**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 8**

**CHAPTER 4**

**The Thinking Skandha**

H3 The characteristics of the demons of the thinking skandha.  
I1 Overview of the beginning and end.  
J1 In the beginning, cultivation has not yet broken out of this region.  
K1 Review of the ending of the previous feeling skandha.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, when the good person who is cultivating samadhi has put an end to the feeling skandha, although he has not achieved freedom from outflows, his mind can leave his body the way a bird escapes from a cage. From within his ordinary body, he already has the potential for ascending through the Bodhisattvas' sixty levels of sagehood. He attains the 'body produced by intent' and can roam freely without obstruction.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, when the good person who is cultivating the power of samadhi has put an end to the feeling skandha, when the feeling skandha is already gone, although he has not achieved the spiritual power of freedom from outflows, he already has other spiritual powers and his true mind can leave his body the way a bird escapes from a cage. Before one puts an end to the feeling skandha, one is trapped in one's body, just like a bird trapped in its cage. Just as the bird can now escape from the cage, from within his ordinary body, he already, by means of spiritual powers, has the potential for ascending through the Bodhisattvas' sixty levels of sagehood. Right in this ordinary body, he can become a Bodhisattva and attain the sixty levels of Bodhisattvahood. He attains the "body produced by intent" and can roam freely without obstruction. He has to formulate the intent before he can have the spiritual power of the "body produced by intent." With such a body, he can go wherever he wants. What are the sixty levels of Bodhisattvahood? They are the fifty-five stages of a Bodhisattva discussed before; the three gradual stages and the stage of dry wisdom, making four kinds; and wonderful enlightenment, which makes sixty levels altogether.  
  
K2 Introduction to the region of the thinking skandha.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This is like someone talking in his sleep. Although he does not know he is doing it, his words are clear, and his voice and inflection are all in order, so those who are awake can understand what he is saying. This is the region of the thinking skandha.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is like someone talking in his sleep. This is an analogy comparing the region of the thinking skandha to someone talking in his dream. While asleep, he starts saying what he wants to say. Although he does not know he is doing it, his words are clear, and his voice and inflection are all in order. Although he doesn't know he is talking in his dream, what he says is intelligible. Everything he says follows in logical order and makes sense, but he himself is not aware of it. So those who are awake can understand what he is saying.  
  
For instance, he says, "I wanted to eat tofu (soybean cake) today, so I went to the store and bought ten pieces of tofu. When I got back, I cooked them and ate them."  
  
He is not aware of what he is saying, but other people who are awake know, "Oh! He ate tofu today." Why did he say what he said? Because he has not forgotten what he ate. He keeps thinking about it and he will talk about it even in his dream. This is the region of the thinking skandha. That is what the region of the thinking skandha is like. But don't take this too literally and think, "The thinking skandha is just talking in a dream." That would be wrong. It is just an analogy.  
  
J2 Ultimately it breaks up and reveals its false source.  
 **Sutra:  
  
If he puts an end to his stirring thoughts and rids himself of superfluous thinking, it is as if he has purged defilement from the enlightened, understanding mind. Then he is perfectly clear about the births and deaths of all categories of beings from beginning to end. This is the end of the thinking skandha. He can then transcend the turbidity of afflictions. Contemplating the cause of the thinking skandha, one sees that interconnected false thoughts are its source.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
If he puts an end to his stirring thoughts, the extremely subtle thoughts in the sixth consciousness, and rids himself of superfluous thinking. Since those very fine thoughts in the sixth consciousness have stopped, superfluous thinking is also eliminated. It is as if he has purged defilement from the enlightened, understanding mind. This enlightened, clear mind is the eighth consciousness. Now, it appears that the eighth consciousness has been purged of defilement. Then he is perfectly clear about the births and deaths of all categories of beings from beginning to end. There are twelve categories of beings, from those born from wombs and those born from eggs up to and including those not entirely lacking thought. He knows the preceding causes and subsequent effects of every kind of being. This is the end of the thinking skandha. At that time the person obtains the spiritual power of knowing past lives. He can then transcend the turbidity of afflictions. Contemplating the cause of the thinking skandha, contemplating the reasons behind his actions and deeds, one sees that interconnected false thoughts are its source. At that point, the false thoughts become interpenetrating, and such thoughts become its source.  
  
I2 The ten states within this.  
J1 Greed for clever skill.  
K1 Samadhi leads to craving and seeking.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves its perfect brightness, so he sharpens his concentrated thought as he greedily seeks for cleverness and skill.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state. No deviant thoughts can disturb him.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
"In the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state." At this point, the feeling skandha is over, and he is in the thinking skandha, which is subtle and wondrous. What is wonderful is that when you have no faults, you will not be troubled by deviant mental states, that is, by feelings of worry and fear. What is meant by worry and fear? It's like the man of Qi, who worried that the sky would fall down. He had a deviant mental state. Now the cultivator is no longer troubled by deviant mental states. He doesn't have them in himself. However, he is not strong enough to resist troubles that come from outside, because love, greed, and seeking are still present in his mind. Since selfish and self-benefiting thoughts are still concealed inside, he is vulnerable to states from the external environment. "Deviant mental states" refer not only to thoughts, but also to feelings of worry and fear. When you are afraid of something, then you have a deviant mental state. When others oppress you and you're afraid to speak out about it, that's also a deviant mental state.  
  
[January 1983, another day]  
  
While we are investigating the fifty skandha-demon states, five hundred kinds of skandha demons may come, so you should open your doors to them and invite them to come make trouble. Although they are demons, they help your cultivation from the reverse; they test you to see how firmly resolved you are. If you have true determination, then a thousand demons will not make you waver, ten thousand demons will not make you retreat and you will not be afraid of anything, because you are not seeking anything. As it is said,  
  
When you reach the place of seeking nothing,  
You will have no more worries.  
  
Since you seek nothing, you will not fear anything. What is there to be afraid of? Some people are afraid of ghosts because of their grotesque appearance. They know that some people turn into ghosts after they die. No one is afraid of spirits, despite the fierce appearance of those spirits clad in golden armor. Confucius said, "One should respect ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance." You should be very respectful toward ghosts and spirits, but don't draw near to them. You should fear neither ghosts nor spirits.  
  
You need not fear demons; they are just testing you out, trying out your skill in cultivation. If you're afraid, then they will come even if you don't want them to. If you are not afraid, then they will not be able to come even if they want to. The secret is to not be afraid. If you're not afraid, then you are "proper" and you can subdue anything, because the deviant cannot overcome the proper. Demons fear those who are proper, great and bright. If you can be that way, then the demons will behave themselves and will even bow to you.  
  
And he experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves its perfect brightness, so he sharpens his concentrated thought as he greedily seeks for cleverness and skill. "To sharpen" means to refine his intense reflection, which is that perfect brightness. He greedily seeks to have skill-in-means to teach and transform living beings. That is what he is greedy for.  
  
[May 21, 1989]  
  
Venerable Master: Here, being "clever and skillful" doesn't refer to ordinary expedient means. Expedient means are very casual. These "clever and skillful" methods which he uses are very ingenious and subtle, and you can't detect any flaws in them, because he applies them very well. You cannot tell that they are expedients.  
  
Disciple: Is he seeking cleverness and skill so he can teach and transform people?  
  
Venerable Master: Not only in teaching, but in all aspects, he has this kind of clever and skillful wisdom. Regular expedient methods can be recognized as such by people. But the kind of cleverness and skill spoken of here cannot immediately be detected by others, because the person speaks very reasonably and ingeniously. You can't find any faults with what he says.  
  
K2 A demon dispatches a deviant force to possess a person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
At that time a demon from the sixth desire heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Seeing that the cultivator's samadhi power is about to be perfected, it waits for a chance to get at him. It watches for some flaw in his character which will provide an opening. The existence of an opening indicates that his samadhi power is not yet solid. Occasionally he will have an extraneous false thought. Once he has that false thought his samadhi power is no longer firm, and the demon will take advantage of him. Thus it says the demon "seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for."  
  
[January 1983]  
  
The demon "seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for." That is, he seizes the opportunity provided by the cultivator's greed and opens up the door. It's not easy to understand what the sutra means; you may be off by just that little bit in your interpretation. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma. The demon from the heavens commands one of its followers, "Go to that place and destroy that person's samadhi power." Before the form skandha and the feeling skandha were ended, the demon could possess the cultivator himself and confuse him. But after the form skandha and feeling skandha are gone and the cultivator reaches the thinking skandha, the demon cannot possess him. It has to take possession of another person and then speak the dharma for the cultivator through that person. That person lectures on the sutras, but the dharma he speaks is deviant and you should recognize it for what it is.  
  
[May 21, 1989]  
  
"Its spirit possesses another person, and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma." There are two ways to explain this. You could say the demon possesses another person, who then comes to speak dharma for the first person. You could also say that the demon possesses the cultivator of samadhi himself. Either of these interpretations can apply; there is more than one meaning.  
  
