**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 8**

**CHAPTER 2**

**The Form Skandha**

G2 Detailed analysis of the characteristics of the demons of the five skandhas.  
H1 The characteristics of the demons of the form skandha.  
I1 Overview from beginning to end.  
J1 Initial cultivation does not break though the skandhas' boundaries.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, you should know that as a cultivator sits in the Bodhimanda, he is doing away with all thoughts. When his thoughts come to an end, there will be nothing on his mind. This state of pure clarity will stay the same whether in movement or stillness, in remembrance or forgetfulness.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, you should know that as a cultivator sits in the Bodhimanda, he is doing away with all thoughts. Ananda, you should know that you are simply cultivating the skill of turning back your hearing to listen to your inherent nature. In that way you obliterate all thoughts. When his thoughts come to an end, there will be nothing on his mind. This state of pure clarity, this wisdom and samadhi-power, will stay the same whether in movement or stillness, in remembrance or forgetfulness. Your mind does not change whether you are moving or still. Whether you are mindful or absent-minded, your state is the same. It is non-dual.  
 **Sutra:  
  
When he dwells in this place and enters samadhi, he is like a person with clear vision who finds himself in total darkness. Although his nature is wonderfully pure, his mind is not yet illuminated. This is the region of the form skandha.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
When he dwells in this place and enters samadhi. Ananda! when he cultivates samadhi power and resides in a state of purity that remains the same whether he is moving or still, mindful or forgetful, he is like a person with clear vision who finds himself in total darkness. He is like a person with good eyes who is living in a dark house. Although his nature is wonderfully pure, his mind is not yet illuminated. Although his nature is pure, bright, and wondrous, his mind has not yet attained the light of genuine wisdom. This is the region of the form skandha.  
  
J2 Ultimately it breaks up and reveals its false source.  
 **Sutra:  
  
If his eyes become clear, he will then experience the ten directions as an open expanse, and the darkness will be gone. This is the end of the form skandha. He will then be able to transcend the turbidity of kalpas. Contemplating the cause of the form skandha, one sees that false thoughts of solidity are its source.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
If his eyes become clear, he will then experience the ten directions as an open expanse, and the darkness will be gone. What is this state called? This is the end of the form skandha. Of the five skandhas: form, feeling, thinking, formations, and consciousness, the form skandha is gone. He will then be able to transcend the turbidity of kalpas. Contemplating the cause of the form skandha, one sees that false thoughts of solidity are its source. When the person goes beyond the turbidity of kalpas, his actions will be based on false thoughts of solidity.  
  
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Disciple: When the form skandha comes to an end, this person can then transcend the turbidity of kalpas. Contemplating the cause of the form skandha, he sees that false thoughts of solidity are its source.  
  
Venerable Master: He still has false thoughts. They are "solid" because he is too deeply attached to that state.

Disciple: Are false thoughts of solidity the source of the form skandha?  
  
Venerable Master: That's how it is when he reaches that state. It is not a matter of whether or not something is the source. There's no way to get to the root of it. This is all false. Form, feeling, thinking, formations, and consciousness are all like this. "The five skandhas, like floating clouds, emptily come and go. The three poisons, like air bubbles in water, rise and disappear." They are unreal. Every state is false.  
  
Disciple: It's just like a dream; you can't make any sense out of dreams.  
  
Venerable Master: Yes, "In a dream, the six destinies clearly exist. After awakening, everything is empty and the universe is gone."  
  
I2 The ten states within this region.  
J1 His body can transcend obstructions.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, at this point, as the person intently investigates that wondrous brightness, the four elements will no longer function together, and soon the body will be able to transcend obstructions. This state is called 'the pure brightness merging into the environment.' It is a temporary state in the course of cultivation and does not indicate sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
We are now discussing the demons associated with the five skandhas: form, feeling, thinking, formations, and consciousness. There are ten kinds of demons for each of the skandhas, making a total of fifty. Cultivators should have a clear understanding of these fifty types of demons. If you are not dear about these states, you could easily end up in the demon king's retinue, and you won't even know how you got there. That's why you have to be especially careful.  
  
