata, the Perfectly Awakened One, is free from a hundred negations and cuts off every error; it is wrong to call him either permanent or impermanent.

“If permanent, there is the error of being a creator-lord. Permanence is asserted by all non-Buddhist paths. A creator has no created object; therefore, the Tathāgata’s permanence is not the permanence of a creator, for that entails error”—if one regards the Tathāgata as permanent, one falls into the error of positing a creator-lord.

All non-Buddhist paths see conditioned dharmas as impermanent and then establish, apart from impermanence, a truly existing permanent lord, such as a heavenly lord. They hold that this truly existing, permanent, active lord produces all impermanent things. This is a non-Buddhist erroneous teaching. The Tathāgata, in truth, is originally quiescent and ceased. The so-called “creator” is not a creator: all

agents and objects of action are merely illusory manifestations and do not truly exist; in truth, there are neither agents nor things made. Therefore, the Tathāgata's permanence is not the permanence of an active creator as asserted by non-Buddhist paths.

["If the Tathāgata were impermanent, there would be the error of being a product and thus impermanent. The marks of the aggregates have no inherent nature; if the aggregates were destroyed, he should be annihilated, yet the Tathāgata is not annihilated. Mahāmati, all that is produced is impermanent, like jars, garments, and so forth. If all were impermanent, the omniscient one and the various skillful means would be meaningless. Because they are produced, all produced things should be Tathāgatas, since their causal nature would be undifferentiated. Therefore, Mahāmati, the Tathāgata is neither permanent nor impermanent."]

If one considers the Tathāgata impermanent, one again falls into the error of being a produced and impermanent thing. If the Tathāgata were something produced—that is, a form produced by the combination of the five aggregates—then, since all produced forms lack any substantial inherent nature and are impermanent and subject to change, the Tathāgata too should perish and return to nothing when the five aggregates disintegrate. But the true Tathāgata never perishes; therefore, the Tathāgata is not impermanent.

Moreover, all things that are produced are impermanent. Like jars and garments, whatever has been made is inevitably subject to decay and destruction. Thus, if the Tathāgata were impermanent, it would mean that all the wisdom of the self-awakened noble ones, all Tathāgatas and sages, and all merits of skillful means for liberating sentient beings were also produced, impermanent, and perishable. Then the Buddhadharma would have no meaning at all.

If all produced things were meaningless and impermanent, there could be no distinctions among dharmas. All dharmas could then be Buddhadharma, and worldly and supramundane dharmas could replace one another, becoming hopelessly confused, since at their fundamental causal basis they would all be impermanent and unobtainable. Clearly, the Tathāgata is not impermanent as something produced.

Therefore, Mahāmati, the Tathāgata is neither permanent nor impermanent.

In these two passages, the Buddha first refutes both eternalism and impermanence from the standpoint of production. Non-Buddhist paths hold that impermanence truly exists and that, apart from impermanence, there is a permanence that produces all impermanent dharmas. The Tathāgata is neither such active permanence nor a produced impermanence.

["Furthermore, Mahāmati, the Tathāgata is not permanent in the manner of space. If he were permanent as space is permanent, there would be the error that the self-awakened noble wisdom and its various qualities are meaningless. Mahāmati, space is, for example, neither permanent nor impermanent. It is apart from permanence and impermanence, sameness and difference, both and neither. Since permanence and impermanence entail error, it cannot be spoken of in those terms. Therefore, the Tathāgata is not permanent."]

"There would be the error that the self-awakened noble wisdom and its various qualities are meaningless": the Tathāgata's self-awakened noble wisdom and manifold virtues would all become meaningless.

Mahāmati, nor is the Tathāgata permanent like space. If the Tathāgata were empty, still, and insentient like permanent space, the wondrous functioning of the wisdom of self-awakened noble wisdom would not exist. Master Yuanyin often said, "At the point where not a single thought arises, the clear and distinct spiritual knowing is precisely a person's Buddha-nature." This is the meaning: the suchness of Buddha-nature is profoundly still and quiescent, yet it is not dead stillness or unconsciousness; rather, it is clear spiritual knowing.

Mahāmati, what the true Tathāgata has in common with space is space's nature as neither permanent nor impermanent. If one calls space a permanent dharma, space has neither form nor location and cannot be grasped; if one calls space impermanent, one sees neither its limits nor its arising, ceasing, and transformation. The Tathāgata's Dharma body is similarly neither permanent nor impermanent. Yet the Tathāgata's transformative functioning is boundlessly wondrous and aware: though inactive, there is nothing it does not do; though without knowing, it has clear spiritual knowing. It is utterly unlike the barren stillness and unconsciousness of space.

Therefore, the Tathāgata is apart from permanence and impermanence, sameness and difference, both and neither. To call the Tathāgata permanent or impermanent is in either case an error. The true aspect of the Tathāgata cannot be grasped through such deluded conceptual speech.

This means that, although certain features of space may be used as analogies for the Tathāgata, the Tathāgata is not permanently barren and still like space.

["Furthermore, Mahāmati, if the Tathāgata were permanently unborn, like the horns of rabbits and horses, then, because of the permanence of being unborn, skillful means would be meaningless. Because of the error of permanently unborn, the Tathāgata is not permanent."]

Further, if the Tathāgata were permanent in the sense of "unborn," and this non-arising were like the horns of rabbits and horses, which have never arisen, then the Tathāgata would fall into the erroneous view of annihilation and non-arising. The Tathāgata's various merits and skillful means would likewise be annihilated and unborn, and would have no beneficial significance for sentient beings. Therefore, permanence as "unborn" falls into the erroneous view of annihilation; the Tathāgata is not permanent in this sense of "unborn."

This refutes the annihilationist permanence in which the Tathāgata is held to be permanently unborn like the horns of rabbits and horses.

Since the Tathāgata is neither permanently unconscious like space nor permanently annihilated like rabbit horns, what, then, is the Tathāgata's permanence? The following passage expounds the meaning of the Tathāgata's true permanence:

["Furthermore, Mahāmati, there is another matter by which one may know the Tathāgata to be permanent. Why is this so? It is because the wisdom attained without interruption is permanent; therefore, the Tathāgata is permanent. Mahāmati, whether Tathāgatas appear in the world or do not appear in the world, the Dharma remains abiding and certain. Śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and all Buddhas and Tathāgatas abide without interruption; they do not abide in space, nor can this be known by ordinary deluded people. Mahāmati, the wisdom attained by the Tathāgata is permeated by prajñā; it is not permeated by mind, intellect, consciousness, or the aggregates, realms, sense bases, and abodes. Mahāmati, all the three realms of existence arise from unreal deluded thoughts. The Tathāgata does not arise from unreal and false deluded thoughts."]

Further, Mahāmati, once the non-Buddhist erroneous views of permanence and impermanence have been eliminated, what remains is the Tathāgata's true permanence. Why? Because the dharma realized by the Tathāgata reveals the true aspect of all worldly and supramundane things, and this true aspect abides continuously and permanently. Therefore, the Tathāgata is truly permanent. Mahāmati, whether the Tathāgata appears in the world or not, the true reality directly indicated by the Tathāgata ultimately abides permanently.

"Śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and all Buddhas and Tathāgatas abide without interruption; they do not abide in space, nor can this be known by ordinary deluded people"—śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas mistakenly think that the Tathāgata's true permanence should be an unconscious empty abiding like space. They cannot understand that all Buddhas and Tathāgatas possess wondrous spiritual knowing and therefore abide permanently without interruption. Though permanently abiding, they abide nowhere; they are utterly unlike the deluded consciousness of the world. Thus foolish ordinary beings likewise cannot fathom or know this.

“Mahāmati, the wisdom attained by the Tathāgata is permeated by prajñā; it is not permeated by mind, intellect, consciousness, or the aggregates, realms, sense bases, and abodes. Mahāmati, all the three realms of existence arise from unreal deluded thoughts.”

“The Tathāgata does not arise from unreal and false deluded thoughts”—the self-awakened noble wisdom realized by the Tathāgata is accomplished through the permeation and manifestation of prajñā. It is not something ordinary beings can attain by relying on the measuring and calculating of their own mind-consciousness.

For the measuring and calculating of ordinary beings’ mind-consciousness arises through the mutual grasping of the various unreal and deluded appearances of the aggregates, realms, and sense bases. Its causes and grounds are erroneous and unreal—like conducting scientific measurements with the wrong ruler. How could it yield any truth of true permanence? Mahāmati, all three realms of worldly existence arise from unreal deluded thoughts. The Tathāgata, however, does not arise from false and unreal deluded thoughts. The Tathāgata is real, free from distinctions of arising and ceasing, gain and loss, existence and nonexistence; therefore, the Tathāgata is truly permanent.

This passage says that when deluded and erroneous views of permanence and impermanence are set aside, there is the Tathāgata’s true permanence. The suchness and real dharma realized by the Tathāgata abides continuously and permanently; the self-awakened right wisdom by which the Tathāgata realizes it is unrelated to arising and ceasing. Yet, although the Tathāgata manifests permanence in this way, it admits not the slightest grasping or discrimination.

[“Mahāmati, because of dual dharmas, there are permanence and impermanence; they are not nondual. Nonduality is quiescence, because all dharmas have no appearance of dual arising. Therefore, the Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Awakened One, is neither permanent nor impermanent. Mahāmati, whenever verbal discrimination arises, there is the error of permanence and impermanence. When awareness of discrimination is extinguished, one is free from the unquiet views of permanence and impermanence held by ordinary deluded people. The wise forever depart from permanence and impermanence; they are not conditioned by permanence and impermanence.”]

“No appearance of dual arising”: the “appearance of dual arising” is the manifest appearance of opposing extremes, such as subject and object, annihilation and permanence, or arising and ceasing. No appearance of dual arising means that these opposing extremes do not truly exist.

Mahāmati, foolish ordinary beings and all non-Buddhist paths mistakenly take dharmas to truly exist. They therefore always fall into extreme views and falsely

perceive the opposing extremes of permanence and impermanence. In reality, all dharmas are originally quiescent and originally nondual; the opposing extremes do not truly exist. Therefore, the Tathāgata in truth is neither permanent nor impermanent.

“Mahāmati, whenever verbal discrimination arises, there is the error of permanence and impermanence”—Mahāmati, as soon as one enters into verbal discrimination, one falls into the two extremes: “Stir a thought and one has already gone astray; open one’s mouth and one is already wrong.”

“When awareness of discrimination is extinguished, one is free from the unquiet views of permanence and impermanence held by ordinary deluded people. The wise forever depart from permanence and impermanence; they are not conditioned by permanence and impermanence”—“the extinction of awareness of discrimination” means that the path of words is cut off and the activity of mind comes to rest. Only then can one be free from the errors of the annihilationist and eternalist extreme views of foolish ordinary beings and attain lasting peace. Those of wisdom thereby forever depart from the two extremes of annihilation and permanence; nor can the fruition of self-awakened noble wisdom be realized through conditioning by such erroneous views.

Here, the World-Honored One also sweeps away even true permanence: the Tathāgata’s true permanence is originally quiescent and does not fall into either extreme; therefore, it is neither permanent nor impermanent. All words, moreover, are merely expedient means—how could one cling to them as real?

In the past, a non-Buddhist adherent of another teaching, holding the two extreme views of annihilation and permanence, once questioned Śākyamuni Buddha: “May I ask, Tathāgata, are all dharmas permanent?” The World-Honored One did not reply. The non-Buddhist then asked, “Then are all dharmas impermanent?” The World-Honored One still remained silent.

The non-Buddhist said, “Is not Śākyamuni Tathāgata supposed to possess all wisdom? Why are you unable to answer me?” The World-Honored One said, “All that you ask is mere empty speculation.” The Tathāgata’s wisdom is not the eloquent verbal cleverness of worldly knowledge. The Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of the canon are nothing but means for people to return to their own minds and rest at once.

If one does not recognize one’s original mind and instead pursues external things without cease, then—even if one’s eloquence is unobstructed—one remains a blind and mute person. Such eloquence has not the slightest value for directly realizing the Buddha’s original intent. Only by putting an end to one’s own deluded grasping, taking the Buddha’s teachings as one’s method, engaging in practice, and cutting off

conceptual understanding can one realize the Tathāgata's truth. At that time, what are permanence and impermanence but superfluous words, and what is not an expedient means? Therefore, do not say that the Tathāgata failed to answer the non-Buddhist. Where the Tathāgata is without words, his silence is like thunder.

At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:

If the manifold aids are held to be meaningless, errors of permanence and impermanence arise. When discriminating awareness is absent, one is forever free from permanence and impermanence.

From the tenets they establish arise many confused meanings. Regard the measure of one's own mind with equanimity: words cannot attain it.

The World-Honored One restated this meaning in verse:

The Buddhadharma does not fall into the two extremes of annihilation and permanence. If one falls into these two extremes, then the various expedient means and merits of all Buddhadharma become meaningless; thus, the erroneous views of annihilation and permanence entail many faults. Only by removing all discriminating deluded thoughts, resting the mind at once, and no longer grasping and seeking can one forever leave behind the erroneous faults of permanence and impermanence and realize the Tathāgata's true permanence.

Because of discriminating deluded thoughts, non-Buddhists cling to permanence and impermanence as truly existent. From their deluded views of the two extremes of annihilation and permanence, numerous schools arise; their theories are confused, and their principles are all mistaken.

If one observes correctly with the Buddha's wisdom, one understands that all dharmas appear through mind alone, are equal, and lack any reality—how could they admit of conceptual deliberation? All the Buddhas' teachings are likewise expedient means directed at the ailments of sentient beings; in truth, they are wholly unattainable. Here in Buddhadharma, there are truly no verbal doctrines or schools to establish.

Outline of This Section:

Key terms of this section: "neither permanent nor impermanent" and "the cessation of discriminating awareness." This passage answers whether the Tathāgata's Dharma body is permanent or impermanent. As before, it first refutes erroneous views and then reveals right understanding:

First, it refutes them from the perspective of causal activity: the Tathāgata is neither the permanence that acts as a cause nor the impermanence that is produced.

Next, it refutes them from the perspective of phenomenal appearances: the Tathāgata is neither the barren permanence of empty, unconscious quiescence nor the annihilationist permanence in which nothing whatsoever arises.

It then reveals the Tathāgata's true permanence: the Tathāgata's reality is the truth that pervades all things, ever abiding without interruption; the Tathāgata's right wisdom is not gained from delusion and is unrelated to arising and ceasing. Therefore, the Tathāgata is true permanence.

It then sweeps away even true permanence: the Tathāgata's Dharma body is quiescent and nondual, neither permanent nor impermanent. What the Tathāgata says is likewise nothing but an expedient means and should not be clung to as real.

Finally, the Buddha also points out the method for forever leaving behind the discriminations of the two extremes of annihilation and permanence: "the cessation of discriminating awareness." By departing from the conditioning influence of deluded discriminations, bringing the path of words to an end and extinguishing the activity of mind, and cultivating prajñā, one can ultimately uproot the seeds of deluded thought and forever leave behind the erroneous views of annihilation and permanence.

36. Arising and Ceasing of the Aggregates and Sense Bases

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, I pray that you will again explain for me the arising and ceasing of the aggregates, elements, and sense bases. Since they are without a self, who arises and who ceases? Ordinary people rely on arising and ceasing; they do not realize the end of suffering and do not know nirvāṇa." The Buddha said, "Excellent! Listen carefully, and I shall explain it to you." Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: "Yes, I respectfully receive your instruction."]

Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, may you again explain the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates, six sense bases, and eighteen elements. If all aggregates, elements, and sense bases lack any substantial intrinsic nature, then who, after all, is there to arise and cease? Deluded ordinary beings drift through the cycle of birth and death, following the appearances of arising and ceasing. They cannot awaken and leave the sea of suffering, nor can they directly realize the true reality of nirvāṇa."

“Aggregates, elements, and sense bases,” as well as “arising and ceasing,” are all illusory appearances. If one directly realizes one’s intrinsic nature, then all the hundred strange things come to rest; if one continues to wander without cease, one is an ordinary person. Therefore, at this crucial point, Mahāmati Bodhisattva compassionately asks the World-Honored One again to explain the root source of arising and ceasing, thereby dispelling deluded attachment. This leads to the Buddha’s teaching that the tathāgata-garbha is the fundamental basis for the arising and ceasing of the aggregates, elements, and sense bases, as well as to the profound Dharma of transforming the consciousness-store into Buddha-wisdom.

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: “The tathāgata-garbha is the cause of good and evil and can give rise universally to the births of all destinies. It is like a performer who manifests the various destinies, free from self and what belongs to self.”]

The Buddha told Mahāmati: The tathāgata-garbha is the cause of all good and evil. Through its activation and impetus, the twelve classes of living beings undergo ceaseless rebirth; likewise, through its activation and impetus, all sages, including those at the three worthy stages and ten bhūmis, are ultimately liberated. That is, the underlying source of all destinies of ordinary beings and sages is the activation and impetus of the tathāgata-garbha.

It is like a performer doing conjuring tricks: from the tathāgata-garbha, all dharmas and all ordinary beings and sages can be magically manifested. Yet none of these phenomena truly exists, nor are there truly any acts of creation or distinctions between subject and object.

Note that here the tathāgata-garbha is not only the cause of evil but also the cause of good. So-called “good” in its fullest sense is ultimate liberation; and “all destinies” include not only rebirth in the six destinies but also the self-awakened sacred destinies of the three worthy stages and ten noble stages. Thus, the tathāgata-garbha is not only the basis of rebirth but also the basis of liberation.

Volume One of A Brief Commentary on the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment states: “In terms of cause, it is called the tathāgata-garbha; in terms of fruition, it is called perfect enlightenment. It is ultimately identical with suchness, Buddha-nature, the dharma realm, nirvāṇa, bodhi, and so forth.” Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna further divides the tathāgata-garbha into the “tathāgata-garbha entangled in defilements” and the “tathāgata-garbha freed from defilements.” This section later also calls the tathāgata-garbha the “consciousness-store.” Thus we may know that the essence of the tathāgata-garbha is the wondrous nature of true suchness: originally pure, neither arising nor ceasing, and pervading all things. Although its essence is such, its appearances and functions differ greatly:

For the deluded, intrinsically perfect luminosity is obscured by the dust and grime of ignorance. The tathāgata-garbha is covered over and becomes the "consciousness-store" (cang), resulting in wandering through birth and death; this is also called the "tathāgata-garbha entangled in defilements." The wise, however, know that it is originally perfectly luminous and inherently quiescent, and that in truth not a single dharma can be obtained. Therefore, the transformations of seas into mulberry fields and the ebb and flow of arising and ceasing are all wondrous manifestations of the treasury (zang) of Tathāgata wisdom. Thus they are not constrained by any dharma, and their wondrous functioning is boundless. This is provisionally called the "tathāgata-garbha freed from defilements."

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch states: "The intrinsic nature can contain the myriad dharmas; this is called the containing-store consciousness. When thought arises, it becomes transformed consciousness, giving rise to the six consciousnesses, issuing through the six gates, and perceiving the six sense objects. Thus the eighteen elements all function from the intrinsic nature. If the intrinsic nature is deviant, it gives rise to eighteen deviant states; if the intrinsic nature is correct, it gives rise to eighteen correct states. Evil functioning is the functioning of sentient beings; wholesome functioning is the functioning of Buddhas." This describes precisely this principle.

Although the principle of the tathāgata-garbha is so profound, vast, and inconceivable, it too is provisionally existent and illusory. In reality, there is no truly so-called root source, nor any activation, creation, or impetus. In other words, the "existence" of the tathāgata-garbha is, in its very nature, "emptiness"—"It is like a performer who manifests the various destinies, free from self and what belongs to self."

["Because they do not realize this, the three conditions combine, by expedient means, to produce them. Non-Buddhists do not realize this and conceive of a creator. Perfumed by beginningless false and evil habitual tendencies, it is called the consciousness-store; it gives rise to the ground of abiding ignorance and is together with the seven consciousnesses. Like waves in the ocean, it constantly arises without interruption. It is free from the fault of impermanence, free from theories of self, intrinsically undefiled, and ultimately pure."]

"The ground of abiding ignorance" simply means ignorance. Ignorance is the fundamental cause of all afflictions. Though called ignorance, it arises through mistaking something for clarity, leading to benighted and deluded activity. A Treasury of the Śrīmālā Sūtra states: Regarding the ground of abiding ignorance, "Because it is the basis on which afflictions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges arise, it is called 'abiding.' Because it can produce as many as the sands of the Ganges, it is called a 'ground.'"

“It is called the consciousness-store; it gives rise to the ground of abiding ignorance and is together with the seven consciousnesses”—in the ten-volume version of the Laṅkāvatāra, this is translated: “Mahāmati, the ālaya consciousness is called the tathāgata-garbha and is conjoined with ignorance and the seven consciousnesses.” Thus, “consciousness-store” here means the eighth, ālaya consciousness. This means that, when the tathāgata-garbha is troubled by ignorance, the eighth ālaya consciousness arises together with the preceding seven consciousnesses.

Non-Buddhists do not realize that all is illusory and that there is truly no agent of creation or distinction between subject and object. They believe that faculties, objects, and consciousness combine to produce the various worlds, and falsely posit a real creator who has created all dharmas. This is because deluded ordinary beings, from beginningless kalpas onward, have mistaken the false for the true and have been perfumed by the evil habit of taking the unreal as real. Through the fault of such ignorance, deluded ordinary beings misunderstand and obscure the excellent tathāgata-garbha, turning it into the “consciousness-store” of the eighth ālaya consciousness. Once it has become the consciousness-store, the functions of the other seven consciousnesses also arise with it.

That is, through the fault of ignorance, the eight consciousnesses arise together. Then all arising, ceasing, and transformation are mutually connected, each arising as another subsides, like waves in the ocean—one wave following another, without rest or end.

“Free from the fault of impermanence, free from theories of self, intrinsically undefiled, and ultimately pure”—yet the body of the ocean itself has never increased or decreased, and cannot be said to be disturbed. The tathāgata-garbha is likewise: originally undefiled and ultimately pure, it is not subject to changing impermanence, nor does there exist any agent or object that rules or creates.

[“The other consciousnesses arise and cease. The mental faculty and mental consciousness, and the like, are seven at every moment. Because of unreal deluded thoughts, they grasp at objects, becoming attached to names and appearances in their various forms and locations. They do not realize the forms and appearances manifested by their own minds; they do not realize suffering and pleasure and do not attain liberation. Entangled by names and appearances, craving gives rise to further craving, whether as cause or as condition.”]

“The other consciousnesses arise and cease. The mental faculty and mental consciousness, and the like, are seven at every moment”—although the essence of the tathāgata-garbha neither arises nor ceases, the other consciousnesses, namely the first seven consciousnesses, arise and cease without interruption. Like waves in the ocean, these seven consciousnesses rise and fall in unceasing succession.

“Because of unreal deluded thoughts, they grasp at objects, becoming attached to names and appearances in their various forms and locations. They do not realize the forms and appearances manifested by their own minds; they do not realize suffering and pleasure and do not attain liberation. Entangled by names and appearances, craving gives rise to further craving, whether as cause or as condition.”

That is, deluded sentient beings are inwardly driven by distorted views and deluded thoughts, while outwardly taking all objects to be real. They consequently continue to discriminate and become attached to the various objects, clinging sometimes to their names and sometimes to their appearances. They do not realize that all these objects are manifestations of their own minds; nor do they realize that the nature of all suffering and pleasure is no more than dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows. Carried along by karma, they cannot attain liberation. In this way, sentient beings are bound by names and appearances. Craving gives rise to karmic actions of grasping and rejecting, while the various external objects in turn further foster the mind’s craving. Thus causes, conditions, and karmic results continue in an endless, revolving cycle.

This means that deluded ordinary beings mistake the false for the true. The treasury of the Tathāgata is covered over by deluded consciousness and becomes the eight consciousnesses; thus they entertain inverted deluded thoughts and grasping attachments. Seeds give rise to manifest activity, and manifest activity in turn perfumes seeds. The eight consciousnesses become mutual causes and conditions, revolving without rest; cause and effect continue, and rebirth never ceases.