When a cultivator is at the level of the thinking skandha, the demon's spirit cannot possess him and confuse his mind directly. For example, right now there is a cultivator who involuntarily does tai ji quan and shouts, but he realizes what is going on and knows that it is wrong. The demon is unable to confuse his mind. On the other hand, if a person has not cultivated at all, then once the demon confuses him, he will not understand anything at all; he will not realize that a demon has come or the things it has done. Most people who don't cultivate are this way. The demon possesses the person and speaks through him. Then after the demon has left, you ask the person what happened and he has no idea. That's because his mind was thoroughly confused. Someone who is not confused by the demon will be able to keep a clear mind during the experience. There are various interpretations, not just one. If you interpret the text as saying only that the demon possesses another person, your interpretation is incomplete. There are many possibilities, and the situation could develop in one of several directions, so it is not fixed.  
  
While the text may be explained in any way that makes sense, the translation of the sutra should not be limited to a particular explanation. The sutra is like an ocean, while explanations of it are like rivers. Rivers can flow into the ocean in many different ways, and so you cannot use a particular river to represent the entire ocean.  
  
[December 2, 1993]  
  
Do not become too attached to what the sutra says. The sutra gives a general idea of what might happen, but each particular situation may be different. There are not only fifty, but perhaps five hundred, five thousand, or even fifty thousand kinds of states. There are so many states that we could never finish speaking of them. These [fifty states] are just a general summary, and you shouldn't think of them as profound and esoteric. Regard them as if they were spoken by an ordinary person, and don't always be splitting hairs.  
  
My explanations of sutras are called "simple explanations"; I don't give profound explanations. When I explain a sutra, my only aim is for everyone to understand what I mean and for me to understand what everyone else means. Don't think too deeply. Anyone who thinks too deeply will never be able to finish explaining it. Don't beat your head against the wall trying to figure out exactly what it means. After all, this sutra is a translation; it is not so rigidly fixed that you cannot add or omit a word. It does not correspond exactly to the original Sanskrit. Just try to convey the general meaning; don't spend too much time pursuing the fine details of literary interpretation.  
  
Disciple: At the level of the thinking skandha, the demons from the heavens can no longer disturb the cultivator's mind directly. A demon has to possess another person in order to disturb the cultivator's samadhi.  
  
Venerable Master: For example, a cultivator may frequently encounter people who are possessed by ghosts, who come to speak the dharma for him, or who come to challenge him to see who is on top.  
  
At the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, there's a student from the University of California at Berkeley who has many snakes following him. You may not have seen them, but Guo Zhen saw those snakes get into a dharma-contest with me at Gold Mountain Monastery. They are really ferocious! His presence there gave the snakes a chance to fight with me. They have been fighting me for over ten years now. When he went to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, he would gradually get better, but as soon as he went back to school in Berkeley, he would get sick again. He realizes that there are many snakes on him. He killed these snakes in the past, and now they've come to get revenge. I've been using wholesome dharmas to try to make peace with them. That's how I treat them, regardless of whether or not they pay any heed. It's a slow process. Over the last ten years or so, many of the snakes have left him, but there are still a few left. There used to be a whole bunch of them.  
  
This case is similar to the state described in the sutra.  
  
Disciple: When a person comes to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, are those beings afraid to come and seek him out?  
  
Venerable Master: No, they still come. When it [the snake] came to challenge my dharma, it was terribly fierce. At first he [the student possessed by the snake] knelt down, but then he stood up and waved his hands and glared at me. His heavy breathing sounded worse than a screeching and hissing cat.  
  
Disciple: Master, what did you do? Did you give it a good scolding?  
  
Venerable Master: No, I just pretended nothing was happening. People saw me acting as if nothing were going on, but actually, I had converted it. It was hostile to me, but I wasn't hostile to it. I used to use the dharma of subduing, but not anymore. Now I use the dharma of averting disasters.  
  
Disciple: When the form skandha has come to an end, deviant demons can no longer possess a cultivator. They have to possess another person. But is there another interpretation in which the demon can directly possess the cultivator?  
  
Venerable Master: There are endless possibilities. The demon can even possess a cat. It all depends on whether or not you recognize it. It can also possess other animals. There's no fixed rule.  
  
Disciple: Can it possess the cultivator himself?  
  
Venerable Master: No, it can't get to him.  
  
Disciple: But when the Venerable Master explained the fifty skandha demons in the past, you said it could possess the cultivator himself.  
  
Venerable Master: As I said, none of this is fixed. The text gives one example, but that's not the only way it can be. There are many variations. Each case encompasses many possibilities.  
  
Disciple: But didn't the Venerable Master just say that the demons can't get to the cultivator himself? Venerable Master: If he truly cultivates, then the demons can't get to him, because there are dharma-protecting spirits protecting him.  
  
Disciple: If the cultivator starts entertaining false thoughts, then,  
  
Venerable Master: Then they'll get to him.  
  
Disciple: It's just like living at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. If we follow the rules set down by the Master, then those beings cannot bother us. If we don't follow the rules, then they can come.  
  
Venerable Master: Many people who come here have a lot of deviant demons of external ways, goblins, ghosts, and strange spirits attached to them. Yet the Bodhisattvas who guard the dharma don't try to keep them out. We practice kindness and compassion here. Thus we haven't fortified our place or set up any defense against them.  
  
Disciple: If someone truly cultivates, then the demons can't get to him. But if he's not cultivating and he starts indulging in false thoughts, then they can come.  
  
Venerable Master: Right, it's a case of the deviant attracting the deviant.  
  
Disciple: If the demons can't get to him now, it doesn't necessarily mean that they can't get to him ever. For instance, when National Master Wuda entertained a thought of arrogance,  
  
Venerable Master: Right! That's a very clear illustration!  
  
Disciple: The ghost hadn't been able to get to him for ten lives, but with that one improper thought, it was able to get in.  
  
Venerable Master: It came to demand his life!  
  
Disciple: So would you say that the demons can get to the cultivator or not? It's not fixed. If he truly cultivates, then they can't get to him, but if he doesn't, then they can.  
  
Venerable Master: Right, it's not fixed. Whatever can be put into words loses its real meaning. Once you understand this principle, you shouldn't pursue the details too intently. As I just said, there are infinite variations and possibilities. These fifty states can be transformed into five hundred, five thousand, or fifty thousand states. Don't spend too much time on these examples. You should understand that there are other cases that are variations of these. In general, whatever can be said has no real meaning. You could say all the sutras are false, but you must find the true principles within this falseness. Any sutra that makes sense can be believed. If it doesn't make sense, if it's incorrect, then don't believe it.  
  
K3 The person who is possessed causes trouble.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This person, unaware that he is possessed by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks cleverness and skill, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. In an instant, he may appear to be a bhikshu, enabling that person to see him as such, or he may appear as Shakra, as a woman, or as a bhikshuni; or his body may emit light as he sleeps in a dark room.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
You can see how formidable these demonic states are. This person, unaware that he is possessed by a demon, has no idea a demon is helping him. He claims that he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. He claims to have obtained the truth of nirvana, the wonderful fruition of nirvana.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
Yesterday someone mentioned a certain person who recited the Buddha's name and then suddenly started jumping around, as if dancing. He was possessed by a demonic spirit. He didn't know what was happening, and he thought, "Wow! I've entered samadhi." He was like a rambunctious kid; he hopped about like a bunny.  
  
When he comes to see that good person, the cultivator who seeks cleverness and skill, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma for that good person who seeks to be clever and skillful. In an instant, very briefly, he may appear to be a bhikshu, enabling that person who seeks clever skill to see him as such. Or he may appear as Shakra, Lord God, as a woman, or as a bhikshuni. When the person seeking cleverness and skill sees him going through such transformations, he thinks, "He must be Guan Yin Bodhisattva!" He has no idea that it is a demon. That's why you shouldn't get carried away by any state you see, no matter what it is. Or his body may emit light as he sleeps in a dark room.  
  
When people who do not understand the Buddhadharma see that, they marvel "Wow! His body emits light! If he isn't a Buddha, he must be at least a Bodhisattva or an Arhat!" They do not realize that the person is possessed by a demon king that is manifesting spiritual powers in order to delude the cultivator.  
  
Therefore, as ordinary people who do not truly understand the Buddhadharma, we should not be turned by the things we see, no matter what they are. Don't become moved and run off after those states. How should you treat them? Look upon them as if they didn't exist. Seeing those things should be the same as not seeing them. Be neither elated nor disgusted. If you become elated when you see a demon, then you have been turned by the demon's state. If you get disgusted, then you have also been turned by the demon's state. How should you act? Just maintain the Middle Way, neither liking nor disliking it. See as if you haven't seen, and hear as if you haven't heard. You shouldn't say, "That was a fine state! I'd like to see that again!" If you have that thought, you have made a mistake.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
Demons are very smart. They see what you're greedy for and use that to tempt you. Therefore, cultivators don't need to recite any particular mantra or practice any particular dharma. Just be honest and true; don't contend, don't be greedy, don't seek, don't be selfish, and don't pursue personal gain. If you put your shoulder to the grindstone and cultivate diligently, no demon can bother you. But as soon as you become greedy or you start scheming for advantages and shortcuts, it's easy for demons to possess you. Demons are very wise; they can see what level of cultivation you've reached and know what methods should be used to lure you. As for choosing a person to possess, that's not a problem, because the person is only a false front for them. They use the person, and they use various methods to entice and delude you. If a cultivator is unselfish and doesn't think about benefiting himself, he will not be afraid of any demon.