Ananda, at this point, as the person intently investigates that wondrous brightness. When the form skandha is about to end, he experiences the ten directions opening up and perceives a kind of brightness. As he investigates that state of subtle wonder and brightness, the four elements will no longer function together, and soon the body will be able to transcend obstructions. The four elements will cease to function (normally), and very soon after that the body will become free of obstructions, just like empty space. This is known as the "body produced by intent." It is another body that can leave the physical body. Earlier I mentioned my disciple who went to the heavens in his dharma body, which is also the "body produced by intent." The intent refers to the mind, one of the six sense faculties. Such a body, being a creation of the mind, is able to transcend obstructions.  
  
This state is called "the pure brightness merging into the environment." The pure light flows into the surrounding environment.  
  
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Disciple: "This state is called the pure brightness merging into the environment." How is this sentence explained?  
  
Venerable Master: This means that the person is too smart. He has false intelligence and worldly wisdom. He's simply too clever!  
  
Disciple: What does "the environment" refer to?  
  
Venerable Master: It refers to the state mentioned earlier.  
  
Disciple: Is it the state that occurs when he is working at cultivation? Venerable Master: It's simply the state he attained previously. It is a temporary state in the course of cultivation. This kind of skill is temporary; it will not last. It is different from being able to come and go wherever you please. With that kind of complete freedom, one can:  
  
Let it go, and it fills the six directions;  
Roll it up, and it secretly hides away.  
  
If one lets it go, it fills the universe. And yet one can gather it back in at any time. If you cannot do this whenever you want, then yours is only a temporary skill. It's a state that you may encounter when you reach a certain level in your cultivation. However, this state is temporary. You won't always have a body that transcends obstructions.  
  
And so it does not indicate sagehood. You have not reached the fruition of a sage. This isn't what it's like when a sage realizes the fruition.  
  
If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. That is, you don't say, "Oh, I truly have some skill in my cultivation! I can actually send a body out through the top of my head!" If you become arrogant like that, what happens? It's all over for you. However, if you don't interpret this state as proof that you have attained to sagehood, then this state is no great hindrance; there is nothing particularly wrong with it. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence. You might say, "Oh! My skill is extraordinary. I'm fantastic! I am a sage who has transcended the world! I'm an Arhat!" If you think that way, the demons will descend upon you. Once the demons come, you are headed for a fall into the hells.  
  
J2 Internally the light pervades and he can extract intestinal worms.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, Ananda, as the person uses his mind to intently investigate that wondrous light, the light will pervade his body. Suddenly he will be able extract intestinal worms from his own body, yet his body will remain intact and unharmed. This state is called "the pure light surging through one's physical body." It is a temporary state in the course of intense practice, and does not indicate sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is the second demonic state of the form skandha. These demonic states are brought about by your vigorous effort in cultivation. If you were not working hard, you could not attract such demonic states even if you wanted to. The demons would pay no attention to you. In their eyes, you would be just another poor person, and they would obtain no advantage in coming after you. But now since you've been cultivating, you've amassed some treasures, and that's what the demons are after.  
  
What should you do when they come? You have to remain in a state of unmoving suchness and clear understanding. Do not become attached to appearances. Have no attachments at all. Do not think, "What a fine state! I'd like to experience it again!" Don't welcome it, and don't reject it. Just act as if nothing were happening. If you do not consider yourself a sage, then it is a good state. But if you think you are a sage, and you say, "Wow! I'm incredible! I can pull parasites out of my body," if you decide you've obtained spiritual powers and self-mastery, then you've made a mistake. With that one thought of arrogance, the demons come. Riding on that thought of arrogance, they bore into your mind and take over. They manipulate you until you have no samadhi power left.  
  
Therefore, you have to truly understand the principles of cultivation! Only then can you keep from falling into a trap or going down the wrong road. If you don't understand the Buddhadharma, it is very easy to go astray. There is no problem if you do not have any real skill. But when you gain some skill, the demon kings will have their eyes on you every moment, and the first opportunity they see, they will come to disturb you.  
  
Further, Ananda, as the person uses his mind to intently investigate that wondrous brightness, the light will pervade his body. If you persist in your cultivation, you will eventually be able to see everything inside your own body. It's one thing if you are always able to see like that; but if you only have this ability once in a while, then it is merely a state of the form skandha.  
  