[“When the faculties of sensation cease and thereafter do not arise in sequence, the remaining deluded thoughts of one’s own mind do not know suffering or pleasure. Entering the cessation of sensation and perception, the proper absorption, or the fourth dhyāna, practitioners conceive this to be liberation through the good true reality. Yet, not having departed from or transformed the consciousness-store called the tathāgata-garbha, the seven consciousnesses continue to flow and do not cease. Why is this? Because the consciousnesses arise through mutual conditioning. This is not a realm of practice accessible to śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas: they do not realize no-self; through grasping their own and common characteristics, they give rise to the aggregates, elements, and sense bases.”]

“Liberation through the good true reality” means leaving behind suffering and its arising and realizing the truth of the path of quiescent cessation, taking this to be liberation—though it is in fact the narrow nirvāṇa with remainder.

“Not having departed from or transformed the consciousness-store called the tathāgata-garbha” means that one has not left the consciousness-store or transformed it into the treasury of the Tathāgata.

There is another kind of practitioner who believes that, by subduing the faculties of sensation so that they do not move, all coarse and subtle conscious thoughts gradually cease to arise and one no longer knows any suffering or pleasure. Such practitioners enter the concentration of cessation of sensation and perception, or attain rebirth in the fourth dhyāna heaven, and believe that this is the "good true reality" and that they have thereby attained liberation. In fact, this is merely a liberation they imagine for themselves. They have not completely left behind inverted deluded thoughts, nor have they transformed the consciousness-store into Tathāgata wisdom. The Lotus Sūtra reproves this, saying: "Merely exhausting birth and death is called liberation, but in truth it is not yet complete liberation!"

Such a method of practice cannot transform the eighth consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom. The other seven deluded consciousnesses therefore continue to flow without cease. Why is this? Because the eight consciousnesses are mutually causes and conditions for one another, mutually conditioning one another as they arise and cease.

In other words, this kind of practice can only suppress thoughts. At most, the six consciousnesses may fail to arise; but as long as the eighth ālaya consciousness has not been transformed and the seventh manas consciousness still continually and scrutinizingly deliberates, the root of rebirth remains. Thus, once one emerges from meditative absorption and again encounters external objects, the seeds in the field of the eight consciousnesses manifest when they meet conditions. One again mistakes the false for the true and gives rise to greed, anger, and ignorance. Seeds then give rise to manifest activity, and manifest activity perfumes seeds; rebirth continues to repeat itself.

"This is not a realm of practice accessible to śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas: they do not realize no-self; through grasping their own and common characteristics, they give rise to the aggregates, elements, and sense bases"—therefore, the true ultimate meaning of the tathāgata-garbha cannot be known through the realm of practice of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas have not severed attachment to dharmas; grasping and discrimination still remain, and they loathe birth while longing for cessation. Their practice therefore only temporarily restrains and subdues the first six consciousnesses. The eighth ālaya consciousness remains fundamentally untransformed, and in essence they have not yet escaped the five aggregates, six sense bases, and eighteen elements.

[By seeing the tathāgatagarbha, the intrinsic nature of the five dharmas, and the selflessness of persons and dharmas, the store of consciousness is extinguished. The stages then proceed and advance in succession, and no heterodox views can shake them. This is called abiding on the immovable ground of a bodhisattva. They attain the joy of the ten gateways of samādhi, are sustained by the realization of

samādhi, contemplate their own inconceivable vows concerning the Buddha Dharma, do not accept the joy of the gateways of samādhi or ultimate reality, and turn toward the noble course of self-realization. This path of practice is not shared by any śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, or non-Buddhist paths. They attain the path of the ten stages of worthy and noble spiritual disposition, and the mind-born body of body, wisdom, and intention, departing from the practice of samādhi.]

"The joy of the ten gateways of samādhi" refers to the Dharma joy of ten kinds of samādhi. In the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, after teaching the ten faiths, ten abidings, ten practices, ten dedications, and ten grounds, the Buddha taught ten kinds of samādhi, abbreviated as the "ten samādhis." They are: the Great Samādhi of Universal Light; the Great Samādhi of Wondrous Light; the Great Samādhi of Successively Traveling Throughout the Buddha Lands; the Great Samādhi of Pure and Deep Practice; the Great Samādhi of Knowing the Treasury of Past Adornments; the Great Samādhi of the Treasury of Wisdom-Light; the Great Samādhi of Fully Knowing the Adornments of the Buddhas in All Worlds; the Great Samādhi of the Differentiated Bodies of Sentient Beings; the Great Samādhi of Sovereignty in the Dharma Realm; and the Great Samādhi of the Unobstructed Wheel.

"Their own inconceivable vows concerning the Buddha Dharma" refers to the unsurpassed great vows they themselves have made to liberate sentient beings. When Mahāyāna bodhisattvas first set out, they all make unsurpassed great vows; all children of the Buddha likewise learn the Four Great Vows.

(Unsurpassed great vows, too, do not depart from one's own mind. The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch once taught people: "I vow to liberate the boundless sentient beings of my own mind! I vow to cut off the boundless afflictions of my own mind! I vow to study the inexhaustible Dharma gates of my own intrinsic nature! I vow to accomplish the unsurpassed Buddha Way of my own intrinsic nature!" This explicitly states that there is no dharma outside the mind and that seeing one's nature is fundamental. This is the initial resolve aroused in the sudden teaching, and it closely accords with the intent of this sūtra. We practitioners of heart esotericism make the following vow after a thousand meditation sessions: "May I swiftly open wisdom and attain Buddhahood in this life, liberate sentient beings, and seek no other fruition." Such is this vow; and how could "this life" be limited to this life alone...)

"Attaining the path of the ten stages of worthy and noble spiritual disposition" means the ten grounds of a bodhisattva.

"Body, wisdom, and intention-born" refers to the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya. "Body" means the sambhogakāya; "wisdom" means the dharmakāya; and "intention-born" means the nirmāṇakāya.

Mahāmati, if one can thoroughly see the true reality of the tathāgatagarbha and the five dharmas—name, appearance, deluded thought, right wisdom, and suchness—and directly realize the twofold selflessness of persons and dharmas, only then can the store of the eight consciousnesses be forever extinguished. (In fact, the true reality is this: the tathāgatagarbha is empty in its very essence, originally complete and luminous, with nothing to grasp or reject. Once one breaks through the old mold and awakens from the great dream, one realizes that what is called the store of the eight consciousnesses was originally a false misunderstanding: the eight consciousnesses are themselves the four wisdoms, and the store of consciousness and the tathāgatagarbha have never been two or different.)

All bodhisattvas enter the bodhisattva grounds through this path of practice and then advance stage by stage. It is also by uprooting ignorance in this way, opening insight, and directly realizing the signless true reality that they cannot be shaken by any non-Buddhist views. This is called abiding on the immovable ground of a bodhisattva.

Then, on the basis of this great samādhi of peaceful immovability, they continue to deepen their cultivation and realization, attaining all worldly and supramundane states of dhyāna and samādhi. Yet Mahāyāna bodhisattvas, because they uphold the wisdom of right view, do not abide in or cling to the various Dharma joys of dhyāna and samādhi. At the same time, they contemplate and recollect the inconceivable vows they made in the past to liberate sentient beings; therefore, they should not become engrossed in the temporary ease of meditative states. With this realization and recollection, Mahāyāna bodhisattvas will surely advance from ground to ground and ultimately attain directly the final fruition of the Tathāgata's noble wisdom of self-realization.

Mahāyāna bodhisattvas cultivate and realize in this way, unlike the path practiced by all śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and non-Buddhist paths. From the first ground until they fully realize the ten grounds, Mahāyāna bodhisattvas ultimately bring the wondrous functions of the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya to complete fulfillment, while never abiding in the practices of the various samādhis.

In contrast to what the Buddha said in the preceding passage about the mistaken practice of adherents of the two vehicles, who suppress the six consciousnesses and take temporary quiescence as nirvāṇa, this passage indicates that Mahāyāna Buddhadharma neither abides in nor clings to states of samādhi.

It also points out the method of practice for attaining the Tathāgata's ultimate fruition: "By seeing the tathāgatagarbha, the intrinsic nature of the five dharmas, and the selflessness of persons and dharmas, the store of consciousness is extinguished." This sentence is the core. That is to say, if one is truly to extinguish

the deluded thoughts of the eight consciousnesses, one must open the Buddha's knowledge and vision, realize the mind and see one's true nature, and directly realize the fundamental ultimate reality. Yet true reality is signless and not without signs. Thus, when the whole is fully revealed and the feelings of ordinary beings and sages alike are emptied, one is neither deluded by the illusory appearances of the world nor by the illusory appearances of supramundane bliss in samādhi. One may then liberate innumerable, boundless sentient beings where, in truth, there are no sentient beings to be liberated.

[Therefore, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas who wish to seek further advancement should purify the tathāgatagarbha and the designation "store of consciousness." Mahāmati, if the designation "store of consciousness" did not exist, then the tathāgatagarbha would have neither arising nor ceasing. Mahāmati, yet all ordinary beings and sages have arising and ceasing. Practitioners enter the noble course of self-realization and abide in the bliss of the Dharma as presently realized, without relinquishing skillful means.]

"Abiding in the bliss of the Dharma as presently realized" does not here refer to the temporary dhyāna of the Lesser Vehicle or to nirvāṇa with remainder. It means manifesting a state of abiding in the bliss of the true Dharma of liberation—that is, manifesting ultimate liberation endowed with great freedom. Of course, great freedom itself cannot be grasped; therefore it is called "manifesting" abiding in the bliss of the Dharma.

Therefore, Mahāmati, bodhisattvas seeking the ultimate fruition of the Way should restore the tathāgatagarbha—also called the store of consciousness—to its original purity. Yet a pure tathāgatagarbha or ālaya consciousness does not imply annihilation. If the eighth ālaya consciousness were annihilated and removed, there would likewise be no various arising, ceasing, and transformations.

Yet, as we see, all ordinary beings and sages have birth and cessation. Ordinary beings undergo the cycle of birth and death in reliance on the eighth ālaya consciousness, while sages likewise use it provisionally to cultivate the true, manifesting the process of arousing the resolve, practicing, and ultimately realizing fruition. If one realizes the ultimate noble wisdom of self-realization and manifests liberation in great freedom, one certainly does not relinquish the skillful means of all arising, ceasing, and transformations.

That is, purifying the tathāgatagarbha does not mean isolating or cutting it off. Buddhas and bodhisattvas who have realized the noble wisdom of self-realization make great Buddha-work in the dream through the various illusory appearances of arising, ceasing, and transformation, manifesting samādhi as play.

[Mahāmati, this tathāgatagarbha, the store of consciousness, is what all śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas perceive through their conceptual minds. Although its intrinsic nature is pure, because it is covered by adventitious defilements, they still see it as impure; this is not so for the Tathāgatas. Mahāmati, for the Tathāgatas, the realm before them is as clear as seeing an āmalaka fruit in the palm of the hand.]

Mahāmati, therefore the principle that this tathāgatagarbha, or store of consciousness, neither establishes a single dharma nor falls into annihilation is profoundly deep. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas still have discriminations based on dharma objects and views arising from affective consciousness. Their understanding and views are therefore not thorough. That is, their views incline toward biased emptiness, and their cultivation and realization fall into annihilation; in actuality, they have not completely transformed the store of consciousness, the ālaya consciousness, into the treasury of the Tathāgata.

The Buddhas, the Tathāgatas, directly realize the realm illumined by great perfect mirror wisdom. The Tathāgata sees all realms as clearly as an āmalaka fruit in the palm of the hand. This is a metaphor for the Tathāgata's thorough realization that all dharmas are only manifestations directly present from one's own mind and are, in truth, unobtainable. Therefore, the Tathāgata sees the nature of all dharmas with ultimate clarity: "Skilled at distinguishing the characteristics of all dharmas, yet unmoved in the highest truth."

Note that this passage criticizes the Lesser Vehicle: "Because it is covered by adventitious defilements, they still see it as impure." Practitioners of the two vehicles regard dharmas as attainable and sainthood as realizable. In this way, they obscure the master within and separate themselves into the position of guests; this is what it means to be "covered by adventitious defilements."

[Mahāmati, by establishing this teaching through my spiritual power, I enabled Queen Śrīmālā and bodhisattvas endowed with keen wisdom to proclaim and expound the tathāgatagarbha, the designation "store of consciousness," and their co-arising with the seven consciousnesses. Śrāvakas are attached to conceptualization and perceive the selflessness of persons and dharmas. Therefore Queen Śrīmālā, receiving the Buddha's majestic spiritual power, taught the realm of the Tathāgata, which is not the realm of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, or non-Buddhist paths. The tathāgatagarbha, the store of consciousness, is a realm of wisdom only for Buddhas and other bodhisattvas of keen wisdom who rely on the definitive meaning. Therefore, you and the other bodhisattva mahāsattvas should diligently study and cultivate the tathāgatagarbha, the store of consciousness; do not be satisfied merely with hearing and intellectual understanding.]

The canon contains The Śrīmālādevī Siṃhanāda Ekayāna Mahāvaipulya Sūtra and the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra (fascicle 119, the Assembly of Queen Śrīmālā), which record teachings given by the Buddha to Queen Śrīmālā and others, including the meaning of the chapter on the tathāgatagarbha. What the Buddha says here refers to this matter:

Mahāmati, concerning the tathāgatagarbha and the store of consciousness, I once blessed Queen Śrīmālā and bodhisattvas of great wisdom through inconceivable wisdom-power, enabling them to proclaim on my behalf the principles of the pure tathāgatagarbha and of the arising and ceasing of the ālaya consciousness together with the seven consciousnesses. This was to enable attached śrāvakas to leave behind the two attachments to persons and dharmas. Thus Queen Śrīmālā, receiving the Buddha's majestic spiritual power, taught the ultimate realm of the Tathāgata's wisdom and refuted the erroneous views of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and non-Buddhist paths.

Mahāmati, only the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of keen wisdom who comprehend the definitive meaning can penetrate the profound meaning of the tathāgatagarbha and the store of consciousness. Therefore, all bodhisattvas should diligently study, cultivate, and realize this tathāgatagarbha and store of consciousness. Do not merely hear and intellectually understand it, then give rise to the thought that this is enough.

(Note: The following passages concerning the tathāgatagarbha are excerpted from the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra, fascicle 119, the Assembly of Queen Śrīmālā: "World-Honored One, the tathāgatagarbha is the treasury of the dharma realm, the treasury of the Dharma body, the treasury beyond the world, and the treasury of intrinsic purity. As I understand it, this tathāgatagarbha is intrinsically pure. Even when stained by adventitious defilements and afflictions, it remains the inconceivable realm of the Tathāgata.

Why is this so, World-Honored One? In each moment, wholesome and unwholesome mental states cannot be stained by adventitious defilements and afflictions. Why is this so? Afflictions do not touch mind, and mind does not touch afflictions. How can a dharma that does not touch it nevertheless stain the mind? World-Honored One, because afflictions exist, there is a mind that is subsequently stained. Such staining by accompanying afflictions is difficult to understand and difficult to know. Only the Buddha, the World-Honored One, is the eye, wisdom, root of Dharma, venerable one, guide, support of the true Dharma, and one who knows and sees reality as it is.

At that time, the World-Honored One praised Queen Śrīmālā, saying: 'Excellent, excellent. As you have said, that the intrinsically pure mind is stained by

accompanying afflictions is difficult to comprehend. Furthermore, Śrīmālā, there are two dharmas difficult to comprehend. What are these two? The intrinsically pure mind is difficult to comprehend, and that this mind is stained by afflictions is also difficult to comprehend. Only you and bodhisattvas who have accomplished the great Dharma can receive and accept these two dharmas.'"

That is, although sentient beings, through the mischief of ignorance, enshroud and conceal the excellent tathāgatagarbha, making it into a store of consciousness, and then move back and forth between adventitious defilements, afflictions, and the subsequently stained mind without end in saṃsāra, the essential nature of the store of consciousness remains the pure tathāgatagarbha. The nature of the tathāgatagarbha is originally pure: neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing.)

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses: The profoundly deep tathāgatagarbha is together with the seven consciousnesses. It arises through two kinds of grasping; the wise keep far from them.]

The tathāgatagarbha is the basis of all defilement and purity. This principle is profound and wondrous, beyond measure. Deluded sentient beings take the false for the true; thus the pure tathāgatagarbha becomes obscured as the storehouse consciousness. Subject and object then stand in opposition, giving rise to grasping, attachment, karma, and karmic retribution, and the cycle of rebirth continues without end. The wise, however, remain apart from the two extremes of subject and object and from all deluded thoughts and discriminations.

[Like images appearing in a mirror, / Perfumed by habits from beginningless time. / For one who observes things as they are, / All affairs are no affairs.]

All dharmas are nothing but manifestations of one's own mind. Deluded sentient beings, permeated by false habitual tendencies from beginningless time, perceive the sense faculties, the body, the material world, and all things as truly existing. Yet all of these are merely illusory appearances. It is like a round mirror, which can reflect many different forms and colors: whether the pleasures of music, beauty, dogs, and horses, or the hardships of wandering exiles and prisoners, all are scenes upon the mirror's surface. Though they clearly come and go, they neither add to nor diminish the mirror itself in the slightest. Therefore, if one can observe things as they are, one knows that all these affairs are like objects within a mirror: all affairs are no affairs.

[Like a fool who sees the finger pointing to the moon / And looks at the finger rather than the moon. / Those who cling to names / Do not see my true reality.]

“The teachings of the sūtras are like a finger pointing to the moon.” The words of the Tathāgata are originally intended to convey meaning; like living spring water, they wash away defilement. Yet how can it be that fools see the finger but not the moon, while those who pedantically analyze verbal meanings are as numerous as sesame seeds and millet grains? One should know that ultimate reality never falls within the scope of verbal explanation or conceptual thought. This is what is meant by “the realm of wisdom of bodhisattvas of keen intelligence who rely on meaning.” How could those who haggle over names and appearances even dream of it?

[The mind is like a skilled performer; / Intellect is like one who accompanies the performance. / The five consciousnesses are its companions; / Deluded thoughts are like the audience watching the show.]

“Mind” is the eighth, ālaya consciousness. The eighth consciousness receives impressions and retains seeds, transforming them into the sense faculties, the body, and the material world, just as a performer creates various illusions according to circumstances. “Intellect” is the mind faculty of the seventh, manas consciousness. The seventh consciousness constantly and closely deliberates; attachment to self is difficult to relinquish, and it continually maintains and transmits. It is like one who sings in accompaniment, most closely associated with the performance. The first five active consciousnesses take hold of their objects in response to sensory objects, successively becoming companions. The sixth consciousness calculates over feelings and sensory objects, while deluded thoughts and discriminations are like the audience.

Thus the great drama of rebirth is formed: one is oneself the performer and oneself the spectator. Is this not tragic?

Outline of This Dharma Gate:

In response to Mahāmati Bodhisattva’s question concerning the source of the arising and ceasing of the aggregates, realms, and sense bases, the Buddha expounded the principle of the tathāgatagarbha. Interpretations of the principle of the tathāgatagarbha have long varied widely among doctrinal schools. Therefore, according to what is taught in this Dharma gate, the tathāgatagarbha may now be summarized as follows:

1. The tathāgatagarbha is the basis of defilement and purity, and it is also the root that gives rise to and propels the various destinies of ordinary beings and sages.

2. Yet the essential nature of the tathāgatagarbha is wondrous suchness-nature: originally pure, perfectly luminous and all-pervading, neither arising nor ceasing.

3. Speaking from the perspective of ordinary beings: through the misunderstanding of ignorance, this excellent tathāgatagarbha is concealed and called the “storehouse consciousness.” The term “called” means that its essential nature has not changed; the tathāgatagarbha itself remains neither increased nor decreased. The seven consciousnesses then arise together with it. The eight consciousnesses mutually serve as cause and effect, turning ceaselessly in succession. Craving gives rise to birth, and birth gives rise to craving. This is the principle by which the aggregates, realms, and sense bases arise and cease in rebirth.

4. Practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle: although relying on the tathāgatagarbha, they arouse the resolve to leave the bitter sea of rebirth, their view of dharmas has not yet been removed. They suppress the arising of the sensory faculties and seek entry into nirvāṇa. In truth, they have not transformed the designation “storehouse consciousness”; fundamentally, they have still not gone beyond the aggregates, realms, and sense bases.

5. Only Mahāyāna bodhisattvas and the Buddhas: they penetrate the true reality that the tathāgatagarbha and the storehouse consciousness are neither one nor different. They are neither bound by the arising and ceasing of rebirth nor abide in the quiescence of one-sided nirvāṇa. Although they know that all is illusory, they do not abandon skillful means. Precisely by means of the tathāgatagarbha, they manifest arising, ceasing, and transformation, and, in accord with conditions, liberate sentient beings. This is the complete manifestation of the functioning of the tathāgatagarbha.

Therefore, you should know that the tathāgatagarbha is the wondrous, luminous Buddha-nature. When deluded, it becomes the “ālaya consciousness,” which propels rebirth: “As soon as you stir your mind, the dusts of affliction arise first.” When awakened, however, the great perfect mirror wisdom may shine forth brightly, for all things have always been the full manifestation of the treasury of the Tathāgata: “When I press my finger down, the ocean-seal emits light.” Yet the tathāgatagarbha, too, is unobtainable and cannot be established. As Chan Master Huairang said: “The mind-ground contains all seeds; when they encounter moisture, all sprout. The flower of samādhi is formless—what can decay, and what can come into being?”

Thus we know that the Buddha Dharma establishes words only through skillful means. The expedient teaching of the “tathāgatagarbha” was originally intended to guide deluded sentient beings, bring deluded thoughts to rest, and reveal the wisdom of suchness inherently possessed. Yet in recent times, many lovers of literary elaboration have taken it as real, even establishing separate schools and arguing without end. This merely adds another layer of mud, and takes them ever farther from the meaning of liberation. Therefore, the final verse of this Dharma

gate says: “Those who cling to names do not see my true reality”; “For one who observes things as they are, all affairs are no affairs.”

37. Distinctions Among the Four Dharmas

The preceding section explained that the tathāgatagarbha is the basis of both worldly and supramundane dharmas. This section continues by discussing the relationship of the doctrines of the five dharmas, three self-natures, eight consciousnesses, and twofold non-self to the stages of practice and realization.

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, I pray that you will explain the ultimate distinguishing characteristics of the five dharmas, self-nature, consciousness, and the two kinds of non-self. May the other great bodhisattvas and I distinguish these dharmas throughout the successive stages of all bhūmis and enter into all the Buddha-dharmas. To enter into all the Buddha-dharmas is to reach the ground of the Tathāgata’s self-awakening.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Listen carefully, listen carefully, and consider this well.” Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “Yes, World-Honored One. I respectfully receive your instruction.”]

Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks the Buddha to elucidate the ultimate distinguishing characteristics of the four doctrinal gateways: the five dharmas, three self-natures, eight consciousnesses, and twofold non-self. If one can analyze these without confusion, bodhisattvas will clearly and correctly understand the methods of cultivation on the mind-ground, advance progressively through the stages, enter all the dharmas of the Buddhas, and realize the sacred wisdom of the Tathāgata’s self-awakening.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “The five dharmas, self-nature, consciousness, and the two kinds of non-self have distinguishing modes and characteristics. They are: name, appearance, discrimination, right wisdom, and suchness. If practitioners cultivate and enter the sacred path of the Tathāgata’s self-awakening, they will be free from views of annihilation and permanence, existence and nonexistence, and will abide before them in the blissful right experience of the present dharma. Mahāmati, those who do not awaken to these five dharmas, self-nature, consciousness, and twofold non-self imagine external natures manifested from their own minds. This is the deluded discrimination of ordinary beings, not that of the noble sages.”]

The Buddha tells Mahāmati that, although the five dharmas, three self-natures, and other teachings are expounded from different perspectives, they interpenetrate one another. The five dharmas may be used as an example: name, appearance, discrimination, right wisdom, and suchness.