K4 The cultivator becomes deluded and confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
The good person is beguiled and fooled into thinking that the other is a Bodhisattva. He believes the other's teachings and his mind is swayed. He breaks the Buddha's moral precepts and covertly indulges his greedy desires.**  
**Commentary:**  
  
The good person who cultivates samadhi is beguiled and fooled at this point into thinking that the other is a Bodhisattva. When he sees how the person can appear as a bhikshu, as Shakra, as a lay woman, and as a bhikshuni, suddenly changing from one appearance to another, he thinks the person must be a Bodhisattva. He then deeply believes the other's teachings and his mind is swayed. He breaks the Buddha's moral precepts. What should you examine in a cultivator? See whether or not he keeps the Buddha's precepts. If he doesn't, then he is certainly a demon. If he strictly adheres to the precepts without violating them, then he is a genuine Buddhist. However, someone may claim to be a Buddhist call himself a venerable elder, and assume other tides as well, and yet he covertly indulges his greedy desires. He engages in a clandestine affair and tries to keep people from knowing about it.  
  
K5 The types of things he says.  
 **Sutra:  
  
The other person is fond of speaking about calamities, auspicious events, and unusual changes. He may say that a Tathagata has appeared in the world at a certain place. He may speak of catastrophic fires or wars, thus frightening people into squandering their family wealth without reason.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
The other person is fond of speaking about calamities, auspicious events, and unusual changes. What does the person who is possessed by the demon like to speak about? He likes to talk about calamities, which are unlucky events. He may say a calamity is going to occur in a certain place, or that something auspicious is going to happen somewhere, or that an unusual event is going to take place. He may say that a Tathagata has appeared in the world at a certain place. He may say, "You know what? Such-andsuch a Buddha has now appeared in the world at such-and-such a place."  
  
He may speak of catastrophic fires or wars. He may say, "The three disasters, flood, fire, and wind, and the eight difficulties are upon us." Or, "The kalpa is coming to an end!" Or he might warn people, "Be careful, war is about to break out there." Or, "The Soviet Union is about to go to war with a certain country!" He speaks in this way, thus frightening people into squandering their family wealth without reason. He always says things that capture people's attention and cause them to be alarmed. When people hear what he says, they panic, "Oh no! There's going to be war. Will my life be in danger?" He might say, "The war is starting. If you give me some money immediately, I'll guarantee your safety. If you don't pay me, you will lose your life!" He is always saying such things to cheat people.  
  
If you want to determine whether a person is genuine or phony, whether he is a Bodhisattva or a demon, you can look for the following things: First, see whether he has any desire for sex; and second, see whether he is greedy for money. If he cheats people to satisfy his lust and greed for wealth, then he is not genuine. How might he be greedy for wealth? For example, he may say, "A great calamity is nearly upon us! The world is coming to an end. An atomic bomb is going to explode at such-and-such a place. A hydrogen bomb will be set off at another place." He says such things to frighten people into giving him their money. If you wake up to his tricks, then even if he emits light, makes the earth quake, or does something else spectacular, you shouldn't believe in him, because he is greedy. A person without greed is true; a greedy person is a phony. My method is a practical and effective truth-detector.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
If we had no greed or desires, then we would have no trouble. If you have greed and desire, then all sorts of things will happen. All the myriad things, beings, and species in the world are born from greed and desire. Thus it is said, "When not a single thought is produced, the entire substance manifests." If you don't have thoughts of greed and desire, then the Buddha-nature will appear. "When the six sense faculties suddenly move, one is covered by clouds." Once the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind become attached to a state, it's like the sky clouding over so that the sun cannot shine. Fundamentally, what causes the six sense faculties to move? Greed and desire. Because you are unable to give up greed and desire, the six sense faculties turn into the six thieves and the six consciousnesses come into being. If you had no greed and desire, then the thieves of the six sense faculties would no longer be thieves, and the six consciousnesses would no longer be consciousnesses.  
  
Everything would return to the source, and all troubles would disappear. Everyone should pay attention to this. It all depends on whether or not you have greed and desire. If you do, then you have not separated yourself from the demons yet. If you do not, then you have joined with the Buddhas.  
  
K6 Giving the name and pointing out the harm.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This is a strange ghost that in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person. But when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is a strange, weird ghost that, after a long time, in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person. But when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. Eventually, it gets bored of playing this game. It has had enough, and so it stops possessing the person. When that happens, then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law. The authorities arrest them, accuse them of rabble-rousing, and either execute them or punish them in some other way.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
This is the time to study, and we must keep studying the states, one by one, until we finish. Then everyone will have a better understanding.  
  
Right now we've just started studying, and some will understand, while others won't. When each of you comes to the front, you are not here to interrogate anyone, but just to investigate what you have seen and understood with everyone else. The person who just came up here had a correct understanding. When the form skandha is obliterated, the view of self is emptied, so that one no longer has a sense of self, and all physical objects, all things with form and appearance, are also emptied. If you don't understand this, you can read over the sutra text a few more times, and then you'll naturally understand.  
  
All religions operate in the realm of the five skandhas. Later on the text talks about how both the teacher and the disciples get in trouble with the law. The words "teacher and disciples" indicate that this is talking about religion. Being satisfied with their small achievements, they set up their own religion and claim that it is the real one. Without my having to mention any religions by name, everyone should know what I'm talking about. If you want to know which skandhas those religions fall under, what level they have reached, then you have to gain a thorough understanding of the fifty skandha-demon states.  
  
Instead of just asking questions, you should look into them yourselves. We are all studying together, and it shouldn't be that one person answers everyone else's questions, because our wisdom is equal. In our investigation, if everyone agrees to a principle, then we will consider it correct. We are gathering everyone's opinions, and when we publish the fifty skandha-demon states in the future, each person's opinion should be included. This is a joint investigation, not one person answering others' questions. Anyone can speak out and express an opinion.  
  
Why do we have only two people reading aloud? Because these two people have passable Chinese and English. They are giving a general explanation of the meaning, and if what they say is incomplete, people can speak up. People should not be simply asking questions. This is not like when we lectured on the Brahma Net Sutra. This meeting is investigatory in nature, and everyone is equal. There's no need to request the dharma or do anything. Everyone should just investigate and study together. No one is debating with anyone else, and anyone can express an opinion. Do you all think this is a good method?  
  
[January 1983, another day]  
  
Disciple: The sutra text says that the teacher and disciples will both fall into the hells?  
  
Venerable Master: Right, that's referring to the cultivator! Disciple: Is the cultivator one of the disciples?  
  
Venerable Master: Not necessarily. The teacher is also that way; he's also a cultivator. An example of this was the People's Church. You can tell by whether or not a person has lust. If he has lust, then he is a demon. If he doesn't, then he's proper and he's a Buddha. That's where the difference lies. If he hasn't cut off lust then he can't subdue his mind. He may be able to sit there and enter samadhi, but while in samadhi, he is still greedy and seeking. "He correctly indulges his greedy desires." That's how you can recognize him.  
  
K7 Instructions to be aware and not become confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. You should awaken to this early on and not enter the demon king's cycle of birth and death. If you are confused and do not understand, in the future you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
J2 Greedy for adventure.  
K1 Samadhi leads to craving and seeking.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, Ananda, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves to roam about, so he lets his subtle thoughts fly out as he greedily seeks for adventure.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, Ananda, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person who cultivates samadhi is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind has another false thought and craves to roam about, that is, "to go out the top of his head and roam around in his spiritual body." That means his spirit goes out and runs around to various places. So he lets his subtle thoughts fly out as he greedily seeks for adventure. His spirit flies out and wants to go everywhere, to see the sights and have some fun.  
  
K2 A demon dispatches a deviant force to possess a person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. The demon king in the heavens again becomes jealous and waits for an opening to get in. Its spirit possesses another person. It again sends a member of its retinue to possess another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma. It comes to disturb the cultivator. Why does the cultivator get possessed by a demon? Simply because he is greedy for adventure; he longs to travel, to roam far and wide. As soon as he entertains the thought of roaming, that gives the demon king the chance to disturb him. The demon would not come if the cultivator did not have that thought.  
  
K3 The person who is possessed causes trouble.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This person, unaware that he is possessed by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks to roam, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. His own body does not change its appearance, but those listening to the dharma suddenly see themselves sitting on jeweled lotuses and their entire bodies transformed into clusters of purple-golden light. Each person in the audience experiences that state and feels he has obtained something unprecedented.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This person, unaware that he is possessed by a demon, claims he has reached the wondrous fruition of unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks to roam, that is, the cultivator who had a false thought about his spiritual body going out the top of his head and roaming everywhere, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. His own body does not change its appearance. In the previous passage, the person's own body took on the appearance of a bhikshu, of Shakra, of a lay woman, of a bhikshuni, and various other forms. But in this case his body does not change. There are different kinds of demons, and you should not consider experiencing an unusual state to be something good. If one occurs and you don't recognize it, a demon can possess you. Here, the body of the person who is speaking the dharma doesn't change, but those listening to the dharma suddenly see themselves sitting on jeweled lotuses and their entire bodies transformed into clusters of purple-golden light. Suddenly, everyone feels as if he is sitting on a jeweled lotus and his whole body has turned into a cluster of purple-golden light. Each person in the audience experiences that state and feels he has obtained something unprecedented. They think this is rare and unusual something they have never seen before. They believe it to be a good state, but actually it is a demonic state.  
  