Suddenly he will be able to extract intestinal worms from his own body, yet his body will remain intact and unharmed. In this state, suddenly you can pull worms out of your own abdomen. There are long worms and short ones, big ones and small ones. You can just reach your hand in and pluck them out. The extracted worms are real, and yet there is no injury to the abdomen. How do you suppose they came out? If you reach your hand into the abdomen to pull out the worms, the abdomen should be injured, but there is no rupture at all. "His body will remain intact" could be explained in two ways. One way would be to change the translation to read "their bodies will remain intact" and say that the worms' bodies are still intact, not in the least damaged; they are whole and complete, alive and healthy. You could also say that your own abdomen is intact and uninjured.  
  
This state is called "the pure light surging through one's physical body." An extremely pure and brilliant light penetrates your body. You do not actually put your hand in the abdomen and pluck the worms out they issue forth of themselves. It is a temporary state in the course of intense practice and does not indicate sagehood. This state is not something that happens all the time. If this were a perpetual state, the situation would be different. This is not the state of a sage.  
  
If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. It is fine; it won't cause any great trouble. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence. If you say, "I've attained sagehood. I can take things out of my stomach. Isn't it wonderful? You don't have such a state." If you become arrogant and attached to your state, you are in for trouble. You will be dragged off by the demon king to become part of his retinue.  
  
J3 His essence and souls alternately separate and unite.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, as the person uses his mind to intently investigate inside and outside, his physical and spiritual souls, intellect, will, essence, and spirit will be able to interact with one another without affecting his body. They will take turns as host and guests. Then he may suddenly hear the dharma being spoken in space, or perhaps he will hear esoteric truths being pronounced simultaneously throughout the ten directions. This state is called 'the essence and souls alternately separating and uniting, and the planting of good seeds.' It is a temporary state and does not indicate sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, as the person uses his mind to intently investigate the wondrous brightness inside and outside, striving to exceed excellence, incessantly trying to refine that process, his spiritual and physical souls undergo a change. There are three spiritual and seven physical souls residing in the human body. I have mentioned these ten "brothers" before. Some of them have only ears or only eyes. Some have merely a nose, but no lips, eyes, or ears. Each of them possesses only one sense organ and lacks the other five, so they cannot function on their own. They must work cooperatively as a team. Those with ears help out those lacking ears; those with eyes help out those lacking eyes. They depend on and help one another.  
  
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Venerable Master: Our three souls and seven spirits are like children. But they each have only one sense faculty, not many. Because they control our bodies, we are able to speak and perform actions. They are gathered together, and when your cultivation is accomplished, they become what is known as a Buddha in Buddhism or an immortal in Taoism. Some have only eyes and some have only ears, so they help each other. The child who has ears and can hear will help the one who can see. They are interconnected.  
  
So when you achieve the interchangeable functioning of the six sense faculties, your ears will be able to eat and talk. There are many states such as these that you cannot even conceive of.  
  
Disciple: Venerable Master, you mentioned that you had a young disciple who went to the heavens to play and was captured by a demon king. He cried, "What can I do? I can't come back!" Did some of his souls and spirits go there?  
  
Venerable Master: Among his three souls and seven spirits, maybe only one went, or maybe two went, or maybe three or four went. It's not for sure. Once they got there, they aggregated together. They were not seven or three separate entities. Once they go out, they unite into one. That's how wonderful and mysterious it is. It's a mass of efficacious energy!  
  
Disciple: Is it because of different levels of cultivation that some people can send out more spirits than others?  
  
Venerable Master: It's better not to send spirits out. If they always go out to play, they risk being caught by the demons. When the souls and spirits are captured, one becomes dumb. Retarded people and people who are that way because their souls and spirits have been seized by demons. Souls are ghosts, but with some cultivation, they can become spirits, which are yang in nature. With more cultivation, they can become immortals. Cultivated to the ultimate, they become Buddhas. All these states of cultivation are achieved by the same individual soul.  
  
Disciple: If a person is in a "vegetable," or comatose, state or has lost some of his three souls and seven spirits, although his physical body is still intact, will the spirits and souls which have left him become another person?  
  
Venerable Master: They don't become another person; they simply go with the demons. That's why the person is sometimes lucid, but sometimes very muddled.  
  
Disciple: What if a cultivator who has sent out some of his three souls and seven spirits encounters Buddhas or Bodhisattvas?  
  
Venerable Master: If a person is truly cultivating, there will be dharma protectors invisibly surrounding him. I have met a lot of strange people who can send spirits out of their bodies. Since you haven't encountered such states, you wouldn't recognize or understand them. For instance, the experience of those who act as mediums in Taiwan is described in the fifty skandha-demon states.  
  