If practitioners can perceive the essential nature of the five dharmas, three self-natures, eight consciousnesses, and twofold non-self, they are cultivating the Mahāyāna path. They will certainly realize the ultimate sacred wisdom of the Tathāgata's self-awakening and be free from erroneous views of annihilation and permanence, existence and nonexistence, attaining great liberation and freedom. Conversely, if they do not understand the essential nature of the five dharmas, three self-natures, eight consciousnesses, and twofold non-self, they will seek dharmas outside the mind, grasp and reject, and chase after conditions. This belongs to the deluded thoughts and wrong views of ignorant ordinary beings, not to the noble sages.

[Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, how do the deluded discriminations of ignorant ordinary beings arise, unlike those of the noble sages?" The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "Ignorant people cling to conventional numerical names and appearances, and their minds scatter and flow along with them. Once they have scattered and flowed, they fall into views of self and what belongs to self, longing for the various appearances and images, and cling to pleasing forms. Having clung to them, they are covered and obstructed by ignorance, and attachment arises. Once attachment has arisen, the karma produced by greed and anger accumulates."

"Once it has accumulated, deluded discrimination entangles them, like a silkworm spinning its own cocoon. They fall into the ocean of birth and death and the wasteland of the various destinies, turning like a waterwheel drawing from a well. Because of ignorance, they cannot know that things are like illusions, mirages, or the moon in water. Their self-nature is free from self and what belongs to self, yet they give rise to all unreal deluded discriminations. They are free from appearance and that which appears, and from arising, abiding, and ceasing. They arise from the deluded discrimination of one's own mind, not from a creator, time, atoms, or a supreme principle."]

"Conventional numerical designations" is also translated as "dharmas of provisional designation." The Saṃyukta Āgama (335) states: "Conventional numerical dharmas mean that because this exists, that exists; because this arises, that arises—as with ignorance conditioning formations, formations conditioning consciousness, and so forth, up to the arising of this entire great mass of suffering."

Mahāmati Bodhisattva then asks the Buddha why ordinary beings give rise to deluded discriminations and various erroneous views, unlike the noble sages.

The Buddha replies: ignorant people take the false for the real, discriminatingly clinging to all kinds of false appearances, while their own minds move and flow delusively along with them. Because their minds move and flow delusively, they

mistakenly give rise to love and aversion toward various appearances, pursuing and seeking external objects. Through such pursuit and attachment, together with the obstruction of ignorant and deluded habits, various defiled attachments of consciousness arise. Because of these defiled attachments of consciousness, greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt arise; they then create karma and undergo karmic retribution. The various karmic retributions, in turn, further foster greed, anger, ignorance, and deluded thoughts.

Thus seeds give rise to manifest activity, and manifest activity perfumes the seeds; craving gives rise to craving, like a silkworm spinning its cocoon and binding itself. They fall into the great ocean of birth and death and wander through the wasteland of the six realms. Like a waterwheel drawing from a well, the cycle continues without end, and they cannot escape. Therefore, the Record of the Source-Mirror states: "Subject and object give rise to one another, and mind and objects stand in opposition. Following conditions, one loses one's nature and does not return to the original source. Unaware and unknowing, one passes through kalpas as numerous as dust motes."

Because ordinary beings are ignorant and lack wisdom, they cannot awaken to the fact that all dharmas are like illusions, mirages, and the moon reflected in water. In truth, the self-nature of all dharmas contains no self, no possession of self, and no such dharma-appearances. These activities of subject and object, along with arising and ceasing transformations, all arise from unreal deluded discrimination. In truth, the self-nature of all dharmas is free from the activities of subject and object, and free from arising, abiding, and ceasing. All appearances arise solely from the deluded discrimination of one's own mind; they are not produced by a creator, time, atoms, or a supreme principle.

This means that sentient beings, through delusion and false thought, arise from ignorance and revolve in the bitter ocean of saṃsāra through the twelve links of dependent origination. The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna states: "All objects differ only because of deluded thoughts; if one is free from mental thoughts, there are no appearances of any objects whatsoever."

["Ignorant ordinary beings flow along with names and appearances. Mahāmati, as for appearances: that which is apprehended by eye consciousness is called form; that which is apprehended by the consciousnesses of ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind is called sound, odor, taste, touch, and dharma. These are called appearances. Mahāmati, as for deluded discrimination: names are assigned to reveal the various appearances, so that one takes them as not different—such as the names elephant, horse, chariot, foot soldier, man, and woman. This is called deluded discrimination."

“Mahāmati, right wisdom is knowing that those names and appearances cannot be obtained; they are like passing travelers. The consciousnesses neither arise nor cease, nor are they permanent; one does not fall into the ground of any non-Buddhist path, śrāvaka, or pratyekabuddha. Furthermore, Mahāmati, through this right wisdom, great bodhisattvas do not establish names and appearances, yet neither do they reject names and appearances. Abandoning the two views of assertion and slander, they know that names and appearances do not arise. This is called suchness.”]

From the foregoing, we can see that ignorant ordinary beings all follow names and appearances in their deluded discriminations. Mahāmati, among the various appearances, that which is apprehended by eye consciousness becomes the appearance of “form”; that which is apprehended by the consciousnesses of ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind becomes the appearances of “sound, odor, taste, touch, and dharma.” Each appearance has its name, and each name denotes an appearance. These are “name” and “appearance.”

So-called “deluded discrimination” means assigning names to things in order to display their respective appearances, then firmly clinging to the connection between name and appearance. Thus elephants, horses, chariots, foot soldiers, men, and women are taken to have real forms and real names. To cling firmly to names and appearances as real is “deluded discrimination.”

“Right wisdom” means knowing that all names and appearances cannot be obtained. All names, appearances, and deluded discriminations are like passing travelers: ultimately they have no substantial self-nature, are ultimately without name or appearance, and offer nothing to which one may adhere. The consciousnesses neither originally arise nor cease, nor do they abide permanently. To possess such right knowledge and view, and never fall into the ground of any non-Buddhist path, śrāvaka, or pratyekabuddha—this is “right wisdom.”

Because bodhisattvas possess right wisdom, they do not establish names and appearances, nor do they reject the expedient use of all names and appearances. Thus they abandon the two erroneous extremes of assertion and slander, knowing that all names and appearances have never arisen and fundamentally have never come into being. This is suchness.

[“Mahāmati, great bodhisattvas who abide in suchness attain the bodhisattva ground of joy because they attain the realm in which nothing whatsoever exists. Having attained the bodhisattva ground of joy, they forever leave behind all erroneous destinies of non-Buddhist paths, correctly abide in the supramundane path, and mature in the characteristics of dharmas. They distinguish all dharmas as illusion-like, awaken to the characteristics of the dharma path, leave behind all

deluded views and strange appearances, and advance stage by stage up to the Dharma Cloud bhūmi."

"In the interval between these stages, the powers of samādhi, mastery, and spiritual powers unfold. Having attained the ground of the Tathāgata, they perfectly illuminate the various transformations and manifest them to mature sentient beings, like the moon in water. They skillfully bring the ten inexhaustible statements to ultimate completion and, for sentient beings of various inclinations and understandings, expound the Dharma discriminatingly. The dharmakāya is free from mental fabrication. This is what bodhisattvas attain by entering suchness."]

This passage continues the preceding discussion of "suchness." Mahāmati, bodhisattvas who abide in suchness ascend to the Ground of Joy because they realize the realm in which nothing whatsoever exists. Having ascended to the Ground of Joy, they forever leave behind all non-Buddhist views and can no longer fall into non-Buddhist paths of wrong views. "Correctly abiding in the supramundane path" means truly entering the proper path of Buddhist cultivation. As the Avataṃsaka Sūtra illustrates, to realize the first bhūmi, the Ground of Joy, is to become like a "son of the Dharma King": one will certainly attain the royal throne in the future, beyond doubt and beyond alteration.

Here, "nothing whatsoever exists" does not mean annihilation. Rather, it means gaining a better understanding of dharma-appearances, more skillfully distinguishing all illusory dharmas, and more clearly realizing that the sacred wisdom of the Tathāgata's self-awakening is originally complete. One can therefore remain free from all inverted deluded views, empty disputation, and bizarre supernatural claims, without being disturbed by them. Cultivating and realizing in this progression, one reaches the Dharma Cloud bhūmi. In the course of this, bodhisattvas attain various samādhis, and mastery and spiritual powers unfold.

Upon reaching the ground of the Tathāgata, they perfect the various transformation bodies, which illuminate everywhere in their totality like a mirror reflecting objects, clearly discerning difference and sameness without the slightest mental contrivance. Like the moon in water, though it cannot be grasped, they can indicate the ultimate truth to sentient beings whose conditions have matured. This is the wondrous functioning of the Tathāgata's sambhogakāya.

At the ultimate ground of the Tathāgata, the ten inexhaustible original vows made when bodhicitta was first aroused are fulfilled. Bringing forth immeasurable skillful means, the Tathāgata can expound discriminatingly for sentient beings of differing intentions and views, enabling each of them progressively to accord with true reality. This is the wondrous functioning of the Tathāgata's nirmāṇakāya.

The Tathāgata's dharmakāya, however, is ultimately pure: in truth, it says nothing and does nothing. It has neither sudden nor gradual stages and is free from all discrimination and mental contrivance.

This is called a bodhisattva's realization and entry into the realm of "suchness."

This passage explains that bodhisattvas uphold the right view that nothing whatsoever exists, advance through the bhūmis, and enter the ground of the Tathāgata. This "nothing whatsoever exists" does not mean annihilation. On the contrary, the more thoroughly one realizes that nothing whatsoever exists, the more clearly one understands all dharma-appearances and the more skillfully one exercises unhindered wondrous functioning. Upon reaching the ground of the Tathāgata, there is truly not the slightest mental contrivance: not even a hair's breadth is established, not a single dharma remains. This is originally so and ultimately pure; therefore immeasurable wondrous functions for liberating sentient beings manifest.

Therefore, Buddhist practitioners should set aside all forms of external adornment and learn the inwardly realized realm of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. They should understand that bodhisattvas advance through the bhūmis with "nothing whatsoever exists" as the guiding thread. Yet emptiness is not annihilation; on the contrary, the more thoroughly one realizes that nothing whatsoever exists, the more inexhaustible the wondrous functioning becomes. Thus, at the ground of the Tathāgata, the wondrous marks are majestic and the voice surpasses all others, while in truth the dharmakāya is ultimately "free from mental fabrication."

[At that time, the Bodhisattva Mahāmati addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, how do the three kinds of self-nature enter into the five dharmas? Or does each possess its own characteristics and tenet?" The Buddha told Mahāmati: "The three kinds of self-nature, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of no-self all enter into the five dharmas. Mahāmati, names and characteristics belong to the self-nature of deluded conceptualization. Mahāmati, when mental dharmas arise in dependence on that deluded conceptualization, names arise simultaneously with them, just as sunlight arises together with the sun. The various characteristics are each discriminated and sustained according to their distinctions. This is called the self-nature of dependent arising. Mahāmati, right wisdom and suchness, because they cannot be destroyed, are called the self-nature of perfection."]

Having finished explaining the five dharmas, the Bodhisattva Mahāmati again asked: Why can the three kinds of self-nature be included within the "five dharmas"? Or do the five dharmas, the three self-natures, and the other such dharmas each have their own characteristics and central tenet?

The Buddha told the Bodhisattva Mahāmati that the three kinds of self-nature, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of no-self can all be included within these “five dharmas.” Take the three self-natures, for example:

1. “Name” and “characteristic” are the “self-nature of deluded conceptualization” among the “three self-natures,” namely, the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment.

2. Various mental factors arise in dependence on the “deluded conceptualization” among the five dharmas. The deluded conceptualization called “name” naturally arises simultaneously with them. Thus, “deluded conceptualization” and “name” among the five dharmas arise together, just as the sun and its light appear together. “Characteristics,” meanwhile, are based on the differing features of individual things, and the names corresponding to them likewise differ. Therefore, “name,” “characteristic,” and “deluded conceptualization” are mutually related as causes and conditions. This is the self-nature of dependent arising, namely, the nature of dependence on others.

3. “Right wisdom” and “suchness” are not conditioned or fabricated; rather, they are originally complete and perfected—true emptiness yet wondrous presence, neither ceasing nor eternal, and indestructible. Therefore, they are the self-nature of perfection, namely, the nature of absolute reality and perfection.

This passage sets forth the specific correspondence between the “three self-natures” and the “five dharmas”: “name” and “characteristic” are both the self-nature of deluded conceptualization, also called the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment; “name,” “characteristic,” and “deluded conceptualization” arise simultaneously, with name and characteristic corresponding to one another, and the three are mutually related through causes and conditions. This is the nature of dependence on others. “Right wisdom” and “suchness” are the self-nature of perfection.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, deluded conceptualization manifested by one’s own mind has eight kinds of discrimination: the storehouse consciousness, manas, mental consciousness, and the characteristics of the bodies of the five consciousnesses. Because of deluded conceptualization of unreal characteristics, grasping at self and what belongs to self ceases, and the two kinds of no-self arise. Therefore, Mahāmati, all the stages of continuation and sequence of the self-awakened noble wisdom of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and Tathāgatas, as well as all Buddhadharmas, are included within these five dharmas.]

Sentient beings do not know that all realms are manifested by mind alone. Taking the false for the real, they pursue and seek things externally, thereby producing the eight discriminating consciousnesses: the “storehouse consciousness” of the eighth

ālaya consciousness, the faculty of “manas” of the seventh manas consciousness, the sixth mental consciousness, and the five consciousnesses that arise when the physical sense organs—the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body—contact external objects: eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousness. All these differentiated consciousness-characteristics are unreal. These eight consciousnesses arise because of our deluded discrimination and our taking the false for the real.

If one relinquishes the grasping of subject and object, there is neither a grasping “self” nor dharmas that are grasped. All worldly and supramundane dharmas are no more than dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows. To recognize this is for the wisdom of the two kinds of no-self to arise.

That is to say, the eight consciousnesses and the two kinds of no-self also interpenetrate with the five dharmas: the eight consciousnesses are nothing but name, characteristic, and deluded conceptualization; the two kinds of no-self are originally thus, with nothing further to be attained. This is right wisdom, and it is also suchness. The Record of the Dharma Mirror states: “If one understands the eight consciousnesses, the true mind naturally transcends all opposites. When doubts concerning subject and object are dispelled, vine and snake are both empty.”

“As for these five dharmas, all the stages of continuation and sequence of the self-awakened noble wisdom of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and Tathāgatas, as well as all Buddhadharmas, are included within them”—by the same reasoning, all Buddhadharmas, including the noble ones such as śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and Tathāgatas, their ultimate wisdom, and the distinctions among the successive stages of practice, may likewise be encompassed by the teaching of these “five dharmas.”

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, the five dharmas are characteristic, name, deluded conceptualization, suchness, and right wisdom. Mahāmati, “characteristic” means that when locations, shapes, forms, colors, and the like appear, they are called characteristics. When such a characteristic is given the name “jar,” for example—this and not another—that is called a name. To establish various names in order to reveal various characteristics, and the mental dharmas associated with jars and the like, is called deluded conceptualization.]

Furthermore, Mahāmati, the five dharmas are “characteristic, name, deluded conceptualization, suchness, and right wisdom.” “Characteristic” refers to the various outward appearances, such as the differing shapes of forms seen by sentient beings.

A name is assigned on the basis of characteristics. For example, “jar” indicates that a jar is a jar and not a plate, thereby distinguishing one thing from another. Establishing various names in this way to indicate various things, then continually

clinging to and comparing them, gives rise to the various mental dharmas and mental factors called “deluded conceptualization.”

[Those names and those characteristics are ultimately unobtainable. From beginning to end, there is no awareness; with regard to dharmas, there is no successive transformation. Free from unreal deluded conceptualization, this is called suchness. The ultimate self-nature of reality is decisively unobtainable. This is the characteristic of suchness, the realm into which I and all Buddhas accordantly enter. For the sake of sentient beings, we universally expound it truthfully, provisionally establishing and revealing it to them. By accordingly entering right awakening, one is neither annihilationist nor eternalist; deluded conceptualization does not arise; one accords with the noble path of self-awakened realization. This characteristic cannot be attained by any non-Buddhist paths, śrāvakas, or pratyekabuddhas. This is called right wisdom.]

All such names and characteristics are intrinsically false; not the slightest measure of them can be grasped. If one thoroughly realizes that nothing whatsoever is truly obtainable, one understands that originally there is not a single thought that can know or be aware, and not a single object that can be followed or turned by. Naturally, there is no further need for a separate “awakening” or for a separate “turning from the ordinary to the noble.” This is “suchness.” Suchness is the ultimate true reality of all dharmas: decisively, no self-nature can be obtained. This is the characteristic of suchness.

As for “the ultimate self-nature of reality is decisively unobtainable,” all Buddhas accord with this reality of “suchness” and extensively teach it truthfully to sentient beings, manifesting it through skillful means.

If everyone can follow these instructions in skillful means and practice toward the Buddha’s understanding and vision of “suchness,” they will not fall into the two views of annihilationism and eternalism. Nor will they give rise to deluded and erroneous views that seek dharmas outside the mind. This is to accord with and enter the correct path of practice that realizes self-awakened noble wisdom; in the future, one will naturally attain the fruition of self-awakened noble wisdom. This is beyond the reach of all non-Buddhist paths, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas, and is called “right wisdom.”

This means that name, characteristic, and deluded conceptualization are originally unobtainable. Dharmas are naturally and originally thus; this is “suchness.” If one understands this ultimate, original thusness of suchness, one will not fall into the extreme views of annihilationism or eternalism, nor into any other kinds of mistaken views. Such wisdom cannot be conceived or grasped by any non-Buddhist paths,

śrāvakas, or pratyekabuddhas. This is “right wisdom.” Right wisdom is self-awakened noble wisdom—the Buddha’s understanding and vision.

This passage discusses the “five dharmas” in an order different from that of the preceding passage. Since it also concerns liberating sentient beings, it places “suchness” before “right wisdom.”

[Mahāmati, these are called the five dharmas. The three kinds of self-nature, the eight consciousnesses, the two kinds of no-self, and all Buddhadharmas are entirely included within them. Therefore, Mahāmati, you should skillfully study them yourself and also teach them to others; do not follow others.]

Mahāmati, these are the five dharmas. The three self-natures, the eight consciousnesses, the two kinds of no-self, and all Buddhadharmas are encompassed within the five dharmas. Although bodhisattvas know that these are skillful means, they should still study them well themselves and teach them to others in accordance with conditions. They must not follow names and characteristics in discriminating deluded conceptualization and fall into the erroneous views of non-Buddhist paths.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses: The five dharmas, the three self-natures, and the eight kinds of consciousness, together with the two kinds of no-self, all encompass the Mahāyāna. Name, characteristic, and false conceptualization are the two aspects of self-nature; right wisdom and suchness constitute the aspect of perfection.]

This verse briefly sets forth the foregoing: the five dharmas, the three self-natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of no-self—these four categories already include and encompass Mahāyāna Buddhism. “Name, characteristic, and deluded conceptualization” belong to the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment and the nature of dependence on others among the “three self-natures.” “Right wisdom” and “suchness” are the nature of absolute reality and perfection.

Summary of This Section:

The doctrinal meanings of the five dharmas, the three self-natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of no-self mutually interpenetrate. This section discusses only the “five dharmas,” yet all dharmas are included within them. Sentient beings do not know that the myriad dharmas are manifested by their own minds; they falsely establish names, characteristics, and deluded conceptualization, and cling without cease. The Buddhas awaken to this and realize suchness through wisdom. As Master Hanshan said: “This Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra elucidates that ‘the five dharmas and three self-natures are all empty, and the eight consciousnesses and two kinds of no-self are both relinquished,’ directly revealing the realm beyond mind, manas, and consciousness.”

38. Buddhas Are as Numerous as the Sands of the Ganges

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, as the World-Honored One has said, the Buddhas of the past are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges; so too are those of the future and the present. How is this, World-Honored One? Should this be understood exactly as stated, or is there a further meaning? I pray that the Tathāgata, out of compassion, will explain.”]

Here Mahāmati asks about the meaning of the simile of the Ganges’ sands. The Buddha once said in scriptures such as the Bodhisattva Garland Sūtra: “The Buddhas of the past are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges; the Buddhas to come are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges; and the Buddhas of the present are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.” Is it literally so that “the Buddhas are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges”? Or is there “a further meaning”? Therefore, Mahāmati Bodhisattva asks the Tathāgata to explain this for us.

The Buddha’s answer below may be divided into three sections:

(1) Buddhas cannot be equated with the conceptual understanding conveyed by worldly similes;

(2) next, he explains the purpose for which the Buddha employs similes;

(3) finally, from seven perspectives, he explains the sublime virtues of the Tathāgata signified by the simile, “the Buddhas are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.”

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Do not understand it exactly as stated.”]

The Buddha tells Mahāmati not to receive and uphold his words according to their literal wording. That is, one should “rely on the meaning, not on the words.”

[The number of Buddhas in the three times is not like the sands of the Ganges. Why is this so? They transcend worldly comparison and cannot be adequately conveyed by a simile.]

The number of Buddhas in the three times—past, present, and future—is not literally like the sands of the Ganges. Why is this? The Buddhas are neither one nor different. The Dharma of the Tathāgata transcends all worldly calculation and comparison; no worldly simile can describe it with complete adequacy.

The World-Honored One next cites the simile of the udumbara flower as an example:

[Because ordinary foolish beings conceive permanence, and non-Buddhists, through deluded thoughts, foster wrong views, thereby producing endless birth and death, I say to them, in order to make them weary of and turn away from the cycle of birth and death and strive diligently to advance: “Buddhas are easy to see; they are not as difficult to encounter as udumbara flowers.” Thus they cease seeking through expedient means.]

“Udumbara flower” refers to the night-blooming cereus. It flowers only with great difficulty, and those who happen to see its brief blooming are even rarer. Thus it is often used as a simile for the difficulty of encountering and seeing the Buddhadharma.

Ordinary beings and non-Buddhists, through deluded discrimination, conceive dharmas as permanent or impermanent, thereby fostering and increasing all kinds of wrong views and falling into an endless cycle of birth and death. To inspire them to become weary of birth-and-death and strive diligently in practice, transcending the deluded thoughts of mind, intellect, and consciousness, the Buddha speaks of “ease”: Buddhas are easy to see; they are not as difficult to encounter as an udumbara flower in bloom. In this way, he encourages them to set aside their various deluded thoughts of outward seeking and not shrink back in fear of difficulty.

[At times, observing those who are to be transformed, I say: “A Buddha is difficult to encounter, like an udumbara flower.” The udumbara flower has none who have seen it, see it now, or will see it; but the Tathāgata is seen by everyone in the world.]

At other times, the Buddha sees that many beings receiving the Buddha’s teaching, though they have encountered the Buddhadharma, do not cherish hearing and contemplation or diligently cultivate and realize it. To arouse in them a sense of appreciation, he again speaks of “difficulty”: the Buddhadharma is difficult to encounter, as rare and precious as seeing an udumbara flower bloom; in the past, present, and future, few are able to encounter it.

In truth, however, the real Tathāgata is not difficult to see. The dharmakāya is formless, pervades all things, and is originally complete. Whenever sentient beings raise their eyes, they see the Tathāgata. As Lay Master Fu said: “Night after night, I sleep holding the Buddha; morning after morning, I rise together with him.” Master Yuanyin said, “It is always shining at the gateway of your own face; it has never hidden itself.”

Thus, similes are spoken as skillful means. When appropriately suited to the circumstances, they yield twice the result with half the effort and can readily guide students to enter through the simile.

[It is not on account of self-established realization that I say the Tathāgata's appearance in the world is like an udumbara flower. Mahāmati, those who have self-established realization transcend worldly comparison, and ordinary foolish beings cannot believe in them. The realm of the noble wisdom of self-awakening admits of no simile. The real Tathāgata transcends the appearances perceived by mind, intellect, and consciousness and cannot be made the object of a simile.]

Thus, out of compassion, the Buddhas use the expedient simile that the Tathāgata's appearance in the world is like an udumbara flower, in order to lead the multitude toward awakening and to realization of the innate noble wisdom of self-awakening. But for those who have personally realized this noble wisdom of self-awakening, the teaching is not presented in this way through similes. The measure of the wisdom of those truly awakened noble ones transcends all worldly comparisons and cannot be believed or comprehended by worldly fools.