K4 The cultivator becomes deluded and confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
The good person is beguiled and fooled into thinking the other is a Bodhisattva. Lust and laxity corrupt his mind. He breaks the Buddha's moral precepts and covertly indulges his greedy desires.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
The good person is beguiled and fooled into thinking the other is a Bodhisattva. Not only this person, but all those listening to the dharma are very stupid. Their minds are confused, and they think, "He's really a Bodhisattva! He can make me sit on a jeweled lotus and turn the color of purple-golden light." You should ask yourself if you are really seated on a lotus blossom and radiant with purple-golden light. Actually it is all false. How can you, an ordinary person, have such a state? Isn't this a demon king that has come to fool you? Why would a Bodhisattva make such a state appear? What is the Bodhisattva trying to get from you? Lust and laxity corrupt his mind. The minds of those listening to dharma are moved as well, and they start having thoughts of lust. He breaks the Buddha's moral precepts. They don't keep the Buddha's precepts anymore.   
  
You should all remember: After you take the precepts, never be deceived by such states of confused belief. Even if a dharma-speaker displays mighty spiritual powers, you should look him over carefully and see if he is greedy. If he is out for money or if he has lust, then he's not genuine. He's a phony. If a person does not have any lust, greed, or ulterior motives, then he is genuine. If he violates the Buddha's moral precepts, then he's a fraud. And he covertly indulges his greedy desires. He engages in licentious conduct on the sly.  
  
K5 The types of things he says.  
 **Sutra:  
  
The other person is fond of saying that Buddhas are appearing in the world. He claims that in a certain place a certain person is actually a transformation body of a certain Buddha. Or he says that a certain person is such and such a Bodhisattva who has come to teach humankind. People who witness this are filled with admiration. Their wrong views multiply, and their wisdom of modes is destroyed.  
  
Commentary:**  
The other person is fond of saying that Buddhas are appearing in the world. The person possessed by the demon likes to roam about, and then based on his adventures, he talks about strange and mysterious things. The things he says are so mysterious that no one can conceive of them. He says, "All the Buddhas have now come into the world to save people." He claims that in a certain place a certain person is actually a transformation body of a certain Buddha. "He's really Buddha so-and-so, whose transformation body has come here to save living beings." Or he says that a certain person is such and such a Bodhisattva who has come to teach humankind.  
  
For example, one of my disciples says that the disciples of a certain teacher say that their teacher is a Bodhisattva. That's ridiculous. What kind of Bodhisattva? A ghost Bodhisattva. They're just cheating people. I'll tell you something: A real Buddha or Bodhisattva would never admit that he was a Buddha or a Bodhisattva.  
  
Nor would he let his disciples advertise for him, saying, "Our teacher is a Bodhisattva." I never told you to talk like that. Why do some of you say that your teacher is a Buddha? You must never speak that way about me. Haven't I told you I'm a ghost? Just tell them your teacher is a ghost. I don't want to be called a Bodhisattva or a Buddha. How pathetic those people are! Here the person says, "This is a Bodhisattva who has come to teach the world! He has come to save us in this Dharma-ending Age." People who witness this are filled with admiration. Since they have childish views and don't really understand the Buddhadharma, they think, "Wow! He's a Bodhisattva! Fantastic! Let's hurry and go hear him speak the dharma and ask him to be our teacher!" For example, yesterday someone came to steal the dharma. I asked him who his teacher was, and he said it was so-andso. That's the kind of situation this is referring to. They are filled with awe and admiration. "We'll take this Bodhisattva as our teacher, and study Bodhisattva dharmas with him. Since he's a Bodhisattva, of course all the people he teaches can become Bodhisattvas, too." As a result, their wrong views multiply, gradually growing thicker and thicker, and their wisdom of modes is destroyed. Their wisdom of all modes and all their various kinds of wisdom are eradicated. The seeds of their wisdom are destroyed. It's that dangerous!  
  
[January 1983]  
  
There's not a very great difference between what is true principle and what is not true principle. It's a very subtle difference, and so it's not easy for us to have dharma-selecting vision and to distinguish between proper dharma and deviant dharmas, or good and evil. If a person is proper, then everything he does will be open and upright. If he is deviant, then he will always be taking risks hoping to gain advantages; he will do disgraceful things. Good people try to help others, while evil people harm others. Once we recognize these points, we will have a clear understanding.

K6 Giving the name and pointing out the harm.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This is a drought ghost that in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person. But when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is a drought ghost that in its old age has become a demon. Wherever a drought ghost goes, there will be no rainfall. The drought will last at least six months, and it may go on for one, two, three, or five years. As long as the ghost is in the area, there will be no rain. While young, it is a ghost. But as it ages, it becomes more crafty and villainous and turns into a demon. A derogatory proverb about old people says: "To be old and not to have died is to be a rascal." That is even more the case with ghosts. If a ghost grows old and doesn't die, it becomes a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person. But when it tires of doing so, after it has played its tricks for a long time, the demon becomes bored with the whole affair. Having lost interest, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law. They are arrested and put in prison. They may be executed or face life imprisonment. It is just as if they were in the hells.  
  
K7 Instructions to be aware and not become confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the demon king's cycle of transmigration. Don't join the demon's retinue. If you are confused and do not understand, if you don't recognize the workings of the demon king, then you will follow the demon king and fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
J3 Greed for union.  
K1 Samadhi leads to craving and seeking.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves spiritual oneness, so he clarifies his concentrated thought as he greedily seeks for union.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves spiritual oneness. He wants to join in close connection with all sages. So he clarifies his concentrated thought as he greedily seeks for union. He forcefully uses subtle thoughts that have been settled and made clear. Because of his one secret thought of craving for union, he gives the demon king a chance to come and disturb him.  
  
K2 A demon dispatches a deviant force to possess a person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
The demon sees its chance, so it dispatches a spirit that quickly possesses a person and speaks the dharma through him.  
  
K3 The person who is possessed causes trouble.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This person, unaware that he is actually possessed by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks union, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. Neither his own body nor the bodies of those listening to the dharma go through any external transformations. But he makes the minds of the listeners become 'enlightened' before they listen to the dharma, so they experience changes in every thought. They may have the knowledge of past lives or the knowledge of others' thoughts. They may see the hells or know all the good and evil events in the human realm. They may speak verses or spontaneously recite sutras. Each person is elated and feels he has obtained something unprecedented.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This possessed person is unaware that he is actually possessed by a demon. He claims he has reached the wondrous fruition of unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person, the cultivator who seeks union, he arranges a dharma seat, ascends it, and speaks the dharma. Neither his own body nor the bodies of those listening to the dharma go through any external transformations. His own appearance does not change, nor do the appearances of his listeners change. Nothing happens on the outside. It is not as in a previous passage, where the listeners saw themselves sitting on precious lotus flowers or saw their own bodies radiating purple-golden light. Nor is it as when they saw the person speaking dharma change into a bhikshu, a bhikshuni, Shakra, a woman, and so forth. There are no such transformations.  
  
But instead he makes the minds of the listeners become "enlightened" before they listen to the dharma. After their "enlightenment," they feel as if they are drunk or having a dream in which they strike it rich. This "enlightenment" is not true enlightenment.  
  
It is an illusory state, like watching a movie or taking an hallucinogenic drug. They see everything in an altered state so that in their minds they experience changes in every thought. They may have the knowledge of past lives, but again the knowledge of past lives they attain is not real. What they see is totally illusory. Or they may have the knowledge of others' thoughts. They may see all of the states in the hells. Or they may know all the good and evil events in the human realm. They may casually be able to speak verses on their own, or they may spontaneously recite sutras. Each person is elated and feels he has obtained something unprecedented. They all say, "He truly is a Bodhisattva! He's really a Buddha! He has made me enlightened! He has given me the power of knowing past lives." However, the experience lasts only while they are listening to the dharma. That is why it is not genuine.  
  
[May 1989]  
  
Layperson: Venerable Master, dharma masters, and good advisors. I'd like to share something which is closely related to everyone's cultivation.  
  
When the feeling skandha comes to an end, the cultivator tends to be in a state of anxiety in which he craves clever and skillful expedients. He wants to merge with the cosmic principle, unite with potentials, and convert living beings. When he has this kind of anxiety, several things may happen. For example, some people who have never read sutras before will become possessed by demons, and then they will be able to explain many sutras. There are many "cultivators" in Taiwan who have read very little of the sutras and who may have violated the substance of the precepts they received. Yet they want to obtain clever and skillful expedients; when they see other people explaining sutras and gaining a large following, they hope to quickly attain wisdom themselves so that they can also explain sutras to many people. Having such a thought they become possessed by demons as they sit in meditation.  
  
Many people who seem to be very good at explaining sutras are actually possessed by demons. Of course, if a person strictly follows the precepts, diligently recites mantras and sutras, and cultivates very hard, then he may not be possessed. However, there are some people who are very casual about holding precepts and who do not recite sutras or bow to the Buddhas; yet when they go onstage and close their eyes, after two or three days not only they themselves, but also those in the audience who gave rise to false thinking will be able to lecture very well on the sutras without having studied them before.  
  