Disciple: Have they reached that level in their cultivation?  
  
Venerable Master: They are advancing in their cultivation and creating merit. Like all people, some learn to be good and others learn to be bad. Those who learn to be bad join the retinue of the demon kings.  
  
These ten souls, together with the intellect, will, essence, and spirit will be able to interact with one another without affecting his body. They will take turns as host and guests. They trade off roles and assist each other. They take turns playing the roles of the host and the guests.  
  
Then he may suddenly hear the dharma being spoken in space. Someone is lecturing on the sutras in space! Who is it? He can hear a voice, but he can't see the person. In fact it is just his own spiritual and physical souls, his intellect will, essence and spirit taking turns as host and guests to lecture. Or perhaps he will hear esoteric truths being pronounced simultaneously throughout the ten directions. Maybe you hear the sutras and the dharma being spoken in space! Why? Because in your cultivation in previous lives, you heard the sutras and the dharma being spoken, and your spiritual and physical souls, intellect will, essence and spirit have not forgotten that. Thus, in this life, when the pressure in your cultivation reaches a peak, these past experiences come forth. This state is called "the essence and souls alternately separating and uniting and the planting of good seeds." They cooperate with one another, coming together as one party or forming groups. They may speak the dharma to enable you to understand what you didn't understand before, so that you can plant the seeds for future good roots.  
  
It is a temporary, not a permanent, state and does not indicate sagehood. Don't get the idea that this state is extraordinary and say, "Look at me. I don't need to go to the sutra lectures. I can hear the dharma being spoken in space anytime I want." You may hear dharma being spoken, but that doesn't mean you have realized sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, if you don't become arrogant and think yourself extraordinary, if you don't try to deceive others, then this will be a good state. Suppose you say, "Wow! I can hear the dharma even when no one is lecturing the sutras. Has that ever happened to you?"  
  
"No."  
  
"Well, it's happened to me!"  
  
But if you advertise your state to get people to believe in you, what will happen? If he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence. As soon as you become selfsatisfied and attached, thinking you're really great, the demons will possess you and make you fall.  
  
J4 The state changes and Buddhas appear.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, when the person's mind becomes clear, unveiled, bright, and penetrating, an internal light will shine forth and turn everything in the ten directions into the color of Jambu River gold. All the various species of beings will be transformed into Tathagatas. Suddenly he will see Vairochana Buddha seated upon a platform of celestial light, surrounded by a thousand Buddhas, who simultaneously appear upon lotus blossoms in a hundred million lands. This state is called 'the mind and soul being instilled with spiritual awareness.' When he has investigated to the point of clarity, the light of his mind will shine upon all worlds. This is a temporary state and does not indicate sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, when the person's mind becomes clear and pure, unveiled and manifest, bright, and penetrating, an internal light will shine forth, and turn everything in the ten directions into the color of Jambu River gold. A bright light will emanate from within, and then the worlds of the ten directions will all take on the hue of Jambu River gold. All the various species of beings, beings born from wombs, from eggs, from moisture, or by transformation, or any other kinds of beings, will be transformed into Tathagatas.  
  
Suddenly, at this point, he will see Vairochana Buddha. Vairochana means "pervading everywhere" and is the name of the Buddha. He is not located anywhere, and yet there is no place where he is not present; his body is everywhere. This person suddenly sees Vairochana, the All-Pervasive Buddha, seated on a platform of celestial light, manifesting his ten-thousand-foot-tall body. Vairochana Buddha will be surrounded by a thousand Buddhas, who simultaneously appear seated upon blue, yellow, red, and white lotus blossoms in a hundred million lands.  
  
This state is called "the mind and soul being instilled with spiritual awareness." You should not think that this is real. Your mind and your physical soul are being influenced by a state of spiritual response and awakening. However, it is not real. When he has investigated to the point of clarity, the light of his mind will shine upon all worlds. When your mind comes to the point of understanding, it will illuminate all worlds.  
  
This is a temporary state and does not indicate sagehood. What is happening will not last a long time. You have not become a sage. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence. If you say, "Incredible! I've seen Vairochana Buddha. Have you seen him? Your skill is not as profound as mine. I've made it!" Once you have such a thought the demon kings will come and drag you off to the hells.