This is because the realm of noble wisdom of self-awakening possessed by the awakened cannot be equated with any worldly comparison. The real Tathāgata is free from the appearances perceived by mind, intellect, and consciousness—that is, free from all worldly appearances. It cannot be fathomed through mind, intellect, and consciousness or through worldly dharmas.

[Mahāmati, nevertheless, there is no fault in my saying by way of simile that the Buddhas are like the sands of the Ganges.]

Yet, Mahāmati, there is no fault in the simile I use when I say that the Buddhas are like the sands of the Ganges.

Note that the repeated earlier statements, "cannot be adequately conveyed by a simile," "admits of no simile," and "cannot be made the object of a simile," refer to the true essence of the Tathāgata. Here, saying that there is "no fault" is because, when the Buddha offers skillful guidance to highlight the characteristics of the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtue and extinguish sentient beings' deluded thoughts, the simile "like the sands of the Ganges" itself is without fault. "The wise gain understanding through similes." Thus, the two statements are not contradictory.

The Buddha next answers Mahāmati Bodhisattva's question about a "further meaning." Using the same simile—the "sands of the Ganges"—he highlights and describes the sublime virtues of the Tathāgata's dharmakāya from seven perspectives on sand. Of course, these seven perspectives are only similes and descriptions; the Tathāgata's sublime virtues are ultimately not limited to them.

[Mahāmati, it is like the sands of the Ganges: fish, turtles, śiśumāras, lions, elephants, horses, humans, and beasts all tread upon them, yet the sand does not

think, “They trouble me,” and give rise to deluded thoughts. Its nature is pure and free from every defilement.]

“Śiśumāra” is a kind of fierce fish.

The sands of the Ganges do not give rise to defiled, troubled, or deluded thoughts, no matter how all beings tread upon them. Their nature is pure, unstained and undefiled. Chan Master Huangbo likewise said: “As for the sands of the Ganges, the Buddha calls them sand. Buddhas, bodhisattvas, Śakra, Brahmā, and the devas walk over them, yet the sand does not rejoice. Cattle, sheep, insects, and ants tread upon it, yet the sand does not become angry. It does not crave precious treasures and fragrant perfumes, nor does it loathe excrement, urine, or foul filth. This mind is the mind of no-mind, free from all appearances; sentient beings and Buddhas are no different.”

[The Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One: his noble wisdom of self-awakening is like the Ganges, and his great power, spiritual powers, and sovereignty are like its sands. Amid all disturbances from non-Buddhists, humans, beasts, and the rest, the Tathāgata does not give rise to deluded thoughts by attending to them. The Tathāgata is serene, without thoughts or imaginings. By the Tathāgata’s original vows, in order to settle sentient beings in the bliss of samādhi, there is no disturbance, just as with the sands of the Ganges; they are equal and without difference. Moreover, this is because greed and anger have been cut off.]

By the same principle, the noble wisdom of self-awakening of the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One, is like the waters of the Ganges, while his spiritual powers and sovereign freedom are like its sands. In the face of every external disturbance, the Buddhas do not attend to it and give rise to various deluded thoughts. The World-Honored Tathāgata is profoundly serene and still, without attending thoughts or deluded imaginings.

With wisdom free from thought and through the power of his original vows, the Tathāgata applies various skillful means so that sentient beings’ minds may attain stability and peace. Therefore, the Tathāgata himself is not disturbed. Just as the sands of the Ganges do not give rise to deluded discrimination in response to any trampling, so the Tathāgata does not discriminate among sentient beings or give rise to the slightest disturbance. This is also because the Tathāgata has completely cut off greed, anger, and ignorance.

First, from the perspective of sand’s inherently pure nature, unaffected by trampling, this simile depicts the Buddhas and Tathāgatas as pure and such as they are, profoundly serene and still, able to liberate all sentient beings extensively without receiving defilement or harm.

[Mahāmati, it is like the sands of the Ganges: their nature is earth. When the kalpa-ending fire burns, it burns the whole earth, yet the earth element does not relinquish its own nature, since it coexists with the fire element. Ordinary foolish people imagine that the earth is burned, but the earth is not burned, because fire is its condition. Thus, Mahāmati, the dharmakāya of the Tathāgata is indestructible like the sands of the Ganges.]

For example, the sands of the Ganges possess the attribute of the earth element. Even when the kalpa-ending fire arises and burns the whole earth, the nature of the earth element is not burned away. This is because the nature of the earth element and that of the fire element share one dharma nature and coexist from the outset. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: "Together with empty space, earth, water, fire, and wind, they are all called the seven great elements. Their nature is truly perfect and interpenetrating; all are the treasury of the Tathāgata and are originally neither arising nor ceasing."

Deluded ordinary beings think that the nature of the earth element itself is also burned by fire. Yet when fire burns grasses and trees into ash, the ash becomes earth; thus fire is also a condition for earth, and earth and fire not only obstruct one another but also give rise to one another. Since the nature of the four great elements is, in the final analysis, the wondrous nature of true suchness, it is inherently perfect and unobstructed, neither arising nor ceasing. Therefore, even if all earth is burned, the nature of the earth element is originally perfectly interpenetrating and never arises or ceases. By the same principle, the dharmakāya of the Tathāgata is like the sands of the Ganges: whatever worldly circumstances may melt or forge it, the Tathāgata's dharmakāya is never destroyed or extinguished.

Second, from the perspective that the earth-element attribute of sand is indestructible, this simile depicts the abiding permanence of the Tathāgata's dharmakāya.

[Mahāmati, it is like the sands of the Ganges, which are without limit. So too is the Tathāgata's light, without limit. In order to bring sentient beings to maturity, it universally illumines all assemblies of Buddhas.]

Mahāmati, the vast number of sands in the Ganges is without limit. In the same way, the light of the Tathāgata's wisdom is immeasurable. To bring sentient beings to complete fulfillment, the Tathāgata's light of wisdom universally illumines all assemblies of Buddhas throughout the ten directions, without limit.

Third, from the perspective of sand's limitless quantity, this simile depicts the immeasurable light of the Tathāgata's wisdom, which universally illumines all sentient beings.

[Mahāmati, it is like the sands of the Ganges: one can never find a sand different from sand. Thus, Mahāmati, the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One, has no birth and death, no arising and ceasing, because the conditions of the three realms have been severed.]

“One can never find a sand different from sand”: the Tang translation reads, “It is like the sands of the Ganges, abiding in the nature of sand and never changing into something else.”

“Because the conditions of the three realms have been severed”: “existence” here refers to the three kinds of existence, namely the three realms. This means that the conditions for cyclic rebirth in the three realms have been cut off.

Mahāmati, just as the sands of the Ganges can never be transformed into something else, so too, Mahāmati, the Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Awakened One, has already severed the causes and conditions of rebirth in the three realms—that is, the fundamental affliction of ignorance and all subsidiary afflictions have been completely cut off. Thus, the Tathāgata is forever free of segmented birth and death; this is called “having completely transcended birth and death.” The Tathāgata has also completely cut off transformational birth and death; this is called “having completely transcended arising and ceasing.” Chan Master Baizhang said: “When the time has come, one realizes that one’s own treasure is not obtained from another. Simply depart from deluded conditions, and one is thus-buddha.”

Fourth, from the perspective that the sands of the Ganges do not change, this illustrates that the Tathāgata has forever cut off the two kinds of birth and death and does not turn back again.

[Mahāmati, just as it cannot be known whether the sands of the Ganges increase or decrease, so too, Mahāmati, the Tathāgata’s wisdom in bringing sentient beings to maturity neither increases nor decreases, because it is not a bodily dharma. Bodily dharmas are subject to destruction; the Tathāgata’s dharma body is not a bodily dharma.]

Mahāmati, just as the vast quantity of the sands of the Ganges cannot be measured as increasing or decreasing, so too, Mahāmati, the Tathāgata’s wisdom in liberating sentient beings is likewise immeasurable and boundless. Practitioners may choose or reject expedient dharma gates as they wish, but the true Tathāgata ultimately neither increases nor decreases and differs from the conditioned dharmas with characteristics of the worldly three realms. All worldly dharmas with characteristics are subject to increase and decrease, arising and ceasing.

The Tathāgata's wisdom dharma body is not like this. As the Vimalakīrti Sūtra says: "It is like one lamp kindling hundreds of thousands of lamps: all those in darkness are illuminated, yet its light is never exhausted. So too, when one bodhisattva guides hundreds of thousands of sentient beings and causes them to arouse the mind of anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi, that resolve for the Way is likewise never exhausted."

Fifth, from the perspective that increases and decreases in the quantity of sand cannot be measured, this illustrates that the Tathāgata's self-realized noble wisdom responds to the needs of sentient beings without increase or decrease.

[Mahāmati, just as oil cannot be obtained by pressing the sands of the Ganges, so too, even if all sentient beings in extreme suffering press upon the Tathāgata, he does not abandon the dharma realm, his samādhi, vows, and delight until sentient beings attain nirvāṇa, because of great compassion.]

Just as pressing the sands of the Ganges for oil will not produce ghee, no matter how they are pressed, so too, even when any sentient beings in extreme suffering, bound by greed, anger, and ignorance, press upon the Tathāgata, the Tathāgata does not give rise to vexation or disturbance. So long as sentient beings have not attained ultimate nirvāṇa, the Tathāgata does not abandon manifestations within the dharma realm or enter the bliss of samādhi and nirvāṇa. Because the Tathāgata has unconditioned great loving-kindness and compassion based on identity in essence, he does not forsake the liberation of sentient beings, in accordance with his profound vows and original aspirations.

Sixth, from the perspective that pressing sand cannot yield ghee, this illustrates that no matter how sentient beings driven by greed, anger, and ignorance press upon the Tathāgata, he never enters nirvāṇa and abandons sentient beings.

[Mahāmati, just as the sands of the Ganges flow along with water and do not flow without water, so too, Mahāmati, all the dharmas taught by the Tathāgata flow in accordance with nirvāṇa. Therefore, they are said to be like the sands of the Ganges.]

Mahāmati, just as the sands of the Ganges flow with the movement of the water, rather than flowing by themselves without water, so too, Mahāmati, all the dharmas taught by the Tathāgata are taught for the "true reality of nirvāṇa" and for "realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature." Everything the Tathāgata teaches accords with this; he does not teach in reliance on anything else. Therefore, the Tathāgata's verbal teachings are like the sands of the Ganges: they flow in dependence upon nirvāṇa.

Seventh, from the perspective that sand moves with the water, this illustrates that the dharmas taught by the Tathāgata rely solely on the true reality of nirvāṇa. The

Buddha manifests and teaches the Dharma only for this one great cause and condition.

From this final perspective, the World-Honored One further elaborates below in order to lead Mahāmati away from the deluded mind-consciousness and toward awakening to the true meaning of nirvāṇa. Let us continue with the following passage:

[The Tathāgata does not flow along with the various goings. Going means destruction. Mahāmati, the original limit of birth and death is unknowable. Since it is unknowable, how can one speak of going? Mahāmati, going means cessation, yet foolish ordinary people do not understand this.]

What the Tathāgata teaches does not turn along with the various "goings." That is, the dharmas taught by the Tathāgata are unlike the worldly streams of arising, abiding, alteration, and extinction. "Going" means destruction and extinction. Mahāmati, ordinary people see only destruction, extinction, and change, without considering the original source of birth and death. If one examines this carefully, one finds: Where does birth come from? This great matter is difficult to know. Since even the original limit of birth is unknowable, how can one say that there is going or extinction? Mahāmati, if there truly were going and extinction, one would fall into annihilationism. Yet ordinary people do not understand this.

That is to say, the comparison of the Tathāgata to the flowing sands of the Ganges means that the Buddha's teachings are spoken in reliance upon ultimate supramundane liberation; they do not perish in accordance with the destruction of worldly appearances. Ordinary people see that everything in the world ultimately perishes and therefore infer that the Buddhadharma also perishes. In fact, arising and ceasing are illusory dharmas; ultimate true reality neither arises nor ceases and is not annihilation.

[Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, if the original limit of sentient beings' birth and death is unknowable, how can liberation be known?" The Buddha told Mahāmati: "When the causal habits of beginningless false, erroneous, and deluded thoughts are extinguished, the deluded body of taking externally appearing objects, known through one's own mind, as real is transformed. Liberation is not extinction. Therefore, 'boundless' does not mean that nothing whatsoever exists. For the sake of those deluded thoughts, I provisionally use different names such as 'boundless.' When one observes inward and outward and departs from deluded thoughts, there are no distinct sentient beings, knowledge, knowable objects, or any dharmas; all are utterly quiescent. Because one does not recognize the deluded thoughts manifested by one's own mind, deluded thoughts arise; if one recognizes them, they cease."]

In “knowledge and knowable objects,” knowledge refers to worldly knowledge and clever disputation, while knowable objects refers to deluded discriminations.

Mahāmati then asked the Buddha: “Then, World-Honored One, if sentient beings do not even know the original limit of birth and death, how can they know how to attain liberation from it?”

The Buddha told Mahāmati: The habitual tendencies of false, erroneous, and deluded thoughts since beginningless time are the cause of the cycle of birth and death. If this cause can be extinguished, one awakens to the fact that all external objects are merely the mind’s deluded thoughts; this is the transformation of consciousness into wisdom. True liberation is neither arising nor ceasing; it is not the nothingness of destruction and annihilation. The boundlessness and limitlessness of which I speak do not mean the impermanent annihilation of there being nothing at all. It is in order to cut off sentient beings’ deluded thoughts that I use expedient names such as “boundless.”

If one can observe truthfully, one awakens to the fact that the inner mind and external objects are nothing but deluded thoughts. All deluded thoughts and discriminations are sentient beings; apart from these, there are no other sentient beings. All dharmas are originally unborn and inherently quiescent. If one cannot awaken to the fact that the myriad dharmas are only deluded thoughts manifested by one’s own mind, many erroneous and mistaken views arise. If one awakens to the fact that everything is nothing but an illusory manifestation of one’s own mind, all deluded thoughts and erroneous views cease.

That is to say, the Buddha’s answer is that birth and death and their original limit, saṃsāra and liberation through nirvāṇa, and all such notions arise from ignorant deluded thought; they are all illusory, oppositional formulations. If one can sweep away ignorance completely and transform consciousness into wisdom, one realizes that all dharmas are inherently quiescent and that these oppositions between the two extremes do not truly exist. This is genuine liberation.

The following verses restate the wondrous virtues of the dharma bodies of the Buddhas of the three times:

[Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses: “Contemplate all the guides: they are like the sands of the Ganges. They neither perish nor go; nor do they ultimately cease. This is equality.”]

Contemplate the Buddhas of the three times: like the sands of the Ganges, they neither perish nor increase or decrease, and they never enter the quiescent extinction of nirvāṇa. This is the equality of the Tathāgata.

[Contemplate all Tathāgatas: they are like the sands of the Ganges. Completely free from all faults, they flow along with the stream while their nature remains constant. This is the Buddha's perfect awakening.]

Contemplate all the Buddhas and Tathāgatas: like the sands of the Ganges, they are free from all faults. Though they can abide in accordance with the stream, the Tathāgata's true nature remains eternally constant and unchanging. This is the Tathāgata's unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening.

Summary of This Section:

The key phrase in this section is "like the sands of the Ganges." Mahāmati's question is: What does it mean to say that all Buddhas are like the sands of the Ganges?

The Buddha explains this point layer by layer:

First, the essential nature of all Buddhas "surpasses worldly expectations and cannot be illustrated by any analogy"; the "realm of self-realized noble wisdom admits of no analogy"; and the "true Tathāgata transcends the appearances perceived by mind, intellect, and consciousness and cannot be compared." One must rely on the meaning, not on the words.

Second, although the true nature of all Buddhas admits of no comparison, analogies may nevertheless be used as expedient means, enabling sentient beings to gain understanding through them.

Third, the Buddha then uses sand as an analogy, describing from seven perspectives such wondrous virtues and qualities of the Tathāgata as intrinsic purity, freedom from vexation and disturbance, neither perishing nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing, and remaining unchanged while according with conditions.

Finally, the Buddha states directly that all arising and ceasing, coming and going, and all worldly appearances are manifestations of deluded thought. The Tathāgata is not an appearance of arising and ceasing or coming and going. If one awakens to the root and understands that all appearances are illusory, caused by the deluded thoughts of one's own mind, and that the true reality of the Tathāgata neither arises nor ceases, then all deluded thoughts and erroneous views naturally subside.

39. All Dharmas Are Momentary

[At that time, Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, I pray that you will explain the momentary arising-and-perishing of all dharmas. World-Honored One, how are all dharmas momentary?" The Buddha told

Mahāmati: “Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I shall explain it to you.”]

In the preceding section, the Buddha used the simile of the Buddhas being as numerous as the sands of the Ganges to reveal the qualities of the dharmakāya: neither arising nor ceasing, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither defiled nor pure. In this section, Mahāmati again asks about the momentary arising and dissolution of all dharmas. “Momentary dissolution” means that all dharmas continually undergo successive momentary transformations and decay.

[The Buddha told Mahāmati: “All dharmas” means wholesome, unwholesome, and indeterminate; conditioned and unconditioned; worldly and supramundane; culpable and non-culpable; defiled and undefiled; receptive and non-receptive.]

“Wholesome, unwholesome, and indeterminate”: here, “wholesome” refers to worldly dharmas that accord with principle and benefit others; “unwholesome” refers to dharmas that violate principle and harm others; and “indeterminate” means that they cannot be classified as either wholesome or unwholesome.

“Conditioned”: wei means fabrication or activity; what is fabricated is called “conditioned.” What is not fabricated through causes and conditions is called “unconditioned.”

“Worldly and supramundane”: the flowing transformations within the three realms are worldly dharmas; nirvāṇa and liberation are called supramundane dharmas.

“Culpable and non-culpable”: whatever involves the three karmas of body, speech, and mind and in every respect runs counter to principle is called “culpable.” What does not involve the three karmas of body, speech, and mind, harms neither oneself nor troubles others, is called “non-culpable.”

“Outflows” are afflictions. All worldly matters are defiled dharmas; what is free from afflictions is called undefiled dharma.

“Receptive” means receiving the objects one encounters. “Non-receptive” means that the mind is liberated and does not grasp or receive any dharmas. The Lotus Sūtra says: “Because one does not receive any dharmas, the mind is liberated from all outflows.”

The Buddha tells Mahāmati that “all dharmas” means such various categories as wholesome and unwholesome dharmas, and so forth, as described above.

[Mahāmati, in brief: mind, manas, consciousness, and habitual tendencies are the causes of the five receptive aggregates. Through the nourishment of the habitual tendencies of mind, manas, and consciousness, ordinary foolish beings give rise to

wholesome and unwholesome deluded thoughts. Mahāmati, the bliss of cultivating samādhi, the proper reception of samādhi, and abiding happily in the present dharma are called the wholesome undefiled states of worthies and sages.]

“The five receptive aggregates” specifically comprise form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. “Form” refers to tangible material things that we can see. “Feeling” means receiving apprehended objects—for example, feeling pain, pleasure, or neither pain nor pleasure. “Perception” means taking up the characteristics of the six sense objects that have been received, after which various ideas arise. “Formations” refers to karmic activity, such as wholesome and evil actions. “Consciousness” means discernment; through what this mental consciousness gathers, one can distinguish forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas. The coming together of these five aggregates constitutes the body of the personal self.

“Abiding happily in the present dharma” means that, at the ultimate level, things are originally and naturally thus: all is complete as it is, without contrivance, naturally pure and luminously clear. At this time one attains great freedom, ease, and happiness, without advance or retreat; this is called “abiding happily in the present dharma.”

Mahāmati, an exhaustive explanation of all dharmas would be endless. Briefly stated, mind, manas, and consciousness—that is, the eight consciousnesses—and habitual tendencies, referring to ignorance, are the fundamental causes for the accumulation of the five aggregates. Because the eight consciousnesses and the habitual tendencies of ignorance are nourished, foolish ordinary beings accumulate the five aggregates and then delusively give rise to many notions of wholesome and unwholesome, culpable and non-culpable, and so forth. These belong to defiled dharmas.

“The bliss of cultivating samādhi, the proper reception of samādhi, and abiding happily in the present dharma are called the wholesome undefiled states of worthies and sages”—wise worthies and sages may cultivate the bliss of samādhi well and thereby attain tranquility; or, through correct knowledge and view, not receiving any feelings, and deep cultivation and realization, they may attain various stable samādhis; and ultimately they may realize complete liberation, great freedom, and irreversibility. All these are undefiled and non-karmic dharmas cultivated by sages and worthies.

[Mahāmati, the wholesome and unwholesome are what are called the eight consciousnesses. What are the eight? They are the Tathāgata-garbha, called the storehouse of consciousness; mind, manas, consciousness, and the body of the five consciousnesses. This is not what non-Buddhist paths teach.]

Mahāmati, all dharmas, including wholesome and unwholesome dharmas, are the eight consciousnesses. The mind that distinguishes wholesome from unwholesome is the perceiving aspect of the eight consciousnesses; the wholesome and unwholesome appearances that it apprehends are their object aspect. That is to say, all dharmas are nothing apart from what is manifested by the eight consciousnesses.

What, then, are the eight consciousnesses? The Tathāgata-garbha is originally pure, but because it is obscured and defiled by deluded consciousness, it is called the "storehouse of consciousness": the eighth, ālaya consciousness, abbreviated as "mind." "Manas" refers to the seventh manas consciousness; "consciousness" refers to the sixth consciousness; and the first five consciousnesses are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousnesses.

This differs from the heterodox view. Non-Buddhist paths do not understand that all dharmas do not go beyond the mind itself and cannot return to the fundamental Tathāgata-garbha. Thus, they fall into various conceptual speculations and seek dharmas outside the mind.

[Mahāmati, the body of the five consciousnesses is inseparable from mind, manas, and consciousness. Wholesome and unwholesome characteristics transform and decay in succession, flowing on continuously. The indestructible body arises, both arising and ceasing, without recognizing what is manifested by one's own mind. One consciousness ceases in sequence, and the remaining consciousnesses arise. The consciousness arises in mutual conjunction with the five consciousnesses, apprehending distinctions of form and appearance. It does not remain even for a moment; this is called momentariness.]

Mahāmati, the body of the personal self can condition upon external objects and thereby produce the five forms of discernment of form, sound, smell, taste, and touch—the first five consciousnesses. The five consciousnesses, together with the mind of the eighth consciousness, the manas of the seventh consciousness, and the sixth consciousness, all participate and become mutually causal. Thus, seeds produce manifest activity, and manifest activity perfumes seeds, cycling again and again. Therefore, there are such wholesome and unwholesome characteristics, ever changing and impermanent. Even when things appear stable on the surface, they are in fact continually undergoing subtle transformation.

Yet the essence of the storehouse of the eight consciousnesses—the Tathāgata-garbha—neither arises nor ceases. It is precisely for this reason that it can outwardly manifest the various arising, ceasing, and transformations described above, without interruption. Sentient beings are deluded and do not understand that the arising,

abiding, changing, and ceasing of dharmas are in fact manifestations of their own minds.

In fact, the eight consciousnesses are mutually causal and influence one another in continual succession. They are like waves in the ocean: one wave follows another without end, arising here and ceasing there, changing in countless ways.

Once the wind of objects stirs the ocean of mind—that is, whenever any one of the first five consciousnesses encounters conditions and makes a discrimination—the sixth consciousness arises in correspondence with it and differentiates and judges forms, appearances, sounds, smells, and the like. This is what is meant by "the consciousness arises in mutual conjunction with the five consciousnesses" and by "apprehending distinctions of form and appearance." These acts of discernment, comparison, and discrimination by the six consciousnesses are constantly changing at every moment. This uninterrupted change constitutes "momentariness."

That is to say, "a moment" ordinarily refers to an extremely small unit of time. Time is manifested through distinctions of change that can be felt. As external circumstances change, the most subtle discernible changes in the six consciousnesses constitute the appearance of momentary dissolution. In fact, the eight consciousnesses are constantly undergoing subtle, hidden, and continuous transformation—this is their continuous flow; by the time the six consciousnesses manifest changing appearances, the changes have already become quite coarse.

[Mahāmati, "momentariness" refers to the habitual tendencies that give rise to consciousness, in conjunction with the storehouse of consciousness, the Tathāgata-garbha, and manas.]