I don't think this will happen at the Venerable Master's Wayplaces. If you go to other Way-places where the dharma-protecting spirits don't do a good job and you give rise to false thinking and greedy attachments, then you may have these states, especially if you like to meditate. People who don't meditate usually don't have these states. There is an elderly woman in Taiwan who was basically illiterate, but after three or five days, she could write beautiful Chinese calligraphy. I've seen many cases like this, where people suddenly "become Buddhas" in a few days' time. That woman had not been able to explain sutras before, but after three days, she was very good at explaining them. Such strange things really happen.  
  
That is why everyone wants to learn deviant dharmas and no one wants to learn the proper dharma. If you explain the Buddhadharma to them, they won't listen. Those of us here are probably more aware of such phenomena. These states probably won't happen to people at this Way-place, but you have to be careful when you go out.  
  
Venerable Master: These are all cases of people being possessed by fox spirits. This is what is meant by "its spirit possesses a person."  
  
K4 The cultivator becomes deluded and confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
The good person is beguiled and fooled into thinking the other is a Bodhisattva. His thoughts become entangled in love. He breaks the Buddha's moral precepts and covertly indulges his greedy desires.  
  
Commentary:**  
The good person is beguiled and fooled into thinking the other is a Bodhisattva. The cultivator is extremely stupid and thinks the possessed person is a Bodhisattva. His thoughts become entangled in love. He falls in love with the demon. He breaks the Buddha's moral precepts, not abiding by them, and covertly indulges his greedy desires. He has licentious relations on the sly.  
  
K5 The types of things he says.  
 **Sutra:  
  
He is fond of saying that there are greater Buddhas and lesser Buddhas, earlier Buddhas and later Buddhas; that among them are true Buddhas and false Buddhas, male Buddhas and female Buddhas; and that the same is true of Bodhisattvas. When people witness this, their initial resolve is washed away, and they easily get carried away with their wrong understanding.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
He is fond of saying that there are greater Buddhas and lesser Buddhas. What does this demon like to say? It says, "You people study the Buddhadharma, but do you know what Buddhas are all about? There are great Buddhas and small Buddhas, old Buddhas and young Buddhas." He further elaborates that there are earlier Buddhas and later Buddhas; that among them are true Buddhas and false Buddhas. The demon king claims that he is a true Buddha, while other Buddhas are false Buddhas. He also says that there are male Buddhas and female Buddhas. He insists, "Intercourse between men and women creates Buddhas. It is the origin of Buddhas; it is the Bodhi mind." Of course this confuses people. They think, "Oh, so that's how one becomes a Buddha!" and then they indulge in wild debauchery. They would rather die than not engage in lust.  
  
And he says that the same is true of Bodhisattvas, maintaining that there are great and small Bodhisattvas, and male and female ones, too. Actually, anyone who becomes a Buddha or a Bodhisattva is male. There are no female Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. Guanyin Bodhisattva may manifest in the form of a woman in order to teach and rescue women. When people witness this and hear him saying such things, they think, "He's right. I always see Guanyin Bodhisattva depicted as a female. That's proof right there." Such people do not understand the Buddhadharma. Guanyin Bodhisattva is neither male nor female. The Bodhisattva responds to each living being and appears in an appropriate form to teach and transform that being. It is very difficult to distinguish manifestations of Bodhisattvas from manifestations of demons, because demons also have spiritual powers and the ability to transform themselves. How can you tell if someone is a demon? Observe to see whether he has lust or greed. Their initial resolve is washed away. They change their minds and forsake their original resolve to cultivate, and they easily get carried away with their wrong  
understanding.  
  
K6 Giving the name and pointing out the harm.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This is a mei-ghost that in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person. But when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law.  
  
Commentary:**  
This is a mei-ghost, a ghost that falls into the category of li mei, and wang liang ghosts, that in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person who is cultivating samadhi. But when it tires of doing so eventually, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law. They will be arrested and imprisoned.  
  
K7 Instructions to be aware and not become confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. You should wake up at the very start and avoid entering the demon king's cycle of rebirth. If you lack wisdom and are confused, and you do not understand what is going on, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
J4 Greed to analyze things.  
K1 Samadhi leads to craving and seeking.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves to know the origins of things, so he exhaustively investigates the nature of physical things and their changes from beginning to end. He intensifies the keenness of his thoughts as he greedily seeks to analyze things.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person who is cultivating samadhi is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves to know the origins of things. He decides that he wants to study the principles of the physical world. So he exhaustively investigates the nature of physical things and their changes and transformations from beginning to end, to find out what they are all about. He intensifies the keenness of his thoughts, honing his mental concentration as he greedily seeks to analyze, differentiate, and understand things in the physical world.  
  
K2 A demon dispatches a deviant force to possess a person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
At that time a demon from the heavens sees him and says, "Aha! You've had a greedy thought. Great! Now I can send one of my retinue to snare you." And so it seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Once again, the demon king sends one of its followers and its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and speak the dharma of the demon king.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
Disciple: I've noticed that every state of the thinking skandha begins with the phrase "in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, [he is] untroubled by any deviant mental state." What does the phrase "untroubled by any deviant mental state" mean? Does it mean the person is without deviant knowledge and views? Or does it mean that he does not have improper thoughts? When the cultivator reaches this level, what is his state like?  
  
Venerable Master: "In the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone." There has to be unhindered clarity for it to be wonderful, and it must be wonderful for there to be unhindered clarity. When he attains this state in the feeling skandha, he feels very much at ease. "[He is] untroubled by any deviant mental state." That means he doesn't encounter any such state. If he has some skill in the feeling skandha, he basically shouldn't encounter any deviant mental state. And yet, for no apparent reason, he does encounter one. This deviant mental state is a thief from outside, a deviant demon, ghost, or freak that comes from outside. Originally, he shouldn't have encountered such beings, but in the end he had thoughts of love, seeking, greed, selfishness, or self-benefit. Having reverted to these old faults, he encountered those beings. If he didn't have these old faults, he would be able to continue making progress.  
  
If you understand all the states that come up without being swayed by them, then you won't be troubled by deviant mental states. As soon as you're turned by a state, however, it will be able to trouble you. Basically, he isn't supposed to be troubled by deviant mental states, and yet he gets turned, is this a contradiction? No, it's becase his thought of desire has opened the door to thieves. He covertly indulges his greedy desires. He sneaks around engaging in immoral conduct and does not abide by the rules and precepts. He says, "What do precepts matter?" and claims to be enlightened. I don't dare to transgress the rules, because I'm not enlightened.  
  
K3 The person who is possessed causes trouble.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This person, unaware that he is possessed by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks to know the origins of things, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. His body has an awesome spiritual quality which subdues the seeker. He makes the minds of those gathered beside his seat spontaneously compliant, even before they have heard the dharma. He says to all those people that the Buddha's nirvana, Bodhi, and dharma body are there before them in the form of his own physical body. He says, "The successive begetting of fathers and sons from generation to generation is itself the dharma body, which is permanent and never-ending. What you see right now are those very Buddhalands. There are no other pure dwellings or golden features."  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is really a case of "everyone being a Buddha!" That's just the approach this demon uses. This person is unaware that he is possessed by a demon. He doesn't have any idea that he has been caught by a demon, because he gets muddled and loses awareness when he becomes possessed. The demon takes total control and becomes his spokesman. He claims he has reached the unsurpassed wondrous fruition of nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks to know the origins of things, who seeks thorough understanding of the physical world, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. His, the demon king's, body has an awesome spiritual quality which subdues the seeker, the good person who seeks the source. He makes the minds of this person and of those gathered beside his seat spontaneously compliant, even before they have heard the dharma. Their minds are already subdued and respectful.  
  
He says to all those people that the Buddha's nirvana, Bodhi, and dharma body are there before them in the form of his own physical body. He says, "What are Bodhi and nirvana? They are right here in my flesh body. The successive begetting of fathers and sons from generation to generation is itself the dharma body, which is permanent and never-ending. Fathers beget sons, and the sons grow up to become fathers who in turn beget sons. This succession of generations is the permanent, indestructible dharma body. What you see right now are those very Buddhalands. These now are the Buddhas' lands. There are no other pure dwellings or golden features. There aren't any other pure lands to dwell in or any other golden appearances. Those are all phony." That's how he talks He has a ghostly quality and a demonic quality. Don't I often use the expression "demonic energy"? This is what demonic energy is. Because he has a demonic energy from the demon possessing him, people are taken in by what he says.  
  
K4 The people become deluded and confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Those people believe and accept his words, forgetting their initial resolve. They offer up their lives, feeling they have obtained something unprecedented. They are all beguiled and confused into thinking he is a Bodhisattva. As they pursue his ideas, they break the Buddha's moral precepts and covertly indulge their greedy desires.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Those people believe and accept his words. When they hear him speaking such principles, they say, "That makes sense: Fathers beget sons, and the sons in turn beget their sons, generation after generation. That's the permanent and indestructible dharma body. That's actually the way it is." They all believe it forgetting their initial resolve. They lose their former proper outlook and proper thought. Their faith in the demon king is far stronger than their faith in the proper dharma. When demon kings and heterodox sects tell them what to do, they don't dare disobey. When a true teacher tells them to do something, they waver between doubt and belief The demon king confuses them with its demonic power so that they believe whatever it says.  
  