5 Space takes on the color of precious things.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, as the person uses his mind to intently investigate that wondrous light, he will contemplate without pause, restraining and subduing his mind so that it does not go to extremes. Suddenly the space in the ten directions may take on the colors of the seven precious things or the colors of a hundred precious things, which simultaneously pervade everywhere without hindering one another. The blues, yellows, reds, and whites will each be clearly apparent. This state is called 'excessively subduing the mind.' It is a temporary state and does not indicate sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, as the person uses his mind to intently investigate that wondrous light he will contemplate without pause, restraining and subduing his mind so that it does not go to extremes. He tries to curb his mind so that it does not become overzealous.  
  
Suddenly the space in the ten directions may take on the colors of the seven precious things, or the colors of a hundred precious things, which will simultaneously pervade everywhere throughout space without hindering one another. They will be mutually unobstructing.  
  
The blues, yellows, reds, and whites, the various colors, will each be clearly apparent. Each will display its own color. This state is called "excessively subduing the mind." You are cultivating to restrain your mind, not letting it engage in false thinking, not allowing it to have random thoughts. After the restraint occurs for a long time, it becomes excessive. You go beyond the proper measure. It is a temporary state and does not indicate sagehood. You will only temporarily be able to see the colors of the seven precious things in space, so this state does not mean you have attained sagehood.  
  
If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. It will be all right; it will not be a bad state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence. You will be surrounded by deviant influences, and you will fall.  
  
J6 He can see things in the dark.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, as the person uses his mind to investigate with clear discernment until the pure light no longer disperses, he will suddenly be able to see various things appear in a dark room at night, just as if it were daytime, while the objects that were already in the room do not disappear. This state is called 'refining the mind and purifying the vision until one is able to see in the dark.' It is a temporary state and does not indicate sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, as the person uses his mind to investigate with clear discernment until the pure light no longer disperses. Again, this person uses his mind in samadhi to observe states, until the pure light of his discerning mind becomes very focused and he is endowed with samadhi power. He will suddenly be able to see various things appear in a dark room in a house which is not lighted at night, just as if it were daytime, while the objects that were already in the room do not disappear. Not only will he be able to see things that are inside the house, he will also be able to see things that are outside the house. Not only will he see what is already in the house, he will also see, with great clarity, the things that come into the house from outside.  
  
This state is called "refining the mind and purifying the vision until one is able to see in the dark." Your mind is refined to the utmost extent and your vision is purified to the extreme point. With such pure vision, you will be able to see even in dark places. But it is a temporary state and does not indicate sagehood. You shouldn't think that this is the fruition of sagehood, because it certainly isn't!  
  
If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence. If you become conceited and think that you have achieved great skill in cultivation, you will attract demonic obstructions.  
  
When some cultivators reach the state of ultimate purity and allpervading light, they will suddenly see all kinds of things. That is because they have opened the Buddha eye. However, not every person is able to open his Buddha eye, and even if one does, it may not stay open forever. In the state described here, the Buddha eye opens temporarily, enabling one to see the objects in a dark house as if there were light. I also mentioned that you would be able to see things coming to the house from outside. What sort of things might these be? For example, you might see a spirit, a ghost, a Bodhisattva, or a Buddha coming into the dark house from outside. It's not for certain that you will experience these states.  
  
Not everyone experiences such states, but some people might. These are states that may occur at some point in your cultivation. But don't think that all cultivators go through the same experiences, because that's not the case.  
  
Some people open the Buddha eye permanently. That is known as "a spiritual power that comes as a reward." Such people industriously cultivated the dharma of the thousand hands and thousand eyes in previous lives, and as a result, they can open the Buddha eye in life after life. Other people may only be able to open the Buddha eye temporarily, because their minds are not in a perpetual state of purity. If their minds were constantly pure, and they had cultivated the dharma of great compassion in their previous lives, they would be able to open the Buddha eye permanently. There are a variety of differing circumstances in cultivation.  
  