Thus, so-called momentariness is the transformation of the six consciousnesses, while the causes underlying these transformations are the seventh and eighth consciousnesses. The eighth storehouse consciousness and the seventh manas consciousness constantly cling to a self. Acting together, they cause the six faculties, upon contacting the six sense objects, to produce the six consciousnesses, which incessantly grasp, condition upon, and discriminate. They arise here and cease there, continually transforming, and thus cause ordinary beings to generate the deluded notion of "moments."

In other words, the seventh and eighth consciousnesses are the instigators of "momentariness." As Patriarch Linji said, "Watch only the puppet show on the stage: all its pulling and manipulation depend upon the person within." The most crucial "person within" refers to the eighth ālaya consciousness. The seventh manas consciousness constantly examines and reflects, constantly clings to a self, and performs the function of transmitting and "pulling the strings"; therefore, the puppets outside display their lively transformations.

[Undefiled habitual tendencies are not momentary and are not perceived by ordinary foolish beings.]

“Undefiled habitual tendencies” refers to undefiled seeds, the causal seeds of bodhi. In contrast to defiled karmic seeds, they are called undefiled seeds.

Undefiled seeds do not arise, cease, or transform moment by moment. The Cheng Weishi Lun says: “From beginningless time, sentient beings have possessed undefiled seeds. They do not result from perfuming through cultivation, but are naturally accomplished in accordance with dharma.” That is to say, the wisdom of undefiled seeds is inherently possessed by sentient beings; it is not formed through acquired cultivation and perfuming, and thus is not a cause of “momentariness.”

The inherent presence of undefiled seeds ensures that, when the causes and conditions of sentient beings mature, those who arouse the resolve to seek liberation will ultimately awaken and be liberated. Once they awaken and are liberated, they discover that everything has always been complete: the so-called eight consciousnesses and momentariness are all misunderstandings and illusions. Ordinary foolish beings cannot perceive this profound meaning of “undefiled habitual tendencies are not momentary.”

[Because they adhere to a theory of momentariness, they do not realize that all dharmas are momentary and yet not momentary; through annihilationist views, they destroy the unconditioned dharma. Mahāmati, the seven consciousnesses do not transmigrate and do not receive suffering or pleasure; they are not causes of nirvāṇa.]

Deluded ordinary beings falsely imagine and cling to the real existence of moments. They do not understand that the momentary transformations of all dharmas are inherently illusory and that there are fundamentally no momentary transformations. Firmly maintaining this mistaken view of “momentariness,” they then conclude that everything is impermanent, changing, and impossible to grasp; therefore, they assume that the unconditioned dharma of liberation must be the same and that no one can truly be liberated. Such a view is in fact annihilationist and undermines the Buddhadharma, for it denies the unborn and undying.

Śrāvaka sages, however, hold that if the first seven consciousnesses are suppressed so that they do not circulate and do not receive any suffering or pleasure, nirvāṇa will be realized. In fact, such a practice is not a cause of nirvāṇa.

This reminds us that the changes called “momentariness” by ordinary beings are in fact an annihilationist view. Those who hold such a view often ridicule the Buddhadharma and do not believe in the path of liberation; they are truly deluded and pitiable. Some fellow Buddhists also interpret the Diamond Sūtra’s phrase “like

a dream, an illusion, a bubble, and a shadow" in an annihilationist way. They mistake the suppression of thoughts or entry into the absorption of no perception for nirvāṇa and liberation. This, too, is in fact a denial of the Tathāgata-garbha and a destruction of the Buddhadharma.

For example, in a Chan koan: when Master Yuanwu was first at Mount Wei, Master Zhenru asked him one day, "How is it?" Yuanwu replied, "Arising and ceasing never stop." Zhenru said, "You are plainly an ordinary worldling!" From this we can see that Chan Master Zhenru possessed a keen eye of wisdom. He clearly told Master Yuanwu that counteracting the continual arising and ceasing of consciousness, suppressing it so that it does not arise, is the practice of the Hīnayāna annihilationist view; it cannot realize true nirvāṇa.

[Again, Mahāmati, the tathāgatagarbha undergoes suffering and pleasure together with their causes; it arises and ceases. Intoxicated by the ignorance of the four abiding grounds and the abiding ground of ignorance, ordinary foolish beings do not realize this. They perceive momentariness, and false imagination permeates their minds.]

"Abiding ground" means the basis on which the afflictive delusions depend. The "four abiding grounds" are the abiding ground of desire and attachment, the abiding ground of attachment to form, the delusions of thought in the formless realm, and the abiding ground of views united in one place. That is, they are the delusions of views common to the three realms. Thus, the afflictions of these four abiding grounds are also called all delusions of views and thought, or branch ignorance. The "abiding ground of ignorance," by contrast, is fundamental ignorance.

The afflictions of the abiding ground of ignorance and those of the four abiding grounds are collectively called the "afflictions of the five abiding grounds." The most crucial among them is the affliction of the abiding ground of ignorance, for it is the fundamental basis of all the other afflictions. Another scripture translated by the translator of this sūtra, Guṇabhadra—the Śrīmālādevī Siṃhanāda Ekayāna Mahāvaipulya Sūtra—states: "All arise, are established, and increase in dependence on the abiding ground of ignorance. When the abiding ground of ignorance is severed, then dharmas to be severed by the Tathāgata's bodhi-wisdom, more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, are also severed accordingly. Thus all afflictions and subsidiary afflictions, more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, are severed."

The general meaning of this passage is as follows: Mahāmati, the tathāgatagarbha is the fundamental basis; it is the cause of all experiences of suffering and pleasure. Deluded sentient beings, obscured by ignorance, mistake the splendid and pure tathāgatagarbha for the eighth, ālaya consciousness. Thereupon arise all the

afflictions of views and thought belonging to the four abiding grounds. Taking the false for the real, they believe that arising and ceasing truly exist, and that the changing appearance of “moments” truly exists. In fact, all this is caused by false imagination permeating the mind.

Here, the “intoxicated” in “intoxicated by the abiding ground of ignorance” means that ordinary sentient beings immersed in birth and death are like drunkards. When they sober up, they return to normal; then they understand that so-called delusion and awakening, defilement and purity, are all illusory, and that the tathāgatagarbha is originally pure and is not stained by defilements. For those who are intoxicated, returning to normal is inevitable; it is only a matter of sooner or later.

[Again, Mahāmati, like gold, vajra, and the Buddha’s relics, which possess extraordinary qualities and are never destroyed: Mahāmati, if there were uninterrupted momentariness, the noble ones would not be noble. Yet the noble ones have never ceased to be noble. Like gold and vajra, though they pass through kalpas, their weight does not diminish. Why do ordinary foolish beings fail to understand well my teaching of what is concealed, and conceive momentariness with regard to all inner and outer dharmas?]

Continuing the preceding teaching on the tathāgatagarbha, the Buddha told Mahāmati: Mahāmati, ultimate suchness and true reality are like gold, diamonds, and the Buddha’s relics. They possess the qualities of solidity and pure genuineness and cannot be destroyed. Such qualities are inherent from the beginning; they are not produced through refining.

If moment-by-moment change truly existed without interruption, then noble ones would not be noble ones. Yet noble ones are indeed noble ones, and they have never been other than noble. It is like gold and vajra: even after passing through many kalpas, their solid purity does not diminish. The noble wisdom of self-realization possessed by noble ones is likewise so. It is inherent in both you and me: neither increasing nor decreasing, neither defiled nor pure.

Why are ordinary foolish people unable to understand well the Buddha’s profound words of hidden meaning, and stubbornly believe that all external objects and internal thoughts undergo moment-by-moment change?

[Mahāmati Bodhisattva again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, as the World-Honored One has said, when the six pāramitās are fulfilled, one attains perfect awakening. What are these six?” The Buddha told Mahāmati: “There are three kinds of distinction among the pāramitās: worldly, supramundane, and supremely supramundane.”]

Mahāmati again asked the Buddha: “World-Honored One, you have said that fulfilling the six pāramitās enables one to attain the perfect, equal awakening of noble wisdom of self-realization. Which six pāramitās are these?” The Buddha told Mahāmati: “The six pāramitās, namely the six perfections, are of three kinds: worldly pāramitās, supramundane pāramitās, and supremely supramundane pāramitās.”

[Mahāmati, worldly pāramitās are those in which one clings to and appropriates self and what belongs to self, appropriates the two extremes, and, for the sake of pleasures of form, sound, smell, taste, and touch in various places of rebirth, fulfills the pāramitās of giving, morality, patience, vigor, meditation, and wisdom. This leads to the spiritual powers of ordinary beings and to rebirth in Brahmā Heaven.]

Ordinary beings falsely conceive of and cling to self and what belongs to self, taking the false for the real. Consequently, they make all kinds of choices and rejections and adhere to erroneous views of the two extremes. Seeking various places of rebirth, they greedily pursue and cling to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects. For this purpose, they extensively practice giving, uphold the precepts, cultivate patience, diligence, meditative stability, and wisdom. Such conduct brings the spiritual powers of ordinary beings or rebirth in Brahmā Heaven.

Because they seek sensual desire and cling to the karmic results of rebirth, such six perfections are merely worldly pāramitās. At most, they bring favorable worldly results.

[Mahāmati, supramundane pāramitās are those practiced by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas who are attached to the appropriation of nirvāṇa and practice the six pāramitās, delighting in the bliss of their own nirvāṇa.]

Mahāmati, supramundane pāramitās are the six pāramitās practiced by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas who reject birth and death and seek nirvāṇa. They practice the six perfections in order to cut off worldly pleasures, taking only the bliss of their own release and quiescence. Therefore, they are called supramundane pāramitās.

[Supremely supramundane pāramitās are those in which, realizing that the appropriations of the measure of false imagination manifested by one’s own mind, as well as the duality of one’s own mind, do not arise, one does not give rise to false imagination. In appropriating the various destinies, one does not cling to the forms and appearances of one’s own mind. For the peace and happiness of all sentient beings, one gives rise to the pāramitā of giving and employs supreme skillful means.]

Mahāmati, the supremely supramundane six perfections are those of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. They understand that all discrimination and all grasping and rejecting by subject and object are false imaginations manifested solely by mind. Therefore,

they are free from erroneous views of the two extremes and from deluded views and discrimination. They manifest in accord with conditions throughout the six realms, embracing and teaching sentient beings, yet they are not deluded by external circumstances and do not conceive of themselves as liberating sentient beings.

For the benefit and happiness of sentient beings, and to bring them peace, Buddhas and bodhisattvas expediently give and liberate all sentient beings where, fundamentally, there are no sentient beings to be liberated. This is the supremely supramundane pāramitā of giving.

[In those very conditions, not giving rise to false imagination is morality, the śīla pāramitā. In those very false imaginations, not giving rise to patience, and knowing the appropriator and appropriated, is the kṣānti pāramitā. In the first, middle, and last watches of the night, diligently employing skillful means and practicing in accordance with expedient methods, without giving rise to false imagination, is the vīrya pāramitā. When false imaginations are all extinguished, without falling into the appropriation of śrāvaka nirvāṇa, that is the dhyāna pāramitā. Observing with wisdom that the false imaginations of one's own mind are without self-nature, not falling into the two extremes, transforming the former body into a superior and indestructible one, and attaining the noble realm of self-realization—this is the prajñā pāramitā.]

Continuing the discussion of the six perfections:

Not giving rise to false imagination and discrimination amid all kinds of circumstances is the precept of intrinsically pure nature, namely the śīla pāramitā—the perfection of moral discipline.

With regard to all false imaginations, one knows that there are fundamentally no false imaginations, no appropriator or appropriated, and no suffering in one's own nature. Since all dharmas have fundamentally never arisen, how could there be patience under insult? Thus one attains forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas, namely the kṣānti pāramitā—the perfection of patience.

During the first, middle, and last watches of the night, although one diligently practices in accordance with expedient means, one does not conceive of oneself as being diligent, nor does one falsely imagine, discriminate, or take the false for the real. This is true diligence, namely the vīrya pāramitā—the perfection of vigor. The Scripture of Dharma Verses says: "If one gives rise to a mind of diligence, it is false, not diligence. If the mind can remain free of falsehood, diligence has no limit."

When false imaginations are entirely extinguished, one nevertheless does not fall into annihilation or into the view of śrāvakas who cling to the quiescent bliss of

nirvāṇa. This is meditative stability, namely the dhyāna pāramitā.

With regard to all false imaginations, one clearly realizes that they are only manifestations of one's own mind: in truth, there are no false imaginations, nor is a single dharma attainable. With prajñā wisdom, one penetrates the essential nature of all dharmas and does not fall into erroneous views of the two extremes. The form-body produced by previous karma is transformed into the supreme, wondrous, indestructible vajra Dharma body. That is, one thoroughly realizes the selflessness of persons and dharmas, and thoroughly realizes the noble realm of self-realization. This is the prajñā pāramitā—the perfection of wisdom.

Thus we know that the six perfections are all expedient means for liberating the false imaginations of one's own mind. "Pāramitā" means reaching the other shore. With one thought of delusion, there is this shore; with one thought of wisdom, the distinction between this shore and the other shore is utterly dissolved, leaving no trace of coming or going. Spring departs and autumn arrives; throughout the three realms and ten directions, where is not one's home? This is the true other shore of wisdom.

Therefore, the prajñāpāramitā is not prajñāpāramitā; it is called prajñāpāramitā. So-called self-liberation and liberating others are likewise no more than a practice site like the moon reflected in water, turning the wheel of illusion. Therefore, if one clings to the six perfections as real, then the "six pāramitās" must also be fully transcended. This is the supremely supramundane pāramitā. The Buddha told Mahāmati that this is the true meaning of pāramitā.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]

Emptiness, impermanence, and momentariness—foolish beings fabricate these through false imagination. Like a river, a lamp, or a seed, they conceive them as momentary.

When momentariness ceases, affliction and disorder cease; there is quiescence, free from action. All dharmas are unborn: this is the meaning of momentariness that I teach.]

This passage explains the essence and appearance of "momentariness." As for momentariness, its essence is fundamentally "empty," while its appearance is "impermanent." Foolish beings falsely imagine and cling to the appearances of impermanent change as truly existing. Like the flow of a river, the flame of a lamp, or a seed sprouting, phenomena change from thought to thought; thus they believe that "moments" truly exist.

If one suddenly stops the frenzied, confused mind and sets false imagination to rest, then the present reality is quiescent. Free from agent and action, one realizes that all dharmas have fundamentally never arisen or ceased. Still less can there be impermanent change in the appearances of dharmas. Thus there is fundamentally no such thing as momentariness. This is the true meaning of momentariness that I teach.

[When things arise, they perish; this is not taught for the foolish. The nature of uninterrupted continuity is permeated by false imagination.

Ignorance is its cause, and mind arises from it. Until form has arisen, what distinction is there in between?

When the continuum ceases in sequence, another mind arises in accordance with it. When it does not abide in form, on what object does it depend in arising?

Because it arises from that, it does not arise from a cause as it truly is. How can one know momentary destruction when nothing has been produced?]

This passage refutes the deluded appearance of momentariness and reveals the unborn nature of mind and objects:

I do not tell the foolish that all things which arise must necessarily cease. For all arising and ceasing, together with the continuous transformations between them, are false appearances conditioned by the habitual influence of deluded thoughts. Their fundamental cause is ignorance. Intrinsic nature is originally luminous, yet sentient beings falsely give rise to a single thought that apprehends this luminosity; this is the root of ignorance. From this arise all subject-object oppositions, the dharmas of mind, and the hundreds and thousands of dharmas such as form, which continue in an unbroken flow. In truth, however, the Tathāgata-garbha is originally pure and has neither arising and ceasing nor transformation.

Consider this: before the various realms of material phenomena have arisen, what could we discriminate? That is, where could our mental dharmas be manifested? Since the various mental dharmas continually cease here and arise there, if they did not abide in material phenomena but existed independently, on what basis could they arise?

Thus we may know that the various deluded thoughts of mental dharmas depend on and condition one another with the various realms of material phenomena. Since the deluded thoughts of mental dharmas depend on the conditions of material phenomena, and material phenomena are without beginning or end and are false and unreal, the various dharmas of mind are likewise false and unreal, utterly unobtainable. It is not that a truly existing deluded mind-consciousness arises.

Since there are in fact no deluded mental dharmas and no material phenomena that can truly be formed, how could there possibly be a truly existing appearance of destruction in a single instant?

Practitioners in proper realization, vajra, Buddha relics, and palaces in the Heaven of Radiant Sound are things in the world that do not decay through the end of an eon.

Abiding in the true Dharma, they attain the full wisdom of the Tathāgata; bhikshus attain equality. How, then, could they perceive momentariness?

Like gandharva cities and illusions, form has no momentariness; yet they regard unreal forms and the like as real.

Vajra, Buddha relics, palaces in the Heaven of Radiant Sound, and the like do not decay until the end of an eon, relative to other worldly things. The proper realization of practitioners is the same. Genuine bhikshu practitioners abide in the true Dharma in their cultivation and attain the Tathāgata's equal and correct wisdom. This eliminates arising and ceasing, coming and going; how could it be regarded as momentary transformation?

In fact, all dharmas are as illusory and unreal as a mirage; still less do they possess momentary transformation. Yet deluded ordinary beings take this unreal illusory realm to be real, mistakenly believing that momentary transformation truly exists, and thus continue without end to create karma and undergo karmic retribution.

Overview of This Section:

This section is divided into two parts. The key term of the first part is “momentariness.” The sūtra first states that all dharmas, worldly and supramundane alike, are nothing other than manifestations of the eight consciousnesses. Thus, the momentariness of dharmas is nothing other than the functioning of the eight consciousnesses. It then reveals the nature of momentariness: in broad terms, “momentariness is not momentariness,” pointing out that “what is called momentariness is the storehouse consciousness,” which is fundamentally the Tathāgata-garbha; in detailed discussion, it refutes the appearance of momentary destruction and shows that there is originally no arising.

The preceding text echoes Question 037 of the One Hundred Eight Questions, “How does momentary destruction occur?”, and corresponds to Statement 005 of the One Hundred Eight Statements, “The statement of momentariness is not the statement of momentariness.”

The key term of the latter part is “the six pāramitās.” The sūtra gives three categories of practices of the six pāramitās, explaining in detail the supreme supramundane pāramitā: pure intrinsic nature has neither this shore nor the other shore, and

pāramitā, too, is merely a provisional name—thus, “pāramitā is not pāramitā; it is called pāramitā.”

The later text echoes Question 050 of the One Hundred Eight Questions, “How many pāramitā minds are there?”, and corresponds to Statement 068 of the One Hundred Eight Statements, “The statement of pāramitā is not the statement of pāramitā.”

40. Transformations of the Tathāgata

[At that time, the bodhisattva Mahāmati again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, why does the World-Honored One predict that arhats will attain unsurpassed, complete enlightenment, without distinction from the bodhisattvas?”]

In this section, Mahāmati successively puts eight questions to the Buddha, and the Buddha answers each of them.

First question: Why does the World-Honored One predict that arhats, like all bodhisattvas, will attain unsurpassed, complete enlightenment?

In the thirty-ninth section of this sūtra, “The Momentariness of All Dharmas,” the Buddha once said: “Because śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas fall into the nirvāṇa of being received and retained, they practice the six pāramitās and delight in the bliss of their own nirvāṇa.” Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas reject birth and death, seek their own liberation, and cultivate the six inferior undefiled practices. Yet in the fifth section, “The Ever-Inconceivable,” the Buddha also said: “Those who abide among śrāvakas, delighting in samādhi, will attain the Tathāgata’s most excellent body.” Are these statements not mutually contradictory?

Therefore, Mahāmati raises this doubt: the outlook of the śrāvaka vehicle is narrow; at most, it realizes the partial nirvāṇa of true emptiness. Why, then, does the World-Honored One predict that arhats can attain unsurpassed enlightenment just like bodhisattvas? This is the first question.

[If none of the dharmas of all sentient beings enters nirvāṇa, who attains Buddhahood?]

At the beginning of this sūtra, a verse says: “There is no nirvāṇa in anything; there is no Buddha who enters nirvāṇa, nor is there a Buddha’s nirvāṇa.” Since all dharmas are originally without arising or ceasing, and sentient beings and Buddhas are equal, if sentient beings do not cultivate realization and enter nirvāṇa, then who can attain Buddhahood? This is the second question.

[From the time of first attaining Buddhahood until parinirvāṇa, not a single word is spoken, nor is any question answered?]

From the time the World-Honored One first saw the morning star and awakened to the Way until his parinirvāṇa, he taught the Dharma countless times. Why, then, did he say that he had not spoken a single word or answered any question? This is the third question.

[Because the Tathāgata is ever in samādhi, he neither deliberates nor considers. Does the transformation Buddha perform transformed Buddha-activities?]

"The transformation Buddha performs transformed Buddha-activities" means that all Buddha-activities are transformations performed by the nirmāṇakāya Buddha.

In the section "The Buddha Is Like the Sands of the Ganges," it is said that the Tathāgata abides in constant samādhi, without deliberation or consideration, and does not give rise to a single discriminating thought. If there is neither deliberation nor consideration, he should not manifest any Buddha-activities. Why, then, is it said that transformation Buddhas divide their bodies throughout the worlds of the ten directions, teach according to the capacities of beings, and widely perform Buddha-activities? This is the fourth question.

[Why is consciousness said to have the appearance of momentary, successive decay?]

In the section "The Momentariness of All Dharmas," the Buddha says: "The five groups of consciousness arise together with mind, manas, and mental consciousness. Their wholesome and unwholesome characteristics successively change and decay, continuing in an uninterrupted stream." Since, as the Buddha says, the consciousnesses successively change and decay moment by moment in a continuous flow, why does he also say, "The momentary is not momentary"? This is the fifth question.

[Why do vajra guardians constantly attend and protect him?]

In the section "The Buddha Is Like the Sands of the Ganges," it is said that the Tathāgata's Dharma body "transcends worldly perception," which means that it has no worldly characteristics that can be seen. How, then, could vajra guardians attend and protect it? This is the sixth question.

[Why does he not explain the original limit?]

In the section "The Buddha Is Like the Sands of the Ganges," the Buddha says, "The original limit of birth and death cannot be known." Here the question is: Why do you not explain what, ultimately, is the source of birth and death since beginningless time? This is the seventh question.

[Manifestations of Māra and Māra's karma, and the karmic results of evil deeds: the Brahmin woman Ciñcā, the woman Sundarī, leaving with an empty alms bowl, and the manifestation of karmic obstacles—if the Tathāgata has attained omniscience, why has he not been free of all such faults?]

"Manifestations of Māra" refers to Māra's army coming to disturb the Buddha as he sat at the seat of awakening. The Sūtra of the Ocean of Buddha Samādhi says: "The Buddha sat beneath the tree of awakening, his flesh and bones withered away, in order to attain Buddhahood. A māra named Pāpīyas wished to challenge him. He therefore stirred up celestial spirits, earthly deities, goblins, demons, and every host of ghosts; none failed to arrive. In grotesque and varied forms came fierce beasts, fire and thunder, some raising mountains, others wielding pestles, bows, crossbows, spears, and halberds, like clouds and rain. Corpses, pus, blood, filth, and impurity were used to trouble and harm the Buddha. By the power of the Buddha's samādhi of loving-kindness, he faced each of them; all swords and weapons turned into lotus flowers and could do him no harm."

"Māra's karma" refers to the Buddha's enjoyment of the pleasures of the five desires for ten years while in the royal palace. The Chapter on Competing in Skills for Marriage in the Sūtra of the Buddha's Deeds says: "Siddhārtha, Devadatta, and the other princes competed in skill to marry Gopā. At that time Gopā watched their contests from a high tower, including drawing the bow through a target; then he took a consort and fathered a child."

"Ciñcā" refers to a Brahmin woman. She once tied a wooden bowl to her abdomen and slandered the Buddha, claiming that he had had intercourse with her. Then Śakra, lord of the devas, transformed himself into a mouse, entered her clothing, and gnawed through the cord fastening the bowl. The wooden bowl suddenly fell to the ground, and all who saw it rejoiced greatly.