If you told a demon king to lecture on this sutra, he would not do it. Why not? As soon as he did, his true identity would be exposed. That's why I said that if you asked certain people in America who falsely claim to be experts in the Buddhadharma to explain this sutra, they wouldn't dare do it. They are afraid of being exposed.  
  
They offer up their bodies and lives to the demon king, feeling they have obtained something unprecedented. They are all beguiled and confused into thinking he is a Bodhisattva. They are truly pitiable. They think the demon is a Bodhisattva. As they pursue his ideas, studying with the demon and learning his magic, they no longer maintain, but instead break, the Buddha's moral precepts and covertly indulge their greedy desires. They secretly indulge in lust.  
  
K5 The types of things he says.  
 **Sutra:  
  
He is fond of saying that the eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are the Pure Land, and that the male and female organs are the true place of Bodhi and nirvana. Ignorant people believe these filthy words.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
How terrible this demon king is! He is fond of saying that the eyes, ears, nose, and tongue, body, and mind are the Pure Land. "You don't have to look anywhere else for the dharma door of the Pure Land," he tells them. "It's just the six sense faculties." And he also says that the male and female organs are the seeds of Bodhi, the true place of Bodhi and nirvana. Can you imagine speaking like that? Ignorant people believe these filthy words. People without any knowledge or wisdom say, "Oh? I've never seen or heard anything like this before. So that's what Bodhi and nirvana are!" With total disregard for their own lives, they race along the road to death for all they are worth. They believe in such impure talk.

K6 Giving the name, and pointing out the harm.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This is a poisonous ghost or an evil paralysis ghost that in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person. But when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is a poisonous ghost or an evil paralysis ghost, also known as a kumbhanda ghost, that in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person who cultivates samadhi. But when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law. The authorities intervene and impose restrictions upon the disciples and the teacher. They are arrested and imprisoned.  
  
K7 Instructions to be aware and not become confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
You should be aware of this well in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. Don't fall into the demon king's snare. If you are confused and do not understand, you certainly will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
J5 Greed for spiritual responses.  
K1 Samadhi leads to craving and seeking.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves revelations from afar, so he pours all his energy into this intense investigation as he greedily seeks for imperceptible spiritual responses.  
  
Commentary:**  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person who cultivates samadhi is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect bright concentration. At that time he is no longr vulnerable to possession by demons or externalists. Within samadhi, his mind suddenly craves revelations from afar.  
  
"Revelations from afar" refers to knowledge of what is happening, no matter how far away. For instance, he might be in San Francisco and want to know what is happening in New York. If he can know about it, he has experienced what is called a revelation from afar. So he pours all his energy into this intense investigation as he greedily seeks for imperceptible spiritual responses. He intensifies his investigation of this matter of faraway revelations, seeking for psychic responses. For example, as soon as he sits in meditation in San Francisco, he may be able to see clearly what his relatives and friends are doing in New York, and hear clearly what they are saying. Later, he finds out that what he saw and heard is exactly what was really happening at the time. That's the kind of spiritual response he would like to attain.  
  
K2 A demon dispatches a deviant force to possess a person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens notices that your samadhi is about to be perfected, and it becomes jealous. It seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for and sends its demon descendant there to wait for an opening. As soon as it sees a chance, its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma.  
  
K3 The person who is possessed causes trouble.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This person, completely unaware that he is possessed by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks revelations, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. He briefly appears to his listeners in a body that looks a hundred or a thousand years old. They experience a defiling love for him and cannot bear to part with him. They personally act as his servants, tirelessly making the four kinds of offerings to him. Each member of the assembly believes that this person is his former teacher, his original good and wise advisor. They give rise to love for his dharma and stick to him as if glued, feeling they have obtained something unprecedented.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is really dangerous. This person, completely unaware that he is possessed by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. He claims he has been certified when he has not and that he has attained what he has not. He hasn't attained unsurpassed nirvana, but claims he has. When he comes to see that good person who greedily seeks revelations from afar and imperceptible spiritual responses, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma.  
  
He, the person possessed by the demon, briefly appears to his listeners in a body that looks a hundred or a thousand years old. You should know that this vision is temporary. When the people in the assembly see him with the white hair of an old man and the skin of a child, they think he must be an old cultivator, an old bhikshu. They experience a defiling love and cannot bear to part with him. This defiling love refers to a devotion that stains and pollutes them. Once there is love, there is defilement. With defilement, you lose purity.  
  
All the listeners want to follow this demon day and night. Why? They are deluded by its charisma. They personally act as his slaves and servants, tirelessly making the four kinds of offerings to him. The four kinds of offerings are:  
  
1. food and drink,  
2. clothing,  
3. bedding and sitting mats, and  
4. medicine.  
  
They never grow weary of making such offerings to him. Again, one wonders why. A genuine cultivator, a true disciple of the Buddha, will not have people draw near him and serve him in this way. It is only because the demon has a kind of charisma that everyone draws near him and likes to stay with him.  
  
Each member of the assembly believes that this person is his former teacher. They get so confused that each believes the possessed person was his original good and wise advisor. They think, "Oh! He was my teacher in the past!" They give rise to love for his dharma and stick to him as if glued, feeling they have obtained something unprecedented. "It's never been like this before," they think.  
  
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She does whatever he tells her to do. It's not as simple as making the four kinds of offerings of food, clothing, bedding, and medicines. She has to offer her body, mind, and life to him and engage in lust with him. The difference lies in the practice of lust. If a person has lust, then what he does is deviant. If he has no lust then he is proper.  
  
You should never listen to a person who says, "When you are enlightened, you can do whatever you want including indulge in lust." Those are the words of a big demon king. Before you are enlightened, you may transgress the rules because you do not know any better. But if you say that you are enlightened, that you understand, and yet you deliberately transgress the rules and precepts, then what enlightenment have you obtained? It's as if you are driving in reverse.  
  
People nowadays don't investigate true principles. All they know about is getting enlightened. They hear someone say that after he is enlightened, he doesn't have to follow the rules, so they repeat his words and say: "Oh! He doesn't have to follow any rules. Since he's enlightened, he can smoke, drink, play around with women, and do anything at all."  
  
The most important thing is lust: if he has lust and he indulges, in impure conduct all the time, then he's a demon. If he is not greedy for money and he is free of lust, then he is genuine. In this case, he announces to those he meets, 'In a former life you were my wife," or "You were the empress," or "You were my such and such when I was the emperor," and so forth; he makes these statements in order to arouse lust in people. By doing this in public, he hopes to cheat people and exploit the situation. Again, one wonders why. A genuine cultivator, a true disciple of the Buddha, will not have people draw near him and serve him in this way. It is only because the demon has a kind of charisma that everyone draws near him and likes to stay with him.  
  
K4 The cultivator becomes deluded and confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
The good person is beguiled and fooled into thinking the other is a Bodhisattva. Attracted to the other's thinking, he breaks the Buddha's moral precepts and covertly indulges his greedy desires.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
The good person is beguiled and fooled to the utmost into thinking that because the other person can transform himself, he is a Buddha or a Bodhisattva. Fox spirits can display transformations and so can goblins, demons, ghosts, and weird creatures. But it never occurs to him that the ability to transform does not necessarily mean someone is a Bodhisattva or a Buddha. What good roots does he have to enable him to encounter real Bodhisattvas or Buddhas? Attracted to the other's thinking, he draws near the person who is possessed by the demon. He breaks the Buddha's moral precepts. This is the important point. How do we know he is a demon? We can tell from the fact that he breaks the precepts and covertly indulges his greedy desires by engaging in lust.  
  
K5 The types of things he says.  
 **Sutra:  
  
He is fond of saying, "In a past life, in a certain incarnation, I rescued a certain person who was then my wife (or my mistress, or my brother). Now I have come to rescue you again. We will stay together and go to another world to make offerings to a certain Buddha." Or he may say, "There is a Heaven of Great Brilliance where a Buddha now dwells. It is the resting place of all Tathagatas." Ignorant people believe his ravings and lose their original resolve.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Whenever he sees someone, he is fond of saying the same things that Liu Jintong, whom I mentioned before, used to say. She would tell her victim that he had been her son in one past life and her husband in another past life. Now this person says, "In a past life, in a certain incarnation," perhaps in his hundred-and-first life or his hundred-and-second life, "I rescued a certain person who was then my wife,' or he says, "who was then my mistress," or, "who was then my brother," and so forth. "Now I have come to rescue you again. We will always stay together and never part. We will go to another world to make offerings to a certain Buddha."  
  
Or he may say, "There is a Heaven of Great Brilliance that we are going to." Actually the heaven he refers to is the place where the demon king resides. He says, "It is the place where a true Buddha now dwells, and all the Buddhas you presently believe in are phony. It is the resting place of all Tathagatas. When they are tired from teaching and rescuing beings in the world, they go to the Heaven of Great Brilliance to rest." When those ignorant people hear him they believe his ravings, and as a result they lose their original resolve, which had been based on proper faith.  
  