J7 His body becomes like grass or wood.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, when his mind completely merges with emptiness, his four limbs will suddenly become like grass or wood, devoid of sensation even when burned by fire or cut with a knife. The burning of fire will not make his limbs hot and even when his flesh is cut, it will be like wood being whittled. This state is called 'the merging of external states and the blending of the four elements into a uniform substance.' It is a temporary state and does not indicate sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, when his mind completely merges with emptiness, you may say that the mind exists, yet it doesn't you may say it doesn't exist, yet it does. His four limbs will suddenly become like grass or wood, devoid of sensation even when burned by fire or cut with a knife. If you cut his arms or legs with a knife or burn them with fire, he will not feel any pain or discomfort. The burning of fire will not make his limbs hot. When you try to burn them, they won't even become hot. And even when his flesh is cut, it will be like wood being whittled. If you slice off the flesh from his arms and legs, it will be just like shaving wood. He will feel no pain or irritation.  
  
This state is called "the merging of external states and the blending of the four elements into a uniform substance." Defiled external states will come together, and the natures of earth, water, fire, and air will become a single substance. However, it is a temporary state, an occasional experience, and does not indicate sagehood. Do not think you have realized sagehood.  
  
If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage and becomes selfsatisfied and haughty, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence. You will be attacked and surrounded by hordes of deviant beings.  
  
J8 He can see everywhere without obstruction.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, when his mind accomplishes such purity that his skill in purifying the mind has reached its ultimate, he will suddenly see the earth, the mountains, and the rivers in the ten directions turn into Buddhalands replete with the seven precious things, their light shining everywhere. He will also see Buddhas, Tathagatas, as many as the sands of the Ganges, filling all of space. He will also see pavilions and palaces that are resplendent and beautiful. He will see the hells below and the celestial palaces above, all without obstruction. This state is called 'the gradual transformation of concentrated thoughts of fondness and loathing.' It does not indicate sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, when his mind accomplishes such purity that his skill in purifying the mind has reached its ultimate. Applying his mind to cultivation of the Way and to the practice of samadhi, he achieves a state of extreme purity. At that point, he will suddenly see the earth, the mountains, and the rivers in the ten directions turn into Buddhalands replete with the seven precious things, their light shining everywhere. Every place will be adorned with the seven precious things: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, mother-of-pearl, red pearls, carnelian and coral. These precious things will illumine the ten directions. He will also see Buddhas, Tathagatas, as many as the sands of the Ganges River, filling all of space. He will also see tower-pavilions and jeweled palaces that are resplendent and beautiful. He will see the hells below. Looking downwards, he will see all the hells. And looking upwards, he will see what is happening in the celestial palaces above, all without the least bit of obstruction. He is able to see any place he wishes to see.  
  
This state is called "the gradual transformation of concentrated thoughts of fondness and loathing." Why is he able to see these things? It's because he ordinarily has likes and dislikes. He would like to go to the heavens and the Buddhalands, and he would detest going to the hells. He concentrates on such thoughts, being as attentive as a hen sitting on her eggs, as a cat waiting for a mouse, or as a dragon nurturing its pearl. He does not think about anything else, but only about how fine it is in the Buddha lands, and how much suffering there is in the hells. His mind favors happy places and loathes the places of suffering and misery. Eventually, his concentrated thoughts create these kinds of states. It does not indicate sagehood. He should not think that he has attained sagehood and achieved great spiritual skill. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. It's not a bad one. But if he considers himself a sage and says, "What a terrific state! I'm living with the Buddhas. In fact, I'm a Buddha myself!" then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence. If he thinks like that, the demons and the externalists will all go to keep him company. "You say you're living with the Buddhas? Well, we'll be your friends and join you," they say.  
  
J9 He sees and hears distant things.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, as the person uses his mind to investigate what is profound and far away, he will suddenly be able to see distant places in the middle of the night. He will see city markets and community wells, streets and alleys, and relatives and friends, and he may hear their conversations. This state is called 'having been suppressed to the utmost, the mind flies out and sees much that had been blocked from view.' It does not indicate sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, as the person uses his mind to investigate what is profound and far away, he will suddenly be able to see various situations in distant places in the middle of the night. He will see city markets where things are sold on the street and community wells where people draw water, large streets and small alleys. He may see his relatives and friends, his associates, and he may hear their conversations; he will be able to listen to them talking.  
  
This state is called "having been suppressed to the utmost, the mind flies out and sees much that had been blocked from view." In his cultivation, he restrained the mind from indulging in idle thinking. Having stifled the mind to the extreme, he experiences a sensation of flying out and seeing things no matter how far away they are. Usually he tries not to look at things, but now all of a sudden his mind breaks loose and he can see everything. It does not indicate sagehood. He should not think that this is a good state. If he does not think he has become a sage, then this will be a good, passable state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence. If he claims to have realized sagehood when he hasn't, or if he claims to have attained what he hasn't, he will find himself surrounded by demons.