"The woman Sundarī" refers to Sundarī, who slandered the Buddha. Later, she was killed by non-Buddhists and buried where the Buddha lived; the non-Buddhists then falsely accused the Buddha of murdering her.

"Leaving with an empty alms bowl" refers to the Buddha entering the village of Sāvanā to beg for food and leaving with an empty bowl. This was also one of the Buddha's nine hardships.

The so-called nine hardships, as stated in the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra, are as follows: first, the Brahmin woman Sundarī slandered the Buddha, and five hundred arhats were also slandered at the same time; second, the Brahmin woman Ciñcā tied a wooden bowl to her abdomen and falsely accused the Buddha of defiling her; third, Devadatta pushed a mountain upon the Buddha, injuring his great toe; fourth,

a wooden spear pierced the Buddha's right foot; fifth, King Virūḍhaka raised an army and killed members of the Śākya clan.

Sixth, the Buddha accepted an invitation from the Brahmin Agnidatta and ate horse-feed; seventh, a cold wind caused pain in his back; eighth, he practiced austerities for six years in the Snow Mountains; ninth, he entered a Brahmin village to beg for food but received none, and returned with an empty bowl.

This passage asks the Buddha: having already attained Buddhahood and realized the Tathāgata's wisdom, why did you still undergo the karmic results of Māra's karma and evil deeds, and remain unable to be free from the many misfortunes of the world? This is the eighth question.

[The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I will explain it to you." Mahāmati said to the Buddha: "Excellent, World-Honored One. Yes, I shall receive your teaching." The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "It is for the sake of nirvāṇa without remainder, and in order to encourage those who practice the bodhisattva path to advance, that this is said. Those in this and other worlds who practice the bodhisattva path may delight in the nirvāṇa of the śrāvaka vehicle. To cause them to leave the śrāvaka vehicle and advance toward the Mahāyāna, transformation Buddhas give śrāvakas predictions of attainment; this is not done by the Dharma Buddha. Mahāmati, for this reason, śrāvakas are predicted to be no different from bodhisattvas."]

The Buddha first answers Mahāmati's first question: Why are śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas of the two vehicles predicted to attain Buddhahood, just like bodhisattvas?

The Buddha tells Mahāmati that there are two meanings in predicting that śrāvakas will become Buddhas. First, śrāvakas cling to a nirvāṇa with remainder as their own nirvāṇa. To urge them onward so that they realize nirvāṇa without remainder, the Buddha skillfully says that they will become Buddhas. Second, bodhisattva practitioners in this world and other worlds may, during their practice, become attached to the bliss of nirvāṇa for themselves and thereby fall partially into the Lesser Vehicle. To enable them to abandon the lesser and turn toward the great, and to realize nirvāṇa without remainder together, they are given predictions. These are predictions given to śrāvakas by transformation Buddhas, not predictions given by the Dharma Buddha. In other words, these are skillful predictions of the Buddha.

For this reason, the Tathāgata's predictions of śrāvakas are no different from his predictions of bodhisattvas.

[Mahāmati, "no different" means that śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and all Buddha-Tathāgatas are alike in the cessation of the affliction-obstacle and in the single flavor

of liberation; it does not mean that the obstacle to knowledge has been eliminated. Mahāmati, as for the obstacle to knowledge, seeing the non-self of dharmas is supremely pure. As for the affliction-obstacle, one first cultivates and sees the non-self of persons, thereby eliminating it; when the seventh consciousness ceases, one is liberated from the dharma-obstacle; when the latent habits in the consciousness-storehouse are eliminated, there is ultimate purity."]

"The obstacle to knowledge" is the cognitive obstacle. An "obstacle" is an afflictive obscuration that prevents accomplishment on the path. The affliction-obstacle and the cognitive obstacle correspond respectively to the afflictions of views and thought, and to the afflictions of ignorance. When the afflictions of views and thought are eliminated, the affliction-obstacle mentioned here is eliminated and one realizes the emptiness of the personal self. When the afflictions of ignorance are eliminated, the cognitive obstacle—the "dharma-obstacle"—is eliminated and one realizes the emptiness of dharmas.

Mahāmati, the sense in which śrāvakas and bodhisattvas are no different is that the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles, as well as all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, are the same in eliminating the affliction-obstacle and attaining liberation: all have eliminated the affliction-obstacles of the four abiding grounds and realized the emptiness of the personal self; hence it is said that liberation has a single flavor. But all Buddha-Tathāgatas completely eliminate the cognitive obstacle and further realize the emptiness of dharmas. The two vehicles, however, still retain attachment to dharmas and have not removed fundamental ignorance. Herein lies the difference between them. If they can further eliminate the cognitive obstacle of the dharmas of the abiding ground of ignorance and realize the non-self of dharmas, this is the most excellent purity.

"As for the affliction-obstacle, one first cultivates and sees the non-self of persons, thereby eliminating it; when the seventh consciousness ceases, one is liberated from the dharma-obstacle; when the latent habits in the consciousness-storehouse are eliminated, there is ultimate purity"—those who eliminate the affliction-obstacle first cultivate and realize the non-self of persons, and their perceptions and thoughts are thereby extinguished. Yet this is not true and complete extinction: attachment to dharmas remains, and habitual tendencies still abide within the eighth consciousness.

When fundamental ignorance is destroyed, the seventh manas consciousness transforms into the wisdom of equality; this is liberation through eliminating attachment to dharmas. If the subtle habitual tendencies are entirely removed, the eighth ālaya consciousness transforms into great perfect mirror wisdom: "The great perfection and freedom from defilement arise simultaneously," and it "universally

illumines the dust-mote lands of the ten directions.” One then realizes the ultimately pure Buddha-ground.

In fact, the “latent habits in the consciousness-storehouse” are simply the habit of taking what is false as true and clinging to it as real. Yet this habit is subtle and difficult to discern; it is neither wholesome nor unwholesome in character, and is therefore described as being stored in the eighth consciousness in the form of seeds. Because it is so subtle and difficult to discern, it can be thoroughly cleared away only by destroying ignorance and realizing the mind-ground.

This means that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, like Mahāyāna bodhisattvas, have eliminated the affliction-obstacle. But the cognitive obstacle of attachment to dharmas has not yet been eliminated, fundamental ignorance has not been destroyed, and therefore the habitual tendencies in the consciousness-storehouse cannot be completely removed.

[Because of the originally abiding dharma, before and after have no inherent nature.]

The “originally abiding dharma” means that what the Buddha points to is the truth of ultimate reality; it therefore abides eternally from the beginning, enduring through all ages. Since it originally abides eternally, it neither increases nor decreases. Before, there is no Buddhahood to attain; after, there is no nirvāṇa to enter; and in between, there is no Dharma to teach. Thus, “before and after have no inherent nature.” At this point, both before and after are cut off, and ordinary beings and sages alike fall away. If there is a Buddha to be attained, that is called slandering the Buddha; if there is a Dharma to be taught, that is called slandering the Dharma. This answers Mahāmati’s second and third questions:

“If none of the dharmas of all sentient beings enters nirvāṇa, who attains Buddhahood?”—Dharmas are originally thus; all sentient beings are originally quiescent and extinguished. Who, then, has ever attained Buddhahood?

“From the time of first attaining Buddhahood until parinirvāṇa, not a single word is spoken, nor is any question answered?”—Ultimate intrinsic nature is originally complete and free from the marks of speech. Therefore, although the Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-nine years, in truth he never taught any Dharma.

[Because of his inexhaustible original vows, the Tathāgata, without deliberation or examination, expounds the Dharma. Because he is transformed by right wisdom and does not forget his mindfulness, he is without deliberation or examination. Because the habitual tendencies of the four abiding grounds and the abiding ground of ignorance have been cut off, the two afflictions are ended; he is free from the two

kinds of birth and death, realizes the non-self of persons and dharmas, and has eliminated the two hindrances.]

Because of his inexhaustible original vows, the Tathāgata manifests responsive transformation bodies within the great quiescence of being without deliberation or examination, expounding the Dharma for sentient beings in accordance with their intrinsic nature.

The ultimate noble wisdom of self-awakening realized by the Tathāgata is not annihilation. At this very time, the wondrous functioning of the wisdom of subtle observation and the other wisdoms arises; nor does he forget the original vows made when he first aroused the resolve. Thus, the Tathāgata's "without deliberation or examination" is not like that of grasses and trees. He discerns all things: "Whatever kinds of minds sentient beings possess, the Tathāgata knows them all." This is what is meant by the Tathāgata's "without examination." In the state free of thought, he has unconditional great loving-kindness and great compassion sharing one substance with all beings; this is what is meant by the Tathāgata's "without deliberation."

The Tathāgata's "without deliberation or examination" means that he has long since eliminated the afflictions of the four abiding grounds and the habitual tendencies of the abiding ground of ignorance. Forever free from the two kinds of birth and death, he realizes the two kinds of non-self and utterly severs the two hindrances of affliction and knowledge.

This passage answers Mahāmati's fourth question: "Since the Tathāgata is always in samādhi, he is without deliberation and without examination. How does the transformation Buddha perform the Buddha's work?"—The Buddhas and Tathāgatas are without deliberation or examination and are ultimately quiescent; yet they precisely manifest outwardly the perfect fulfillment of the three awakenings and every wondrous skillful means.

[Mahāmati, the seven—mind, manas, consciousness, and eye-consciousness and the rest—arise from the causes of momentary habitual tendencies. When wholesome undefiled qualities are freed from them, there is no further revolving. Mahāmati, the tathāgatagarbha is the cause of the suffering and happiness of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Mahāmati, foolish ordinary beings cannot realize the confused notion of emptiness.]

The seven consciousnesses—mind, manas, consciousness, eye-consciousness, and the rest—continue to flow and revolve, arising and ceasing moment by moment. Their fundamental cause lies in the habitual tendencies of beginningless false conceptual attachment. Only through skillfully cultivating the unconditioned, undefiled Dharma can one utterly eliminate the habitual tendencies of ignorance

within the repository consciousness and cease revolving. Mahāmati, the tathāgatagarbha, the repository consciousness, contains all things and is the fundamental cause of both saṃsāra and liberation; all suffering and happiness arise from it. Therefore, to realize liberation, one must thoroughly realize that the tathāgatagarbha is originally pure. This principle is profound and cannot be known by foolish ordinary beings who fall into emptiness and confused thought.

This answers Mahāmati's fifth question: Why do the consciousnesses appear to undergo momentary successive change and decay, while not truly being momentary?—Intrinsic nature is originally luminous, but because it is permeated by deluded habitual tendencies of ignorance, the pure tathāgatagarbha is covered over by deluded consciousness. Thus one falsely perceives momentary change and eventually enters saṃsāra. Therefore, to realize liberation, one must thoroughly realize that the tathāgatagarbha is originally pure; this is liberation in the very present reality.

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, those guarded by vajra warriors are only transformation Buddhas, not true Tathāgatas. Mahāmati, true Tathāgatas are free from all measures of the faculties. The measures of all ordinary beings, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and non-Buddhist paths are wholly extinguished. They attain the blissful abiding in the present Dharma and, through uninterrupted dharma-wisdom and forbearance, are not guarded by vajra warriors. All transformation Buddhas are not born of karma. Transformation Buddhas created by transformation are not Buddhas, yet are not separate from Buddha. They teach the Dharma by means of appearances created by sentient beings, such as a potter's wheel; they do not expound the realm of self-awakening from their own realization.]

Mahāmati, when I say that vajra warriors constantly attend and guard, I mean that they attend and guard transformation-body Buddhas, not dharmakāya Buddhas. For dharmakāya Buddhas are free from all measures of the sense faculties and consciousnesses, and from the discriminating erroneous views of foolish ordinary beings, followers of the two vehicles, and non-Buddhist paths. The dharmakāya is great sovereign freedom and liberation, adorned with the four virtues of permanence, bliss, self, and purity. It possesses the uninterrupted and ultimate dharma-forbearance of omniscience; it is supreme beyond the world. No diminution or destruction can reach it, and no increase or praise can equal it. Therefore, it is not something that vajra warriors can guard.

Those guarded by vajra warriors are responsive transformation Buddhas. All transformation-body Buddhas are not born of karma. They arise in response to the minds of sentient beings through the fruit-virtue of the dharmakāya Buddha, which is free from slander and harm. Therefore, the Buddha's various expedient manifestations, though not true Buddhas, are not separate from the true Buddha. It

is like a potter making various vessels to contain things: although their forms differ, their clay does not change.

Transformation Buddhas are the same: they teach the Dharma expediently in accordance with what sentient beings are able to know. What they teach is not the ultimate realm of true reality that the Tathāgata expounds from the ground of his own realization; it is provisionally taught so that sentient beings may receive and understand it.

The foregoing answers Mahāmati Bodhisattva's sixth question: "Vajra warriors constantly attend and guard."

[Furthermore, Mahāmati, foolish people, relying on the cessation of the sevenfold consciousness-body, give rise to the annihilationist view. Because they do not realize the repository consciousness, they give rise to the eternalist view. Because of their own false imaginings, they do not know the original limit. When the wisdom of their own false imaginings ceases, there is liberation.]

Foolish ordinary beings see the seven consciousnesses continuously flowing and revolving, changing impermanently from moment to moment, and so believe that all dharmas are impermanent and will ultimately perish. This is the annihilationist view.

"Because they do not realize the repository consciousness, they give rise to the eternalist view"—ordinary beings do not know the essential nature of the repository consciousness upon which the sevenfold consciousness-body depends. The tathāgatagarbha, the repository consciousness, is originally pure and cannot be defiled; but, enveloped by ignorance, it is mistakenly understood as the repository consciousness. From this come birth and death in saṃsāra: collective karma manifests mountains, rivers, and the great earth, while individual karma brings forth the twelve classes of living beings. Non-Buddhists cannot awaken to this, and so separately establish a divine self or the four great elements as permanent, falsely imagining that all myriad dharmas arise from this permanent cause. This is the erroneous view of permanence.

"Because of their own false imaginings, they do not know the original limit. When the wisdom of their own false imaginings ceases, there is liberation."—Birth-and-death in saṃsāra, the eight consciousnesses, fundamental ignorance, and the rest are likewise illusory false imaginings. Foolish people give rise to all such discriminations arising from their own minds and cannot discern the original limit of birth and death as it truly is. Only through deep cultivation and realization, when wisdom opens fully, can one destroy the two views of annihilation and permanence and truly extinguish the erroneous views of false imagination and discrimination. Where false imagination suddenly ceases, there and then is liberation.

This answers the seventh question: Why is the original limit not established?—In truth, the “original limit” is the original ground of ultimate reality, which admits not the slightest speck of dust. This limit has neither beginning nor end and is not substantially existent. It is only through sentient beings’ discriminating false thoughts that birth and death, and an original source or limit for them, are seen as truly existent. Therefore, the Buddha does not establish and teach that there is a truly existent original limit of birth and death.

[Because the habitual tendencies of the four abiding grounds and the abiding ground of ignorance are cut off, all faults are ended.]

The Buddhas and Tathāgatas have utterly eliminated all afflictions and habitual tendencies of the four abiding grounds and the abiding ground of ignorance. Therefore, all wrongful and evil actions, together with their evil karmic results, are completely ended.

This answers the eighth question: “How does the Tathāgata attain the wisdom of all modes without being free from all faults?”—The Tathāgata has eliminated the habitual tendencies of the five abiding-ground afflictions, and thus all faults and evils have been ended. Having already departed from karmic causes, how could karmic results bind him? Therefore, the hardships of the Buddhas are nothing but manifestations, intended to warn foolish ordinary beings against committing evil and to show practitioners the workings of causes, conditions, and karmic results. That is all. As the Buddha said in the preceding passage: “All transformation Buddhas are not born of karma.” This expresses the same meaning.

[At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses: The three vehicles are not vehicles either; the Tathāgata is indestructible.]

The Dharma is originally dharma without a dharma. “The three vehicles are not vehicles either”: in the Buddhadharma, no three vehicles can truly be established, nor is there any dharma of nirvāṇa to be attained. The dharmakāya of the “Tathāgata” thus abides constantly and is indestructible, firm and pure, never diminishing.

[All that the Buddhas teach is taught to free beings from every fault and evil.]

All dharmas taught by the Buddhas are expedient means, intended to enable everyone to leave behind deluded thoughts and attachments, and to leave behind worldly afflictions, faults, and evils.

[For those of uninterrupted wisdom and of nirvāṇa without remainder, and to guide forward those of inferior capacity, this is why they teach in concealed terms.]

The reason I bestow such predictions is to enable śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas to advance in cultivating uninterrupted wisdom—that is, the inherently present fundamental wisdom—and to attain nirvāṇa without remainder. In order to guide those of lesser capacity onward and inspire them to diligent, courageous effort, I use expedient wisdom to predict and teach that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas will attain Buddhahood.

[The wisdom aroused by the Buddhas is precisely what discriminatively teaches the path. The various vehicles are not truly vehicles; nor is that nirvāṇa.]

With the noble wisdom of self-awakening, the Buddhas guide sentient beings provisionally in accordance with their minds and the scope of what they can know, leading them all to enter the Buddha's wisdom. In truth, the methods and paths of the various vehicles are expedient arrangements, not truly existent; nor is there any truly existent nirvāṇa of the Tathāgatas.

[Desire, form, existence, and views are called the four abiding grounds. They arise from consciousness; the abode of consciousness is where manas abides.]

"Desire, form, existence, and views are called the four abiding grounds"—the deluded views of the abiding ground of views in all places, together with the deluded thoughts of the abiding grounds of attachment to desire, attachment to form, and attachment to existence, are the afflictions of the four abiding grounds.

"They arise from consciousness; the abode of consciousness is where manas abides"—the "abode of consciousness," that upon which consciousness depends, refers to the eighth ālaya consciousness, the repository consciousness; "manas" refers to the manas consciousness. This means that the view- and thought-afflictions of the four abiding grounds are all deluded discriminations arising from the sixth consciousness. The arising and manifestation of these deluded discriminations originate in the seventh consciousness, the mind faculty.

The seventh consciousness, the mind faculty, mistakenly takes the perceiving aspect of the eighth consciousness to be a self. Consequently, false thoughts continue without cease and karma is created endlessly. The six consciousnesses and the seventh consciousness all depend upon the eighth ālaya consciousness. The eighth ālaya consciousness is the cause of good and evil and the fundamental basis of deluded thought and attachment; therefore, it is the "abode of consciousness," the repository consciousness.

Only by overturning the fundamental nest and dwelling place, and thoroughly transforming the repository consciousness into the pure tathāgatagarbha, does one attain the wisdom of the sages. Therefore, Chan Master Fengxue of the Linji school

said: “When not a single mote is established, home and country perish, and old rustics sing their songs.” This describes that ultimate realm of purity.

[Regarding manas, eye-consciousness, and the rest, they teach annihilation and call it impermanence; or they form a view of nirvāṇa and so teach permanence.]

Foolish ordinary people see the seven consciousnesses revolving and manifesting the illusory appearance of momentary destruction, and so say that all dharmas are impermanent and annihilated. Or they believe that some permanent divine self, the four great elements, or the like creates the world, and that recognizing and returning to the divine self and so forth is realization of permanent nirvāṇa. Establishing such various deluded views, they ultimately cannot know that the tathāgatagarbha, the repository consciousness, is originally pure, neither arising nor ceasing, neither permanent nor annihilated.

Summary of This Section:

In this section, Mahāmati poses eight successive questions, and the Buddha answers each one. The answers encompass the stages of practice from ordinary beings to the Buddha-ground. They not only closely address Mahāmati’s eight questions, but also summarize the entire Laṅkāvatāra and contain the essential import of the Buddhadharma:

1. The tathāgatagarbha is originally pure. Enveloped by ignorance, it becomes the eight consciousnesses, and thus the seven consciousnesses revolve in arising, ceasing, and transformation. Ordinary beings and non-Buddhist practitioners do not realize this, give rise to the two views of annihilation and permanence, and sink deeply into saṃsāra.

II. A moment is not a moment; the original limit has no original limit. If the consciousness of deluded thought ceases, that is liberation; one is pure in that very moment—this is sudden awakening.

III. If the habitual tendencies of the “four abodes” and the abode of ignorance are cut off, then all faults are cut off. This is gradual removal. Specifically, the gradual removal of afflictions and partial realization of bodhi proceed in the following stages:

1. Those who cut off the afflictions of the “four abodes” and realize the absence of a personal self are śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. Yet their habitual tendencies of the afflictions of the “abode of ignorance” have not been cut off, and their attachment to dharmas has not been eliminated.

2. Those who destroy the afflictions of the “abode of ignorance,” realize the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena, and enter the bodhisattva stages of the Mahāyāna.

3. Some may have reached the bodhisattva stages, yet their innate habitual tendency to cling to appearances remains strong. They therefore still need to press forward in one sustained effort, until the habitual tendencies stored in consciousness are utterly extinguished. Only then is there ultimate purity.

IV. Yet ultimately, there is originally neither defilement nor purity, neither sudden nor gradual, neither ordinary beings nor sages. This is because, in its suchness, it "originally abides," and "before and after are not its nature." This is the true reality of the Tathāgata's dharmakāya. Therefore, countless "transformation Buddhas" expound the true Dharma, manifest various deeds, and are attended and protected by vajra guardians. These are the manifestations of the Tathāgata's wondrous virtues at the ultimate stage.

At this point, Mahāmati's inquiry into the 108 meanings is nearing its end. The Buddha's answers have exhausted his doubts. Let us now return to Mahāmati's initial request in this sūtra:

The world is free of arising and ceasing, like flowers in empty space. Wisdom does not apprehend existence or nonexistence, yet gives rise to great compassion.

All dharmas are like illusions, far removed from mind and consciousness. Wisdom does not apprehend existence or nonexistence, yet gives rise to great compassion.

Free from annihilationism and eternalism, the world is ever like a dream. Wisdom does not apprehend existence or nonexistence, yet gives rise to great compassion.

Knowing that persons and dharmas are without self, and that afflictions and the knowable are empty, one is ever pure and without characteristics, yet gives rise to great compassion.

There is no nirvāṇa at all; there is no Buddha of nirvāṇa, nor is there a Buddha's nirvāṇa. Free from awakening and that which is awakened to, whether there is existence or nonexistence, both are entirely relinquished.

The Muni's serene contemplation is thus free from arising. This is called non-grasping; it purifies this life and future lives.

My name is Mahāmati, and I am well versed in the Mahāyāna. I now respectfully inquire of the Supreme Honored One concerning these 108 meanings.

This content precisely accords with the Buddha's answers in this section, and it also accords with the other thirty-nine sections.

Apart from the general exposition of the 108 statements, the remaining forty detailed expositions in this sūtra all begin with Mahāmati's questions. The World-

Honored One analyzes and refutes wrong views, sweeps away the two extremes, and then leads beings to ultimate reality as their destination. Thus we know that Mahāmati's inquiry, too, is a manifestation of the "transformation Buddha," intended to resolve the assembly's doubts. As for the "Dharma Buddha," in truth not a single dharma can be established, and in truth not a single word can be spoken. This is the Tathāgata, the World-Honored One, speaking to the assembly atop Laṅkā Mountain.

End of the Forty Detailed Expositions.

The final topic of this sūtra is Mahāmati's inquiry concerning the eating of meat. It is set out separately below as the "Circulation Section".

Section on Circulation

Abstaining from Alcohol, Meat, and Pungent Foods

At that time, Bodhisattva Mahāmati asked in verse: "How should those bodhisattvas who aspire to the Buddha Way regard wine, meat, and onions as food?"

"I only pray that the Unsurpassed Honored One, out of compassion, will explain this."

"These are what foolish people crave and cling to: foul and filthy things, devoid of any good repute, relished by tigers and wolves. How can they be eaten?"

"Eating them gives rise to many faults; abstaining from them brings blessings and goodness. I pray that you will explain to me the offenses and blessings of eating and not eating them."

The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra was taught by the Buddha in response to a question on "the summit of Mount Laṅkā by the southern seashore." The Tang translation begins with the Dharma question posed by the "ten-headed rākṣasa king" of Mount Laṅkā. Thus we know that Mount Laṅkā was inhabited by rākṣasas and yakṣas. Rākṣasas are by nature eaters of human beings. The Yiqie Jing Yinyi by Huilin records: "Rākṣasa means evil ghost."