K6 Giving the name and pointing out the harm.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This is a pestilence ghost that in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person. But when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is a pestilence ghost that, after some three thousand or five thousand years, in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person, attempting to destroy his samadhi power. But after a while, when it has played all its tricks and the game isn't new anymore, it tires of doing so. It becomes bored and will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law. Once the demon goes, the person will lose all his awesomeness and charisma. Then people will start to doubt him. Eventually he will be taken to court and put in jail.  
  
K7 Instructions to be aware and not become confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
You should be aware of this in advance. You should awaken to this principle beforehand and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. Don't fall into the demons' snare. Don't enter the demonic cycle of birth and death. If you are confused and do not understand this principle, you will fall into the Relentless Hells for sure.  
  
J6 Greed for peace and quiet.  
K1 Samadhi leads to craving and seeking.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves deep absorption, so he restrains himself with energetic diligence and likes to dwell in secluded places as he greedily seeks for peace and quiet.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person who is cultivating samadhi is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind develops a craving. He craves deep absorption in that principle. So he restrains himself with energetic diligence and likes to dwell in secluded places as he greedily seeks for peace and quiet. He maintains firm self-control and is very strict with himself. He puts great effort into cultivation. He likes to reside in places that are yin, lacking in sunlight. He prefers places where there aren't any people, perhaps a cave somewhere deep in the mountains or in some isolated valley. He picks a secluded spot, for he likes still and quiet places. Because he is too greedy for peace and quiet, demons will come. In cultivation, people should not be greedy. Don't be greedy for good things, and don't be greedy for bad things. The ordinary mind is the Way. Just act ordinary, and don't be greedy. No matter what you may be greedy for, it's not right.  
  
K2 A demon dispatches a deviant force to possess a person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is the same situation as before. At that time a demon king from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. When the chance comes, its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma. It sends a member of its demonic retinue to possess another person who then comes and speaks the sutras and the dharma for him.  
  
K3 The demon?s words and deeds that mislead others.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This person, unaware that he is possessed by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks seclusion, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. He causes all of his listeners to think they know their karma from the past. Or he may say to someone there, "You haven't died yet, but you have already become an animal." Then he instructs another person to step on the first person's 'tail' and suddenly the first person cannot stand up. At that point, all in the assembly pour out their hearts in respect and admiration for him. If someone has a thought, the demon detects it immediately. He establishes intense ascetic practices that exceed the Buddha's moral precepts. He slanders bhikshus, scolds his assembly of disciples, and exposes people's private affairs without fear of ridicule or rejection. He is fond of foretelling calamities and auspicious events, and when they come to pass, he is not wrong in the slightest.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This person is unaware that he is possessed by a demon. He claims, as demon kings do, that he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. What proof is there that someone is a demon? For the most part, demons praise themselves.  
  
They say, "Do you know me? I've already obtained nirvana." Or it may be, "I've realized the first fruition of Arhatship," or, "I've reached the fourth fruition of Arhatship;" or, 'I'm a Bodhisattva now. Do you recognize me?"  
  
As soon as someone talks like that you don't have to ask to know he is a demon. A Buddha would never say, "I'm a Buddha. Hurry up and bow to me. If you don't bow now, you'll miss your chance. Since I'm a Buddha, you're really stupid if you don't bow to me." Anyone who claims to be a Buddha, a Bodhisattva, or an Arhat is nothing but a demon. You can know immediately, without question, that it is a demon talking. A Buddha would never say he was a Buddha. A Bodhisattva who has come into the world would never say he was a Bodhisattva. Even if other people said he was a Bodhisattva, he would not admit it. Even if he were a Buddha, and someone said, "Yes, I know you are a Buddha," he would not acknowledge it. One who is truly enlightened would not admit to that either. If someone says, "I'm enlightened," don't be taken in by him, he doesn't even measure up to a dog. Don't listen to his bluster and self-aggrandizing.  
  
Listen to sutras so that you can have a demon-spotting mirror. Then when demons, ghosts, and weird beings show themselves, you will recognize them. But if you don't understand the Buddhadharma. you will not know what they are saying, and you will be cheated by them. When he, the person who has been possessed by the demon, comes to see that good person who seeks seclusion, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma.  
  
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This "person" is referring to the cultivator, not to another person. He has been possessed by a demon, but he doesn't realize it. He thinks that he has really become enlightened and realized the fruition. He thinks, "What great spiritual skill I have now!" He is not aware of his own mistake. "When people come to see that good person." This phrase is referring to good men and women from outside, who come in quest of the dharma. They want to hear him speak the dharma because they know that he has spiritual powers. When they come, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma to teach and transform them.  
  
Now we are bringing up each person's opinion for everyone to look into, and we don't have to say which opinion is right and which one is wrong. We are studying true principles; true principles are real gold. Whatever does not agree with true principle is wrong. Why do I say that the Shurangama Sutra is real? Because it explains the principles so clearly and honestly that it exposes the demons from the heavens and those of external ways for what they are. It exposes those who pretend to be good and wise advisors, so they have no recourse but to claim that the Shurangama Sutra is false. They try to pass off fish eyes as pearls; they stir up confusion and then exploit the situation.  
  
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In this case, people from outside come and invite him. He doesn't go to them first. "When people come to see that good person" means people from outside approach the cultivator who seeks seclusion. They invite him to go explain the sutras and speak dharma, and then he goes. Do you understand? It is absolutely impermissible to alter the sutra text. This is the only meaning and there is no other explanation. Any other explanation would not make sense; it would be a forced and artificial interpretation. He causes all of his listeners to think they know their karma from the past. Each person feels he knows, as if in a dream, what he was in his previous lives. One says, "Oh, in my last life I was a watchdog." Another person says, "In my previous life I was a cat." Someone else says, "In my past life I was a chicken." Another person says, "In my past life I was a cow." None of them were human beings.  
  
Or he, the demon, may say to someone there, "You haven't died yet but you have already become an animal." What does he say? He says, "You were a dog in your past life, and even though you haven't died yet, you've become a dog again. Don't you believe me?" Then he instructs another person to step on the first person's 'tail.' He says to someone else, "He doesn't believe what I'm telling him. Go behind him and stand on his tail and then see if he can get up." Then that person stamps his foot on the ground and says he is standing the first person's tail, and suddenly the first person cannot stand up. Wouldn't you say those were great spiritual powers? After the demon said the person had a tail and told someone to step on it, the person could not get up. The person has no choice but to believe. "He says I'm an animal, and now I really do have a tail. Otherwise, how could he step on it and prevent me from standing up?"  
  
At that, all in the assembly pour out their hearts in respect and admiration for him. "It's magic," they say. "He knows the person is going to be an animal even before the person has died. He must be a Buddha or a living Bodhisattva." Actually, they've been duped by a ghost and don't even realize it. They see a ghost or a demon king, and mistake it for a Bodhisattva. Living beings are really upside down.  
  
If someone has a doubt, the demon detects it immediately. Someone in the assembly may be skeptical and think, "How can that be? It isn't reasonable." As soon as he starts to doubt, the demon knows it and says, "So you don't believe me?" These people take one look, "Oh! He's really a Bodhisattva! I didn't say what was on my mind, and he knew about it He exposed my doubt. That's incredible." After that he doesn't dare to disbelieve.  
  
He establishes intense ascetic practices that exceed the Buddha's moral precepts. He says, "The Buddha's vinaya is not enough. I'm establishing a new vinaya for you. I want you to be new Buddhas, and I am creating a new Buddhism. The previous one is obsolete and inapplicable. This is the scientific era, the nuclear age, and everything must be modernized and improved. The old way of thinking is no longer useful. The old Buddhism cannot be applied either." That is how he changes Buddhism, He says that people can be elders or bhikshus or anything they want.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
There are old-fashioned religions and trendy religions. No one believes in religions they consider old-fashioned, but everyone chases madly after trendy things. Of all the dharma spoken by the Buddha, the most important part is precepts. Nowadays, people consider the Buddha really old fashioned, and they want to find something more up-to-date. Their search takes them fight into the demon king's lair. None of the external sects are free from greed and desire. They are insatiable, and they desire to benefit themselves at the expense of others.  
  
I cannot say that we at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas are definitely in accord with the proper dharma. Nevertheless, I ask each of you who has followed me for so many years: Have I ever asked you to hand your wealth and property over to the temple?  
  
Why have I never done this? Because I'm very old-fashioned. I want to uphold and honor the precepts. The precepts tell us to give to others, not to demand that others give to us while we don't give anything to them.  
  
At the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, our revenue comes very naturally. We don't scheme for contributions. We receive enough income as it is. If we were to try to cheat people of their money, how would we be any different from demons? People who tell others to donate their personal and family wealth and their own lives and their families' lives to the Way-place are totally misguided. I'm not like them. I do not want anyone's wealth, nor do I desire any beautiful women. I want neither fame nor a good reputation. In fact, I have quite a notorious reputation, not a good one. The very mention of my name gives some people a headache, especially those goblins, demons, ghosts, and freaks.  
  
He slanders bhikshus, saying, "Bhikshu? What's a bhikshu?" He makes fun of the name. He says, "You say he's a bhikshu? I say he's a bach!"  
  