J10 False visions and false words.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, as the person uses his mind to investigate to the utmost point, he may see a good and wise advisor whose body undergoes changes. Within a brief interval, various transformations will occur which cannot be explained. This state is called 'having an improper mind which is possessed by a li ghost, a mei-ghost, or a celestial demon, and without reason speaking dharma that fathoms wondrous truths.' It does not indicate sagehood. If he does not think he has become a sage, then the demonic formations will subside. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is the tenth demonic state of the form skandha, called "false visions and false words."  
  
Further, as the person uses his mind to investigate to the utmost point, he may see a good and wise advisor with whom he studied the dharma in the past, whose body undergoes changes. Right before his eyes, the good and wise advisor suddenly turns into an old man; in the next moment he becomes a middle-aged person; and, in another instant he turns into a young person. Then, if the good and wise advisor is a man, for example, he suddenly changes into a woman, and the person thinks, "Oh! Probably in his previous life he was a woman." Actually, what he is seeing is not real. These changes are the result of his false thinking.  
  
Within a brief interval, various transformations will occur which cannot be explained. Everything changes and becomes different from normal. This is similar to what people who take LSD experience. To them, everything becomes brightly colored, and they cannot see clearly. They paint some bizarre paintings which no one can figure out, because they just recklessly splash on the colors. After they finish painting, some people say, "Wow! What a masterpiece!" People actually praise them. You see? That's the way it goes. "Is it the case that this cultivator has taken a drug?" you ask. No. This experience is caused by the demon king. When you take LSD, the demons are also at work, making you experience changes.  
  
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Venerable Master: "In our investigation of the fifty skandha demon states, everyone is welcome to bring up an opinion. We want to use everyone's wisdom to investigate the principles. In the Dharma-ending Age, everyone is greedy for quick results and shortcuts. They think they can get a lucky break, just like people who gamble and win at the first try. So some people go running around to a lot of different places. They study esoteric practices and various other dharmas. They hear this place has something to offer, so they go there. Then they hear that place has something, so they run over there. Running here and there, they waste all their time on the road; but in the end, they don't understand anything. We should all recognize this kind of state. If we don't it will be very easy for us to go astray."  
  
Disciple: "It's like taking drugs, which is a serious problem in Western society. You could say that hallucinogenic drugs are transformation bodies of demons. The demons come up with a new form of drug and everyone becomes addicted to it. Even though people don't really need to take the drug, a demonic energy combined with their own habits causes them to get hooked. Nowadays there are many deviant teachers who, without the help of drugs, hypnotize people and cause them to see lights and various things. This happens because the drugs in people's bodies are acting up."  
  
These states in the form skandha may change for the better and for the worse. If the person has enough good roots, the changes will be for the better. But people whose good roots are insufficient will change for the worse. There are all sorts of transformations. This state is called "having an improper and deviant mind which is possessed by a li-ghost, a mei-ghost, or a celestial demon, and without reason speaking dharma that fathoms wondrous truths." When a ghost or a demon from the heavens enters your mind, you may act like those people who claim they know how to lecture the sutras or speak the dharma, or who call themselves enlightened, elder masters. Such people start speaking the dharma for no reason, with no idea what they are talking about. They say they have fathomed wondrous truths, but they have not really done so. They are not really speaking the dharma either. They take what is wrong to be right and claim that their dharma is the most wonderful. Praising themselves and putting others down, they call themselves the foremost elder masters.  
  
It does not indicate sagehood. This state is not a good one. If he does not think he has become a sage, then the demonic formations will subside. They will disappear. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons influence. If he thinks he has attained the fruition of a sage, he will soon find himself in the hells. He will attain the fruition of the hells.  
  
I3 Conclusion on the harm, and command to offer protection.  
J1 Showing how the states come about from interaction.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, these ten states may occur in dhyana as one's mental effort interacts with the form skandha.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, these ten states described above may occur in the still contemplation of dhyana as one's mental effort interacts with the form skandha. These states involve the form skandha. When the mind interacts with and investigates the form skandha to the ultimate, one may experience such states.  
  