"They eat human blood and flesh; some fly through the air, while others travel on the ground. Swift and fearsome, they inspire terror." At this point Mahāmati had exhausted all his unresolved questions, so the Tathāgata's teaching and answers to questions on Mount Laṅkā were also drawing to a close. At that time, the rākṣasas and yakṣas recalled that it was time to eat and wished to devour the flesh and blood of living people. At this critical moment, Mahāmati finally requested that the Tathāgata explain the evils of eating meat and the merits of abstaining from it:

Can those bodhisattvas who aspire to the unsurpassed Buddha Way consume wine, meat, and the five pungent roots, such as chives, garlic, and onions? May the World-Honored One have compassion and explain this for us.

Foolish people crave wine, meat, and onions; their foul stench is beyond description. These are what tigers and wolves delight in; how can one crave and eat them? Those who eat them give rise to many evils and faults; those who do not eat them gain blessings and foster goodness. May the World-Honored One explain to me the offenses and blessings respectively involved in eating and abstaining from meat and the five pungent roots.

After Bodhisattva Mahāmati had spoken these verses and asked his question, he again addressed the Buddha: “May the World-Honored One explain to us the merits of not eating meat and the evils and faults of eating it.”

“In the present and the future, the other bodhisattvas and I will distinguish and teach the Dharma to sentient beings who, for various reasons, desire to eat meat, causing them to turn toward one another with loving-kindness. Having attained loving-kindness, they will each become pure and clear in the stages in which they abide, swiftly attain ultimate unsurpassed bodhi, and, having ceased at the stages of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, will also attain unsurpassed bodhi. Even those of non-Buddhist paths who uphold evil and erroneous doctrines, clinging perversely to the false views of annihilation and eternalism, have prohibitions against eating meat. How much more so should the Tathāgata, the protector of the world, accomplished in the true Dharma, refrain from eating meat?”

Bodhisattva Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, please explain to us the merits of not eating meat and the evils and faults produced by eating it. Then, when the other bodhisattvas and I teach sentient beings now and in the future, we may transform those who greedily desire meat, leading them to turn toward goodness and give rise to great loving-kindness. Having cultivated loving-kindness, they will practice through each bodhisattva stage with purity and clarity and swiftly attain ultimate unsurpassed bodhi. Practitioners of the two vehicles, if they abstain from meat and cease killing, can immediately cease their inferior aspirations at their own stages and swiftly realize the ground of the Tathāgata.”

Those of non-Buddhist paths who uphold evil doctrines and erroneous theories, who maintain the false views of annihilation and eternalism and perversely cling to them, can nevertheless prohibit the eating of meat. How then could the Tathāgata, who brings sentient beings to accomplishment through the unsurpassed true Dharma, who is truly the protector of the three realms of the world and the compassionate father of the four kinds of birth, permit the eating of meat?

The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “Excellent, excellent! Listen carefully, listen carefully, and reflect well upon this. I shall explain it to you.” Mahāmati said to the Buddha: “Yes, World-Honored One, I accept your instruction.” The Buddha said to Mahāmati: “There are innumerable reasons why one should not eat meat. I shall now explain them briefly to you. Since beginningless time, all sentient beings have, through their successive causes and conditions, continually been one another’s six kinds of close relatives. Because they should be regarded as relatives, one should not eat meat.”

“Because butchers mix together and sell the meat of donkeys, mules, camels, foxes, dogs, cattle, horses, humans, and other beasts, one should not eat meat. Because it grows from impure substances, one should not eat meat. When sentient beings smell it, they all become frightened. Just as dogs, upon seeing caṇḍālas and hunters, hate them, are startled, and bark together, so one should not eat meat. Moreover, because it prevents practitioners from giving rise to loving-kindness, one should not eat meat.”

“Because it is what ordinary foolish people crave, is foul and impure, and has no good repute, one should not eat meat. Because it prevents various mantric practices from being accomplished, one should not eat meat. Because killers, seeing a creature’s form, give rise to discriminating consciousness and become deeply attached to its taste, one should not eat meat. Because those who eat meat are abandoned by the devas, one should not eat meat. Because it makes the breath foul, one should not eat meat. Because it brings many evil dreams, one should not eat meat.”

“Because tigers and wolves in secluded forests smell it, one should not eat meat. Because it causes one’s eating and drinking to become immoderate, one should not eat meat. Because it prevents practitioners from giving rise to revulsion and renunciation, one should not eat meat. I have always said that, whatever one eats, one should regard it as the flesh of one’s children and as medicine. Therefore, one should not eat meat. There can be no valid basis for permitting the eating of meat!”

“Because it grows from impure substances, one should not eat meat”: the Tang translation renders this sentence as, “All flesh is formed from the impurity of semen and blood. How can one who seeks purity consume it?”

“Caṇḍāla”: that is, a butcher.

“Tāṃpā”: a hunter.

The World-Honored One said to Bodhisattva Mahāmati: There are many reasons why one should not eat meat. I shall now explain them briefly to you:

Since beginningless time, all sentient beings have passed continuously through birth and death, revolving without rest through successive causes and conditions, and have mutually been parents, siblings, spouses, children, and the other six kinds of close relatives. Therefore, upon seeing the flesh of sentient beings, one should think: They are one's own flesh and blood; blood is thicker than water. Thus one should not eat their flesh.

Those who sell meat, seeking profit, traffic in the flesh of donkeys, mules, camels, foxes, dogs, horses, and cattle; they even mix in human flesh for sale. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

All meat consists of semen, blood, and foul odors; it is produced through impure sexual conduct. Thus eating meat can increase one's own impure and lustful thoughts. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

Moreover, meat is produced through slaughter. When animals smell the killing odor of meat-eaters, they are all terrified. For example, when dogs see butchers and hunters, they leap about in alarm and bark together. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

Eating meat causes practitioners to lose their compassionate minds. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

Eating meat is the conduct of foolish people. After eating it, one's body becomes filthy and foul-smelling, and one will ultimately gain neither good repute nor prestige. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

If practitioners eat meat, the various mantric practices they cultivate cannot be accomplished. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

When meat-eaters see the forms of sentient beings, they give rise to discrimination, imagining whether their flesh is fat or lean, fine or poor. Deeply trapped in attachment to taste, they give rise to thoughts of killing. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

Those who eat meat are abandoned by devas and humans. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

Those who eat meat constantly have a foul odor in their mouths. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

Those who eat meat develop increasingly strong thoughts of killing. Their sleep is restless; in dreams they often see all manner of evil things, and upon waking they are sorrowful and afraid. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

In open mountains and forests, the odor of meat-eaters attracts tigers and wolves. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

Eating meat leads to immoderate eating and drinking and increases illness. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

Eating meat prevents practitioners from giving rise to revulsion and renunciation. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

I have always said that, whatever one eats, one should regard it as the flesh and bones of one's children and as medicine. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

On the basis of the above fifteen causes and conditions, there can be no valid basis for eating meat.

"Furthermore, Mahāmati, in the past there was a king named Siṃhasaudāsa. He ate every kind of meat and eventually came to eat human flesh. His ministers and people could no longer endure it, so they plotted rebellion and cut off his provisions. Because eating meat entails such faults, one should not eat meat."

Mahāmati, in the past there was a king named Siṃhasaudāsa. He ate every kind of meat and eventually progressed to eating human flesh. His ministers and people truly could not endure it, so they indignantly plotted rebellion and cut off his stipend. Eating meat has so many faults; therefore, one should not eat meat.

Earlier, the World-Honored One explained the various faults of eating meat. Here he gives an example of its immediate karmic retribution.

"Furthermore, Mahāmati, all those who kill do so to gain wealth and profit, slaughtering and selling sentient beings. Those foolish sentient beings who eat meat use money as a net to catch flesh. Those killers use either wealth or hooks and nets to seize sentient beings that move through the air, water, and land; they kill them in various ways, slaughter them, and sell them for profit. Mahāmati, there can be no fish or meat unless someone instructs, seeks, or thinks of it. For this reason, one should not eat meat."

Mahāmati, all those who kill sentient beings do so in order to obtain wealth and profit through slaughtering and selling their flesh. Although meat-eaters may not personally capture and kill living beings, they use money to buy meat to eat; this is equivalent to using money as a net to catch the flesh of various sentient beings. These two kinds of people use either wealth or hooks and nets to capture sentient beings that fly in the air, swim in the water, and walk upon the land, employing every means to slaughter them and sell them for profit.

If no one instructs others to kill, seeks meat, or thinks of eating meat, there will be no fish or meat to eat. To think of meat or seek meat is equivalent to instructing others to kill and encouraging them to kill; thus one also incurs the karma of killing. For these reasons, one should not eat meat.

“Mahāmati, at times I have spoken of prohibiting five kinds of meat, or of forbidding ten kinds. But in this sūtra, all kinds of meat, at all times, are entirely prohibited without exception or expedient allowance.”

“Prohibit” corresponds to “permit.” The precepts commonly speak of “permission, prohibition, observance, and transgression.” “Permission” means allowance, while “prohibition” means restraint. The fifth passage of the first fascicle of the Zichi Ji states: “Prohibition is restriction; where there is no restriction, that is permission.”

“Prohibiting five kinds of meat” means meat not seen to have been killed, not heard to have been killed, and not suspected of having been killed for oneself; meat from animals that died naturally—that is, birds or beasts whose lives ended of themselves; and remnants of birds or beasts eaten by raptors such as hawks and kites. The first three are also called the three kinds of pure meat.

“Or forbidding ten kinds” means absolutely prohibiting the consumption of the flesh of humans, snakes, elephants, horses, dragons, foxes, pigs, dogs, lions, and monkeys.

Mahāmati, at times I have said that five kinds of meat are prohibited, or that ten kinds are forbidden, with the prohibition imposed gradually. But in this sūtra I say: regardless of the kind of sentient being or the circumstances, no expedient allowance is made for eating meat. All flesh should be renounced.

[Mahāmati, the Tathāgata, Worthy One, and Perfectly Awakened One does not partake of any food at all—how much less fish and meat! Nor does he teach others to do so. Since great compassion comes first, he regards all sentient beings as though they were his only child. Therefore, he does not permit the eating of a child’s flesh.]

Mahāmati, the Tathāgata, the Perfectly Awakened One, partakes of no food at all—how much less such impure things as fish and meat? Nor could the Tathāgata possibly incite others to eat fish and meat. The Tathāgata appears in the world out of great compassion in order to save the multitudes who are deluded. He views all sentient beings as though they were his only child: all are his closest kin, and all are equal. How, then, could the Tathāgata teach his disciples to eat meat? For to eat meat is the same as eating one’s child.

This concludes the preceding discussion: the Tathāgata has great compassion based on shared identity, and the Buddha's children should likewise do so. If one eats the flesh of sentient beings, one is eating the flesh of one's own children, just as one would be eating one's own flesh. Therefore, one should not eat meat.

[At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:]

All have once been our relatives; flesh is base, foul, and impure. It grows from impurity, and at its smell all beings are terrified.

All meat, onions, chives, garlic, and the like, together with the various intoxicating wines that lead to heedlessness, should always be avoided by practitioners.]

All sentient beings have revolved through countless kalpas, each becoming the relatives of the others. Meat is filthy and base, produced through impure sexual conduct. After one eats meat, sentient beings with spiritual awareness smell it and flee in terror. Therefore, practitioners should not eat any meat or the five pungent plants, such as onions, garlic, and chives, but should keep far away from them.

Here the World-Honored One restates the causes and conditions for abstaining from meat. Not only meat, but also the five pungent plants—such as chives, garlic, and onions—and wine should be avoided. When cooked, these five pungent plants arouse sexual desire; when raw, they arouse anger. All of them obstruct the mind of great compassion. Wine, moreover, easily causes one to lose one's mind and discernment and commit many errors.

[One should also always avoid sesame oil and all beds with holes, for the tiny insects within them are greatly terrified.]

"One should also always avoid sesame oil": In ancient India, when people made sesame oil, they first allowed insects to breed in the sesame seeds and then pressed the insects together with the seeds to produce the oil. Only in this way, they believed, would the oil be rich and fragrant. Therefore, sesame oil should not be consumed either.

"And all beds with holes": If a bed has crevices or holes, insects often gather there. Practitioners should not sit or lie on such beds, because these tiny insects become frightened when people sit or lie down on them.

[Food and drink give rise to heedlessness; heedlessness gives rise to various thoughts. From thoughts arises craving; therefore, one should not consume them.

From eating arises craving; craving intoxicates the mind. Intoxication increases desire and attachment, and one is not liberated from birth and death.]

Drinking wine and craving meat make one heedless. Once heedlessness arises, deluded thoughts and wrong views arise; once thoughts have become distorted, craving arises and intoxicates the mind. Intoxication then increases desire and attachment; desire and attachment bind one another, and one repeatedly undergoes birth and death without attaining liberation.

Thus, the roots of desire that perpetuate birth and death are all supported by the auxiliary conditions of eating meat, the five pungent plants, and intoxicating food and drink that lead to heedlessness. Therefore, if one wishes to cut away one's true nature, one must first remove these auxiliary conditions—by refraining from wine, meat, and the five pungent plants, such as onions, garlic, and chives.

[Some kill sentient beings for profit; others use money to obtain their meat. Both are evil karma, and after death they fall into the Hell of Wailing.]

Those who kill do so for financial gain, while those who crave the taste of meat use money as a net to capture and kill sentient beings. In fact, both commit the same evil karma, and their karmic retribution is to fall into the Hell of Wailing. It is called the "Hell of Wailing" because killing and eating meat cause the victimized sentient beings to cry out in terror; thus, these two kinds of people bring about the fruition of falling into the Hell of Wailing after death.

[If there were no urging, imagining, or seeking, there would be no threefold pure meat. Such meat does not exist without causes; therefore, one should not eat it.

For this reason, all practitioners should keep far away from it. The World-Honored Buddhas of the ten directions all rebuke it.]

If no one urges the eating of meat, thinks of eating meat, or craves and seeks meat, then there will be no threefold pure meat or fivefold pure meat in the world. Meat does not arise without causes. It is supplied because there is demand for it. Therefore, one should not eat it and thereby aid evil.

For this reason, all practitioners should keep far away from meat and the pungent foods. All Buddhas of the ten directions likewise rebuke those who eat meat and pungent foods.

[They eat one another in turn; after death they fall among tigers and wolves. Foul and loathsome, they are born ever foolish.

They are often born among caṇḍālas, hunters, and Tāmbaras; or as ḍākinīs and other meat-eating beings, such as rākṣasas, cats, and civets. They are born everywhere among such kinds.]

"Ḍākinīs" here refers to female rākṣasas.

Because their habit of killing does not perish and their karmic debts remain unsettled, meat eaters revolve again and again through rebirth, devouring one another life after life. After death, they fall among tigers, wolves, cats, and civets, foul and repulsive. The forms of birth they bring about are also often those of foolish people: they may be born as butchers or hunters, fall among evil female rākṣasas, or be reborn as meat-eating species such as tigers, wolves, cats, and civets. These are the karmic retributions of eating meat.

[In the Sūtra of Binding the Elephant, the Great Cloud Sūtra, the Aṅgulimāla Sūtra, and this Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, I have prohibited the eating of meat.]

"Binding the Elephant," "Great Cloud," and "Aṅgulimāla" are all names of sūtras. "Binding the Elephant" refers to the Sūtra of Binding the Elephant; "Great Cloud" refers to the Great Cloud Sūtra, also called the Mahāvaipulya Sūtra of Non-Thought; and "Aṅgulimāla" refers to the Aṅgulimāla Sūtra.

In the Sūtra of Binding the Elephant, the Great Cloud Sūtra, the Aṅgulimāla Sūtra, and this Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, the Buddha teaches that eating meat should be abandoned.

[All Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and śrāvakas rebuke it. Having eaten it without shame or remorse, one is born life after life in perpetual ignorance and darkness.]

All Buddhas and bodhisattvas, śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas—all sages and worthies—rebuke the practice of eating meat. Most meat eaters feel no shame or remorse and do not recognize the killing involved. Because of these causes and conditions, they bring about the karmic retribution of being foolish and benighted through many lives.

[I previously spoke of meat not seen, heard, or suspected, yet this already rejects all meat. Because of deluded thoughts and lack of awareness, places where meat is eaten arise.

Just as the faults of craving obstruct the holy liberation, wine, meat, onions, chives, and garlic all obstruct the noble path.]

The Buddha previously spoke of the threefold pure meat—meat not seen, heard, or suspected. Those of keen faculties should understand that this amounts to saying that all meat should be abandoned. Ordinary, foolish people are covered by deluded thoughts; confused and unaware, they persist in eating meat. Therefore, after death, they also are born in places where meat is eaten, harming and devouring one another and binding one another in turn.

Therefore, eating meat, like craving, obstructs liberation. The five pungent plants and heedless drinking likewise all obstruct the realization of sagehood.

[Sentient beings in future ages will foolishly speak of meat, saying, “This is pure and blameless; the Buddha permits us to eat it.” Regard food as medicine, and also as the flesh of one’s own child. Be content, give rise to revulsion and dispassion, and practice by going on alms rounds.]

Sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age, deluded into eating meat, say that it is threefold pure meat and that eating it is blameless, claiming that the Buddhas permit them to eat meat. This is foolish talk. Originally, the precepts of the Hīnayāna did not prohibit bhikṣus from eating certain kinds of pure meat; however, Mahāyāna sūtras such as the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Brahmā Net Sūtra, and Nirvāṇa Sūtra all say that meat should not be eaten. As the fourth fascicle of the Nirvāṇa Sūtra says: “Good man, those who eat meat cut off the seed of great compassion.” Kāśyapa further asked, “Why did the Tathāgata formerly permit bhikṣus to eat the three kinds of pure meat?” The Tathāgata replied, “Kāśyapa, these three kinds of pure meat were gradually prohibited according to circumstances.”

The Buddha teaches his disciples that, with regard to all food and drink, they should contemplate it as medicine and also regard it as the flesh of their own children. If even pure food is to be regarded in this way, how could eating meat possibly be permitted?

All sentient beings are originally complete; what could they lack? Therefore, practitioners and śramaṇas should take the joy of the Dharma as their food, neither seeking worldly honor nor longing for worldly pleasures. Their daily lives should be simple and plain, adapting to conditions and abiding within their means. Monastic bhikṣus need only eat what they receive through alms.

[Those who abide in loving-kindness, I say, always renounce such things. Even tigers, wolves, and other fierce beasts may always roam and dwell with them.]

I have always said that those who do not eat meat abide in loving-kindness and renounce all kinds of evil conduct, such as killing and eating meat. Thus even tigers, wolves, and fierce beasts may roam and dwell with them without fear.

In ancient times there was Chan Master Hualin Shanjue. When Pei Xiu, the regional inspector, came to visit, he asked, “Do you have any attendants?” The master replied, “I have one or two, but they cannot receive guests.” Pei asked, “Where are they?” The master then called out, “Great Emptiness! Little Emptiness!” At that moment, two old tigers emerged from behind the hermitage. Pei was startled and frightened when he saw them. The master said to the two tigers, “We have a guest; go away for now.”

The two tigers roared and departed. Pei asked, “What practice has the master performed to bring about such a result?” After a long silence, the master said, “Do

you understand?" Pei replied, "I do not." The master said, "This mountain monk constantly keeps Avalokiteśvara in mind."

[If one eats flesh and blood, all sentient beings are terrified. Therefore, practitioners should not eat meat, but abide in loving-kindness.

Those who eat meat lack compassion and forever turn away from true liberation; they also violate the dignified forms of the sages. Therefore, they should not eat it.]

If one eats flesh and blood, all sentient beings who see it become terrified. For this reason, practitioners should all refrain from eating meat out of compassion.

If meat eaters lack compassion, they will forever turn away from the true path of liberation and violate the dignified forms that exemplify the Dharma of the sages. Therefore, meat should not be eaten.

[One may be born among pure brahmins, in places of practice, or in wealthy and wise families: this comes from not eating meat.]

If one does not eat meat, one may be born among pure brahmins, in places conducive to practice, or in wealthy and wise families.

All of this results from the merit and virtue of not eating meat.

(End of the complete text)

Selected Essentials from the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra

Preface

The Lankāvatāra Sūtra employs archaic language, subtle wording, and profound meaning. To facilitate study, several fellow practitioners have made a brief selection of excerpts from the sūtra, hoping that those without time to read it in full may, through these extracts, gain some glimpse of the profundity and breadth of the Laṅkāvatāra. It is also hoped that those studying this sūtra will grasp its meaning well, seize its essential point directly, and soon uncover the Laṅkāvatāra treasury within their own minds.

It should be noted that, because these are selected excerpts, taking passages out of context is unavoidable. Therefore, the original sūtra should remain the basis for interpreting particular sentences; these extracts are for reference only. As it is said: "A bright mirror, water, and clear eyes; a wondrous maṇi jewel. Within them all colors appear, yet in truth nothing is there."

Lianming, a student of the Mind-Seal school, respectfully joins palms and offers this general preface

The Six Accomplishments That Establish Faith

The world is free from arising and ceasing, like flowers in empty space. Wisdom finds neither existence nor nonexistence, yet gives rise to great compassion.

All dharmas are like illusions, far removed from mind and consciousness. Wisdom finds neither existence nor nonexistence, yet gives rise to great compassion.

Free from annihilationism and eternalism, the world is ever like a dream. Wisdom finds neither existence nor nonexistence, yet gives rise to great compassion.

Knowing that persons and dharmas are without self, and that afflictions and their fuel are ever pure and without marks, one gives rise to great compassion.

There is no nirvāṇa, no Buddha who attains nirvāṇa, and no nirvāṇa of a Buddha. Free from awakening and what is awakened to, from existence and nonexistence—these two are both abandoned.

Main Doctrinal Section

Forty Distinct Explanations

1. The Arising and Ceasing of the Consciousnesses

The Buddha-ground is unborn and reaches the sacred realm of self-awakening; the self-mind is at ease and reaches the practice beyond deliberate cultivation.

2. The Realm of the Storehouse Consciousness

Blue, red, and all mixed colors—
No waves exist at all.

The mind that gathers karmic seeds
Enables ordinary beings to awaken.

If one speaks of what is real,
That mind has no reality.

It is like ocean waves,
Images in a mirror, and dreams.

It is like a master painter
And the painter’s apprentices.

They spread colors and paint manifold forms;
What I teach is likewise.

Colors themselves have no patterns;
They are neither brush nor canvas.

To delight sentient beings,
They adorn images in variegated colors.

Words are differently employed,
But reality is free from names.

Discrimination accords with beginners;
Practice reveals reality.

At the place of self-awakened reality,
Awakening, thought, and the object of awakening fall away.

The ultimate characteristics of the sacred wisdom of self-awakening are these: one does not conceptually cling to the marks of any dharma; one attains the illusory samādhi-body; and one gives rise to progressive practice toward the stages of the Buddhas. Mahāmati, these are called the three characteristics of sacred wisdom.

3. Deluded Conceptions of Existence and Nonexistence

They decisively relinquish the five dharmas and the three natures, and the dharmakāya and wisdom of all Tathāgatas are well adorned by themselves.

4. Sudden and Gradual Purification of the Stream

All kinds of unreality are like illusions; all kinds of conceptual attachment are unobtainable.

The Dharma Buddha is free from the characteristics of mind and intrinsic nature.

Moreover, the Dharma Buddha is free from grasping at conditions. When such grasping ceases, all marks of faculties, measures, and activities cease.

5. Eternally Inconceivable

Furthermore, Mahāmati, all dharmas are unborn. This is what the Tathāgatas of the past, future, and present have taught.

Mahāmati, this is for those at the initial stage of cultivation. It is provisionally established through the distinction of spiritual capacities in order to lead them beyond into the stage of nothing whatsoever.

The three vehicles and the one vehicle—
I do not teach them as vehicles.
Foolish people have little wisdom;
The sages are far removed from quiescence.

The gate of Dharma of the highest truth
Is far removed from the two teachings.
Abiding in nothing whatsoever,
Why establish three vehicles?

As for the icchantika bodhisattva: having known that all wholesome dharmas are originally parinirvāṇa, such a one ultimately does not enter parinirvāṇa.