J2 Confusion will bring harm.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Dull and confused living beings do not evaluate themselves. Encountering such situations, in their confusion they fail to recognize them and say that they have become sages, thereby uttering a great lie. They will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Dull and confused living beings do not evaluate themselves. Living beings are stubborn and intractable, and they do not wake up from their delusion. They do not take stock of themselves to see what level they are at. Encountering such situations, such demonic states, in their muddled confusion they fail to recognize them and say that they have become sages. They claim, "Oh, I am a Buddha! I am enlightened; I've attained sagehood," thereby uttering a great lie. They are really telling the greatest lie. They will surely fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
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We have to be very cautious in all aspects. As it's said, "If you're off by a hairsbreadth in the beginning, you'll miss by a thousand miles in the end." We keep studying the Buddhadharma, but we end up falling into the hells. Why? Because we haven't really been able to follow the teachings. We haven't really been able to refrain from lying, stealing, sexual misconduct, taking intoxicants, and killing. If you can't even hold the five precepts, how can you think of accomplishing Buddhahood?  
  
First of all, you must not kill. That doesn't simply mean eating vegetarian food.  
  
"I haven't killed any creature with my own hands," you may say.  
  
That doesn't necessarily mean you haven't violated the precept of not killing. Holding this precept means you must not even harbor anger toward people in your heart. That is not easy to do. As I said earlier, "I also have a strong urge to kill. But I want to stop killing; I want to liberate creatures instead of killing them. If I wanted to kill creatures, all the fine hairs on my body could turn into flying swords, sharp knives, lances, and spears to stab people to death. That's how fierce my fine hairs could be. That's how powerful the urge to kill is, but I'm not going to kill. Why not? Because I realize that killing living beings is equivalent to killing Bodhisattvas, killing Arhats, breaking up the harmonious Sangha, and shedding the Buddha's blood. That's why I don't kill.  
  
Not stealing. Gaining something by improper means or taking something that does not belong to you without informing the owner is considered stealing. If you take something from its place without anyone knowing about it, you are stealing. The causes, conditions, methods, and karma of stealing are explained very clearly in the Brahma Net Sutra. The causes, conditions, methods and karma of killing are also explained dearly in that text.  
  
Not engaging in sexual misconduct is also like that. It only counts if you don't have thoughts of lust in your mind and your own nature. To hold the precept against lying, you shouldn't lie under any circumstances. Nor should you take intoxicants. The stimulating effect of alcohol causes you to be unable to function normally. It also makes you lose your wisdom, and once that happens, you do stupid things.  
  
These are the precepts of not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not lying, and not taking intoxicants. Buddhists should pay dose attention to these five precepts and avoid committing the slightest transgression; only then are they qualified to be called Buddhists. Some of you casually entertain thoughts of killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, and deceiving people with lies, and you casually take intoxicants. You are greedy for everything. Being greedy for food is equivalent to taking intoxicants. If you are so greedy for food that you eat until you're fat as can be, you are also taking intoxicants. We who study Buddhism should constantly examine ourselves on this point. We must be very attentive, without making the slightest mistake or being sloppy at any moment.  
  
On the other hand, we should not be too rigid; we should apply the precepts in a flexible way.  
  
"Then I can be a little more expedient; I can still kill, steal, engage in sexual misconduct, lie, and take intoxicants," you say. That's not what flexibility means. It means we should not bind ourselves up with the five precepts so tightly that we have no room to turn around. When we receive the five precepts, we are not being bound up by the five precepts. We should look into this well. A certain person in Canada used my name to cheat his disciples, alleging that I certified him. People who tell great lies like that are bound to fall into the Hell of Ripping Out Tongues.  
  
J3 Command to offer protection.  
 **Sutra:  
  
In the Dharma-ending Age, after the Tathagata enters nirvana, all of you should rely on and proclaim this teaching. Do not let the demons of the heavens have their way. Offer protection so all can realize the Unsurpassed Way.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
In the Dharma-ending Age, after the Tathagata enters nirvana, all of you should rely on and proclaim this teaching. Ananda, you all should follow and practice the dharma that I have explained for you. In the future Dharma-ending Age, after I have entered nirvana, you must propagate these teachings. Do not let the demons of the heavens have their way. Offer protection so all can realize the Unsurpassed Way. Maintain and support the true and orthodox Buddhadharma so that you will be able to attain the supreme fruition of the Way.