How is intrinsic nature realized? It is the realm attained by sacred wisdom and traversed by the sacred wisdom of self-awakening, free from deluded thoughts of names, marks, things, and characteristics.

6. Establishment and Slander

Establishment and slander are the deluded thoughts of ordinary people.

That is to say, all dharmas are like illusions and dreams, like light and shadow, like the moon in water.

With regard to all dharmas, one is free from arising and ceasing, annihilationism and eternalism, and from the dharmas of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas; one attains hundreds of thousands of samādhis, even hundreds of thousands of millions of nayutas of samādhis.

7. Emptiness, Unarisen Nature, and Intrinsic Nature

I always teach the Dharma of emptiness,
Free from annihilationism and eternalism.
Foolish people give rise to deluded thoughts;
The sages are free from existence and nonexistence.

Mahāmati, emptiness, non-arising, nonduality, and freedom from the marks of intrinsic nature pervade all the sūtras of the Buddhas. Every sūtra teaches this meaning. Yet the sūtras distinguish and reveal their meanings in accordance with the hopes and aspirations of sentient beings; reality does not reside in words.

The dharmas taught in all sūtras are taught to delight foolish people. Sacred wisdom does not truly reside in words. Therefore, rely on the meaning and do not cling to words.

8. The Nature of the Tathāgatagarbha

Mahāmati, at times I speak of emptiness, signlessness, wishlessness, suchness, dharma-nature, dharmakāya, nirvāṇa, freedom from intrinsic nature, neither arising nor ceasing, original quiescence, and intrinsic-nature nirvāṇa. Having spoken such expressions of the tathāgatagarbha, the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One speaks of the gate of the tathāgatagarbha—the realm free from deluded thought and without anything whatsoever—in order to remove the fear that foolish people have of the teaching of no-self. Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas of the future and present should not conceive of it with attachment to a self.

The Tathāgata is likewise free from the self of dharmas and from all marks of deluded thought. By various wisdoms, skillful means, he may speak of the tathāgatagarbha or of no-self. For this reason, his teaching of the tathāgatagarbha differs from the self taught by non-Buddhist paths; this is called teaching the tathāgatagarbha. To guide non-Buddhists who conceive of a self, he teaches the tathāgatagarbha so that they may leave behind deluded thoughts arising from the unreal view of self, enter the realm of the three gates of liberation, and swiftly attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening. Therefore, the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One teaches in this way: the treasury of the Tathāgata. If he did not teach in this way, it would be the same as the self taught by non-Buddhist paths.

9. The Practice of the Four Great Elements

Abiding on the eighth bhūmi of the bodhisattva, one attains freedom from mind, mentation, consciousness, the five dharmas, the three natures, and the two kinds of no-self, and attains the mind-born body.

10. Causes and Conditions of All Dharmas

Mahāmati, things do not arise either gradually or simultaneously. Except for deluded thought that fails to recognize manifestations of one’s own mind, appearances arise. Therefore, with respect to causal conditions, activity, and the marks of expedient means, one should abandon views of gradual and simultaneous arising.

The conditions for true non-arising
Likewise contain no cessation.

Contemplate all conditioned things
As like flowers in empty space.

What apprehends and what is apprehended—
Abandon confused and deluded views of them.

There is neither what has arisen nor what will arise,
Nor are there causes and conditions.

Nothing whatsoever exists;
All this is merely speech.

11. Discrimination Through Speech

What speech enters into is the highest truth; speech itself is not the highest truth. The highest truth is attained through the self-awakening of sacred wisdom; it is not a realm apprehended by deluded thought through speech. Therefore, deluded thoughts based on speech do not reveal the highest truth.

Therefore, Mahāmati, one should leave behind all deluded marks associated with speech.

The various natures have no intrinsic nature,
And neither is there speech.

The profound meaning of emptiness within emptiness
Cannot be understood by foolish people.

The intrinsic nature of all natures,
And the dharmas of speech, are like shadows.

The children of sacred wisdom of self-awakening—
This is what I call ultimate reality.

12. Freedom from the Four Propositions

Free from deluded thoughts of individual and shared marks, one enters the first and true meaning.

Entering in accord with the characteristics of the Tathāgata-ground, one is beyond deliberate cultivation and original vows.

Mahāmati, if one speaks of the individual and shared marks of those natures and intrinsic natures, all such teachings are spoken by transformation Buddhas, not by the Dharma Buddha.

Mahāmati, the transformations of mind, mentation, consciousness, and body cease; the deluded thoughts of what apprehends and what is apprehended, manifested by one’s own mind, are cut off. This is the sacred wisdom of self-awakening at the Tathāgata-ground.

Mahāmati, therefore, those who wish to attain the reality of sacred wisdom of self-awakening should leave behind the deluded thoughts of wrong views concerning arising, abiding, and ceasing; sameness and difference; simultaneous and non-simultaneous; existence and nonexistence; neither existence nor nonexistence; permanence and impermanence; and so forth.

A bright mirror, water, and clear eyes;
A wondrous maṇi jewel.

Within them all colors appear,
Yet in truth nothing is there.

All natures appear
Like painted images or shimmering heat-haze.

Manifold colors appear,
Yet, like a dream, nothing is there.

13. Mahāparinirvāṇa

The nirvāṇa of all Buddhas and my nirvāṇa are realms in which intrinsic nature and things are empty.

Mahāmati, nirvāṇa neither decays nor dies.

Furthermore, Mahāmati, nirvāṇa is neither abandonment nor attainment, neither annihilation nor permanence, neither of one meaning nor of manifold meanings. This is called nirvāṇa.

14. Discerning Dependent Arising

Like the horns of a rabbit in empty space, and the son of a barren woman.

Though nonexistent, they are spoken of;
Such are deluded conceptions of natures.

Regarding dharmas arising from the union of causes and conditions,
Ordinary, foolish people give rise to deluded thoughts.

Unable to know things as they truly are,
They wander in the house of the three realms.

15. Permanence, Sound, and Dependence on Illusion

Mahāmati, whatever is asserted to exist is falsely spoken by foolish people; it is not the speech of the sages.

Without illusion, there would be no analogy. The dharma-nature is said to be like an illusion because it is unreal and fleeting as lightning.

The distinctions made by perfect awakening have no attainable intrinsic nature. Because they are free from speech, they are said to be free from intrinsic nature.

16. Distinctions Among the Four Fruits

Furthermore, Mahāmati, those who wish to transcend the dhyānas, the immeasurables, and the formless realms should leave behind the marks perceived as manifestations of their own minds.

Mahāmati, the sages' various illusory forms and images are free from designations of difference and non-difference.

The storehouse consciousness, through grasping at conditions, manifests the realms of one's own mind. Attachment to the arising of the aggregate of mind becomes mutually causal in succession. It is like ocean waves: stirred by the wind of realms manifested by one's own mind, they arise and cease. So it is here as well. Therefore, when consciousness ceases, the seven consciousnesses also cease.

You and the other great bodhisattvas should not become attached to such notions as illusion, dependent arising, the self-nature of deluded thought, difference and non-difference, existence and nonexistence.

When the mind is bound to objects, awareness, ideation, and wisdom follow its turning. From nonexistence and excellence, the wisdom of equality arises.

Awakened wisdom observes well: without conditions, there is no deluded thought. Once it is accomplished, it has no nature; how then could deluded thought awaken?

17. The One Vehicle of Noble Wisdom

The vehicles of the devas and Brahmā, the vehicles of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

the vehicle of all Buddhas, the Tathāgata vehicle—I speak of all these vehicles.

So long as the mind continues to turn, these vehicles are not ultimate.

When that mind is completely extinguished, there is no vehicle and no rider of a vehicle.

Where no vehicle is established, I call it the One Vehicle.

18. Characteristics of the Mind-Made Body

Knowing that the objects manifested by one's own mind are neither existent nor nonexistent is called the mind-made body that enjoys the right experience of samādhi.

Because one thoroughly understands the dharma of self-nature, this is called the mind-made body awakened to the nature of dharmas.

Awakening to the characteristics of the joy personally attained through the conditions of all Buddha-dharmas is called the mind-made body, innate in its various kinds and free from deliberate activity.

It is not the vehicle of self, not the Great Vehicle; it is neither teaching nor words.

It is neither truth nor liberation, yet it is not without an object-realm.

Yet it is the Mahāyāna vehicle, sovereign in samādhi.

19. The Five Uninterrupted Karmas

If men or women commit the five uninterrupted karmas, they do not enter the Avīci hell.

To cut off the two roots is called killing one's father and mother.

To cut off all dharmas utterly is called killing an arhat.

To utterly cut off the aggregation and accumulation of the variously characterized aggregates is called causing schism in the saṅgha.

To utterly cut off the Buddha of the seven kinds of consciousness is called maliciously drawing blood from the Buddha's body.

If men or women commit these uninterrupted acts, they are called the five uninterrupted deeds, also called uninterrupted karma.

20. The Essential Nature of All Buddhas

To awaken to the selflessness of persons and dharmas, fully understand the two obscurations, transcend the two kinds of birth and death, and cut off the two afflictions—this is called the Buddha's knowledge and awakening. If śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas attain this dharma, they too are called Buddhas.

21. The Four Equalities of Hidden Intent

The Buddha said to Mahāmati: "Because of the four equalities, the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Awakened One proclaims before a great assembly: 'At that time I was the

Buddha Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and Kāśyapa.’ What are the four equalities? They are equality of letters, equality of speech, equality of dharmas, and equality of bodies. These are called the four equalities. Because of these four equalities, one is a Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Awakened One.”

What is equality of letters? If a letter names me “Buddha,” that same letter also names all Buddhas. The self-nature of that letter has no distinction; this is called equality of letters.

What is equality of speech? It means that the marks of my speech arise in the sixty-four kinds of Brahmā voice; likewise, the speech of those Tathāgatas, Arhats, Perfectly Awakened Ones arises in the sixty-four kinds of Brahmā voice, neither increased nor diminished, without distinction—the nature of the Brahmā voice of the kalaviṅka bird.

What is equality of bodies? There is no difference between my Dharma body and form body, with their marks and excellent characteristics, and those of all Buddhas. Only in order to tame sentient beings of the various destinies do they manifest various differentiated form bodies. This is called equality of bodies.

What is equality of dharmas? It means that both I and those Buddhas attain the thirty-seven factors of awakening. In brief, the Buddha-dharma is unobstructed wisdom. These are called the four equalities.

22. Relying on the Two Hidden Teachings

From the night when I attained the most perfect awakening until the night when I entered parinirvāṇa, during all that interval I did not speak a single word; nor had I spoken, nor would I speak. Not speaking—this is the Buddha’s teaching.

23. Dharma Is Beyond Existence and Nonexistence

Existence and nonexistence are the two extremes, extending even to the realm of mind.

When that realm is purified away, the equal mind is quiescent.

Without grasping the nature of object-realms, cessation is not nonexistence.

All phenomena are suchness, like the realm of noble ones.

Conditioned existence and nonexistence do not abide in my teaching.

It is neither non-Buddhist nor Buddha, neither self nor other.

If one knows that nothing arises, then nothing ceases.

Contemplate all this as empty and quiescent, free from both existence and nonexistence.

24. Direct Realization and Verbal Teaching

Direct realization means that practitioners, through the superior and progressive characteristics personally attained, are free from the deluded thoughts of speech and letters; they enter the realm of the undefiled, the characteristics of the ground of self-awakened realization; they are free from all false awareness and ideation, subdue all non-Buddhists and māras, and, through the course of self-awakening, radiate luminosity. This is the characteristic of direct realization.

The one is ultimate truth; freedom from fault is nirvāṇa.

Observe worldly deluded thoughts: they are like illusion, dreams, and banana trees.

Though greed, anger, and ignorance appear, in truth there is no person.

From craving arise all the aggregates; whatever exists is like illusion and dreams.

25. False Discrimination

Contemplate all conditioned dharmas, free from grasping and from objects grasped.

The measure of a mind without mind—I call this mind-measure.

Suchness and the realm of space, nirvāṇa and the dharma realm.

the various mind-made bodies—I call these mind-measure.

26. Skill in Words and Meanings

All dharmas are without self-nature; purity and defilement are both absent.

They are not real as they are seen, nor are they nonexistent.

Attachment to self-nature arises from the various śrāvakas.

Transcending all mind-measures, the Tathāgata’s wisdom is pure.

27. Liberation from Deluded Attachment

Mahāmati, I abide in the emptiness of suchness personally attained. Free from the confused appearances of views, free from views of existence and nonexistence as manifested by one’s own mind, I attain the three liberations, sealed by the seal of suchness. Abiding in observation through self-awakened realization of the nature of

self-nature, I am free from views and appearances of the affairs of existence and nonexistence.

The noble ones' vision is pure; the samādhi of the three liberations arises. Free from arising and ceasing, they roam in nonexistence. Cultivating nonexistence, they are also free from nature and no-nature. The equality of nature and no-nature gives rise to the noble fruition.

28. Wisdom Does Not Obtain an Object

Direct realization means that practitioners are free from the various deluded thoughts manifested by their own minds; that is, they do not fall into the categories of one, different, both, or neither. They transcend all mind, intellect, and consciousness, enter the realm of noble self-awakening, and are free from views and appearances of causal production.

I speak of two kinds of realization: direct realization and verbal teaching. Verbal teaching is given to beginners; direct realization is for practitioners.

29. Do Not Study Worldly Treatises

Only my one direct realization is free from action and what is done. For the sake of my disciples, I teach freedom from all worldly treatises.

30. Distinctions of Nirvāṇa

Mahāmati, the nirvāṇa of which I speak is skillfully awakening to what is manifested by one's own mind, not clinging to external natures, being free from the four propositions, and seeing the place of suchness.

It does not fall into the two extremes of deluded thought manifested by one's own mind; neither the grasping nor the grasped can be obtained.

The higher and higher grounds, the Tathāgata ground, and profound samādhis such as shadow and illusion, free from mind, intellect, and consciousness, are called nirvāṇa.

Sūtra after sūtra speaks of deluded thought, yet it never goes beyond names.

If speech is abandoned, there is also nothing to be spoken.

31. The Awakened Nature of the Tathāgata

All dharmas are thus empty, unborn, and without self-nature. Know them in this way.

Because they are neither one nor different, neither both nor not both, they are wholly beyond all measures. Being beyond all measures, there is no speech. Where there is no speech, there is no arising; where there is no arising, there is no ceasing; where there is no ceasing, there is quiescence; quiescence is self-nature nirvāṇa. Self-nature nirvāṇa has neither affairs nor causes; where there are neither affairs nor causes, there is no grasping; where there is no grasping, one transcends all falsity. To transcend all falsity is to be the Tathāgata. The Tathāgata is the Samyaksaṃbuddha.

A Samyaksaṃbuddha is a Buddha who is free from all measures of the faculties.

32. Neither Arising nor Ceasing

In this and other worlds, all know me to be like the moon in water, neither emerging nor entering.

We Buddhas and all bodhisattvas do not utter a single word and do not answer a single word. Why? Because dharma is beyond letters.

Mahāmati, in all dharmas there is nothing whatsoever; awaken to what is manifested by your own mind and be free from the two deluded thoughts.

Suchness is without difference. Suchness bears the mark of neither coming nor going. When all falsity ceases, this is called suchness.

All natures are without self-nature, yet not without self-nature. Simply awaken to what is manifested by your own mind; when deluded thought does not arise, there is peace and happiness, and worldly affairs cease forever.

Mahāmati, nirvāṇa is seeing the true meaning as it is, free from the former deluded dharmas of mind and mental factors, and attaining the noble wisdom of the Tathāgata’s self-awakening. This I call nirvāṇa.

The nature of existence and nonexistence does not arise; it is neither existent nor nonexistent.

Apart from their numerical transformations, all these are unobtainable.

33. Distinguishing Impermanence

All non-Buddhist paths maintain seven kinds of impermanence; these are not my teaching.

Mahāmati, the arising of my teaching is neither permanent nor impermanent. Why? Because external natures are indeterminate. I speak only of the subtle mind of the three realms of existence; I do not teach that the various appearances have arising

and ceasing. Because the four great elements combine, there are differentiated four great elements and derived forms; these are the two affairs of deluded thought, grasping and the grasped. Knowing the two kinds of deluded thought, one is free from the two views of external nature and no nature, and awakens to what is manifested by one's own mind.

Free from deluded thoughts concerning the nature and no-nature of mind, all worldly, supramundane, and supremely supramundane dharmas are neither permanent nor impermanent.

34. Direct Realization upon Entering Extinction

Bodhisattvas are sustained by the awakening of samādhi; therefore, delighting in the gate of samādhi, they do not enter parinirvāṇa.

Mahāmati, in truth there is neither arising nor ceasing, apart from what is manifested by one's own mind. This refers to the successive stages of the grounds and the various practices of the three realms, which ordinary beings do not perceive. What ordinary beings do not perceive is that I and all Buddhas teach the successive stages of the grounds and the various practices of the three realms.

Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, at the eighth bodhisattva bhūmi, become intoxicated by the bliss of the samādhi of cessation. They are not adept at the measure of what is manifested by their own minds; obstructed by habitual tendencies concerning self and common characteristics, they fall into the view of the selflessness of persons and dharmas as something apprehended through doctrine. They mistakenly conceive of nirvāṇa; this is not the awakening of wisdom in quiescent extinction.

Mahāmati, with regard to ultimate truth, there is no teaching of successive stages, nor is there any dharma of the cessation of deluded thoughts as something existent.

The measure of mind contains nothing at all; this abiding, the Buddha-ground, and past, future, and present are taught by the Buddhas of the three times.

Whether transforming the present three existences or transformations from an earlier time, and expounding the vehicles to them, all are the ground of the Tathāgata.

35. The Meaning of Permanence and Impermanence

The wisdom attained by the Tathāgata is imbued with prajñā; it is not imbued with mind, intellect, consciousness, or the aggregates, elements, sense bases, and fields belonging to them. Mahāmati, all the three existences arise from unreal deluded thoughts. The Tathāgata does not arise from unreal and false deluded thoughts.

Nonduality is quiescence, because all dharmas have no dual characteristic of arising. Therefore, the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One is neither permanent nor impermanent.

If the assembled constituents were meaningless, the error of arising as permanent or impermanent would follow.

If there is nondiscriminating awakening, one is forever free from permanence and impermanence.

From the tenets one establishes arise many confused meanings.

Contemplate equally the measure of your own mind: verbal expression cannot be obtained.

36. The Arising and Ceasing of the Aggregates and Sense Bases

The treasury of the Tathāgata is the cause of good and evil, capable of bringing forth births in all destinies, like a performer who manifests the various destinies, free from self and what belongs to self.

(The treasury of the Tathāgata) is free from the error of impermanence, free from theories of self; its intrinsic nature is undefiled and ultimately pure.

Those who seek further progress should purify the treasury of the Tathāgata and the designation “storehouse consciousness.”

The profound treasury of the Tathāgata is together with the seven consciousnesses; from twofold appropriation arises. The wise keep far from it.

Like images appearing in a mirror, mind is imbued with beginningless habitual tendencies. For those who observe reality as it is, all phenomena are entirely without reality.

37. The Distinctions Among the Four Dharmas

Mahāmati, in right wisdom, names and characteristics cannot be obtained, like a passing traveler. The consciousnesses neither arise nor cease, nor are they permanent; one does not fall into the ground of any non-Buddhist path, śrāvaka, or pratyekabuddha. Moreover, Mahāmati, bodhisattva mahāsattvas, by means of this right wisdom, do not establish names and characteristics—yet this is not merely not establishing names and characteristics.

To abandon the establishment and denial of the two views, and to know that names and characteristics do not arise, is called suchness.

Mahāmati, right wisdom and suchness cannot be destroyed; therefore, they are called the perfected nature.

Those names and those characteristics ultimately cannot be obtained. From beginning to end there is no awakening; among dharmas there is no mutual succession. Free from unreal deluded thoughts, this is called suchness.

The true, certain, ultimate intrinsic nature cannot be obtained; this is the characteristic of suchness. It is the domain entered in accordance with by me and all Buddhas. For the sake of sentient beings, we expound it truthfully, establish and reveal it to them, and lead them into perfect awakening. It neither ceases nor is permanent; deluded thoughts do not arise. It accords with the sacred domain of self-awakening and is a characteristic unattainable by all non-Buddhists, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas. This is called right wisdom.

38. Buddhas Are Like the Sands of the Ganges

The realm of sacred wisdom realized by oneself admits of no comparison. The true Tathāgata transcends the characteristics perceived by mind, intellect, and consciousness and cannot be compared to anything. Mahāmati, yet when I compare Buddhas to the sands of the Ganges, there is no fault in doing so.

The Tathāgata does not follow the currents of transmigration. Going signifies destruction. Mahāmati, the beginning of birth and death is unknowable; since it is unknowable, how can one speak of going?

Because one does not recognize the deluded thoughts manifested by one’s own mind, deluded thoughts arise. If one recognizes them, they cease.

39. All Dharmas Are Momentary

Undefiled habitual tendencies are not momentary and are not perceived by ordinary foolish beings.

The supreme supramundane pāramitās consist in awakening to the appropriating measure of deluded thoughts manifested by one’s own mind and to the duality of one’s own mind. Thus, deluded thoughts do not arise; one does not partake in the appropriations of the various destinies, nor become attached to the forms and appearances of one’s own mind. For the peace and happiness of all sentient beings, the pāramitā of giving arises, along with supreme skillful means.

Not giving rise to deluded thoughts with respect to those conditions is the pāramitā of śīla.

That nonarising of deluded thoughts is the pāramitā of kṣānti; knowing the grasper and the grasped is the pāramitā of kṣānti.

Diligently applying skillful means through the first, middle, and last watches of the night, practicing in accordance with skillful means so that deluded thoughts do not arise, is the pāramitā of vīrya.

When deluded thoughts are entirely extinguished and one does not fall into the appropriation of śrāvaka nirvāṇa, this is the pāramitā of dhyāna.

Observing with wisdom that the deluded thoughts of one's own mind have no intrinsic nature, one does not fall into either extreme. One's former body is transformed into something superior and indestructible, and one attains the sacred domain of self-awakening. This is the pāramitā of prajñā.

40. The Transformations of the Tathāgata

The true Tathāgata is free from all measures of the faculties. The measures of the faculties of all ordinary beings, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and non-Buddhists are entirely extinguished, and he attains the blissful abiding in the present dharma. Because of the forbearance arising from immediate dharma-wisdom, he is not protected by vajra guardians.

The three vehicles are also not a vehicle; the Tathāgata is not destroyed.

All that the Buddhas teach is taught in order to leave behind all faults and evils.
Dissemination Section

Prohibition of Alcohol, Meat, and Pungent Foods

Mahāmati, the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Awakened One has nothing to eat; how much less would he eat fish or meat? Nor does he teach others to do so. Because great compassion comes first, he regards all sentient beings as if they were his only child. Therefore, he does not permit them to eat the flesh of his children.

Postscript to the Revised Edition

The first half of Probing the Mysteries of the Mind's Entry into the Laṅkāvatāra was written principally by Teacher Qi. Beginning with the latter half of Section Sixteen, the work was written section by section by several Dharma brothers of the Mind-Seal school, as follows: latter half of Section Sixteen: Hongxue; Section Seventeen: Lianzi; Section Eighteen: Feixue; Sections Nineteen–Twenty-Six: Lianzi; Sections Twenty-Seven–Thirty: Feixue; Sections Thirty-One–Thirty-Five: Lianzi; Sections Thirty-

Six–Thirty-Seven: Dong; Sections Thirty-Eight–Thirty-Nine: Zhong; Section Forty through the Dissemination Section: Chen.

The work was finally edited and completed by Lianzi. During its compilation, we also received assistance from Jingren, Chuyun, Xuebing, Yue, Junbo, Longmin, Kaijie, Xufeng, Qingping, Weixin, Su, Qin, and many other Dharma brothers—too numerous to list. We extend our special thanks to them all.

This revised edition strives for accessible language and precise principles, so that it may be clearer and easier to understand. We hope that fellow practitioners will generously offer their guidance, so that it may be further improved. Contact email: 450319023@qq.com.

A student of the Mind-Seal school, Home of the Mind-Seal Materials Group

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