He also scolds his assembly of disciples. He scolds his disciples however he pleases. He may tell them, "You're a dog," or "You are a cat," or "You're a rat," or "You're a pig." The disciples hear his scolding and accept whatever he says, thinking he is a Bodhisattva. "You say I'm a pig, so I'm a pig." "You say I'm a dog, so I'm a dog." "You say I'm a cat, so I'm a cat." They don' dare talk back. This demon king has such tremendous power that he manages to delude people into believing everything he says.  
  
And he exposes people's private affairs. For instance, a man and a woman may have done something indecent, and he will say to the woman, "You did such and such with a certain man in a certain place."  
  
The woman thinks to herself, "How did he know?"  
  
Or he may expose them in public, saying, "These two are despicable. They did something improper, something unspeakable, in such-and-such a place. Ask her about it, she wouldn't dare deny it." It turns out that they have in fact done it, and they don't dare to deny it. He does this to show people that he has spiritual powers and that he knows everything that is going on. He exposes their private matters without fear of ridicule or rejection. He divulges people's secrets and is not afraid that they will scorn him.  
  
He is always fond of foretelling calamities and auspicious events. He likes to say things such as, "You'd better be careful. Tomorrow is going to be an unlucky day for you. Someone might try to poison you, so watch what you eat or you may die of poisoning." He foretells both unlucky and lucky events, and when they come to pass, he is not wrong in the slightest. When the events happen, they turn out to be exactly as he predicted. So how could people not believe in him? Such demon kings are far more efficacious than Bodhisattvas.

K4 Giving the name and pointing out the harm.  
K5 Instructions to be aware and not become confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This is a ghost with great powers that in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person. But when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law. You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is a ghost with great powers that in its old age has become a demon. Ghosts become demons when they get old, just as people who don't practice virtuous deeds become rascals in their old age. As I have told you, the Chinese have a saying, "To be old and not to have died is to be a rascal." When people are old and experienced, they can make trouble. In the same way, old ghosts become demons. It disturbs and confuses the good person. Jealous of the cultivation of other people, the ghost destroys their samadhi power. But when it eventually tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body and no longer possess him. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law. That's equivalent to their falling into the hells.  
  
There's a saying:  
  
Someone deluded transmits his delusion,  
So after the transmission, neither one understands.  
The teacher falls into the hells,  
And the disciple burrows in after him.  
  
The same principle applies here. Because he hasn't met a teacher who truly understands, the disciple is also muddled. When he sees his teacher going to the hells, he follows his teacher there. The teacher turns around and says, "What did you come here for?" The disciple replies, "I saw you coming here, so of course I came along."  
  
The teacher says, "Oh no! This isn't a good place. You shouldn't have come."  
  
"But you came first. How could I not have followed you? I study with you, after all. I should go wherever you go," says the disciple.  
  
The teacher thinks, "Ah, I've landed in the hells myself, and brought my disciple with me as well. I've really done wrong by you. I'm very sorry!" You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
J7 Greed to know past lives.  
K1 Samadhi leads to craving and seeking.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves more knowledge and understanding, so he diligently toils at examining and probing as he greedily seeks to know past lives.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves more knowledge and understanding. While in samadhi, he wants to know more things, to have the knowledge of past lives. He works with intense vigor and does not fear suffering. So he diligently toils at examining and probing as he greedily seeks to know past lives.  
  
K2 A demon dispatches a deviant force to possess a person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma. This person, unaware that he is possessed by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks knowledge, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma. This person, unaware that he is possessed by a demon, not realizing that he's been taken over by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks knowledge, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma.  
  
K3 The demon?s words and deeds that mislead others.  
 **Sutra:  
  
There in the dharma assembly, inexplicably, that person may obtain an enormous precious pearl. The demon may sometimes change into an animal that holds the pearl or other jewels, bamboo tablets, tallies, talismans, letters, and other unusual things in its mouth. The demon first gives the objects to the person and afterwards possesses him. Or he may fool his audience by burying the objects underground and then saying that a 'moonlight pearl' is illuminating the place. Thereupon the audience feels they have obtained something unique. He may eat only medicinal herbs and not partake of prepared food. Or he may eat only one sesame seed and one grain of wheat a day and still look robust. That is because he is sustained by the power of the demon. He slanders bhikshus and scolds his assembly of disciples without fear of ridicule or rejection.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
There in the dharma assembly, inexplicably, for no reason whatsoever, in the place where dharma is being spoken, that person may obtain an enormous precious pearl. It may be a diamond or something like a "wish-fulfilling pearl." The demon may sometimes change into an animal. The person who is speaking the dharma changes into an animal himself, explaining that Bodhisattvas can transform into anything. The animal that he changes into holds the pearl or other jewels, bamboo tablets, or tallies. Tallies were used for official purposes in ancient times. Words were written on a piece of bamboo, which was then split so that part of the words appeared on each piece. When it was time to use the tallies, they would be put together. If the tallies matched, it would be a certified match. If the two parts did not match, that would mean it was inauthentic. Talismans are used to subdue and catch demons, ghosts, goblins, and weird creatures. And the animal might carry letters and other unusual things in its mouth. All of these are strange, rare, and valuable objects. The demon first gives the objects to the person and afterwards possesses him.  
  
Or he may fool his audience by burying the objects underground and then saying that a "moonlight pearl" is illuminating the place. He buries the pearl in the ground and then tricks his listeners, telling them, "There is a pearl which resembles the bright moon, emitting light there." Thereupon the audience feels they have obtained something unique. "Wow! This has to be for real. This can't be a demon," they say. He is clearly a demon, yet they insist that he isn't. Alas for those who listen to his dharma! He may eat only medicinal herbs and not partake of prepared food. The demon often eats only herbs, not regular food. He doesn't eat good food. He may eat ginseng or other tonics and nourishing supplements. When I was in Hong Kong I met a person who said he didn't eat ordinary food. He acted as a medium for people who sought long life, sons, blessings, or other things.  
  
Whenever he stayed in people's homes, he would announce he didn't eat ordinary food. What did he eat then? Walnuts. Walnuts are very nourishing, full of oil. If you eat them, your brain will be very good. You only have to eat a little to be full; if you usually eat one bowl of rice you only have to eat half a bowl of walnuts to be full. He also ate pine nuts. At any rate, he ate the most nutritious items. Or he may eat only one sesame seed and one grain of wheat a day and still look robust. Even so, he stays really fat, fatter than a pig. That is because he is sustained by the power of the demon.  
  
He slanders bhikshus and scolds his assembly of disciples without fear of ridicule or rejection. He does nothing but slander those who have left the home-life. "Left-home people? what home did they leave? They don't cultivate at all. Left-home people aren't greedy for money? The more the better is their attitude." Or he says, "Why do you believe in him? He's just a person, after all. You're really an idiot." when people have faith in the bhikshus, he calls them idiots. He scolds his own disciples, calling them animals and all sorts of things. He's totally unafraid of any rebuttals.  
  
[May 1989]  
  
Disciple: "When he comes to see that good person who seeks knowledge, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma."  
  
Venerable Master: This means the demon. It goes to see the person who seeks knowledge of past lives.  
  
Disciple: "There in the dharma assembly, inexplicably, that person may obtain an enormous precious pearl. The demon may sometimes change into an animal." Is this another demon? Venerable Master: No, it's the same one.  
  
Disciple: Does the person possessed by the demon transform into an animal?  
  
Venerable Master: Yes. To everyone, he appears to be an animal. He takes on a bizarre appearance. "First, the demon gives them to the person, and afterwards possesses him." "The person" is the one who seeks knowledge of past lives.  
  
Disciple: The person who seeks knowledge of past lives is already possessed by a demon and has changed into an animal. And he's also holding the pearl and other gems in his mouth.  
  
Venerable Master: He gives them to the people who are listening to the dharma. It isn't just one person. Perhaps he selects one among them. This is all hypothetical. It doesn't necessarily have to happen that way. Don't think that it has to be that way just because the Buddha said it. This is an example, and you should be able to understand other situations by inference. Don't be so rigid. Be flexible in your understanding, so that the next time such a situation occurs, you'll know, "Oh, this is the same as that example." Here he turns into an animal, but in another case he might turn into a Buddha.  
  
Disciple: What about when it "Afterwards possesses him"? Whom does the demon possess?  
  
Venerable Master: The demon possesses everyone.  
  
Disciple: Are there other demons that come to possess everyone?  
  
Venerable Master: No, the same demon can have innumerable transformation bodies. It can possess that person as well as other people.  
  
Disciple: So it jumps around from one to the other? Venerable Master: It doesn't jump. It isn't just one; it can transform into many.  
  
Disciple: Oh, so it can possess you, and it can also possess someone else. I never knew demons were so powerful!  
  
Venerable Master: Demons are about as powerful as Buddhas. It's just that the one is deviant and the other is proper. What demons do is deviant, and what Buddhas do is proper. That's the difference. There's a person from Taiwan who has had such experiences. We can ask him to speak now. [To the layman] Tell everyone the whole story about how the demon transmitted the mind-dharma to you.  
  
Layman: Venerable Master, dharma masters, and good advisors. I will talk about my experiences in non-Buddhist religions, what I saw and understood. Perhaps my experiences are not quite the same as the states caused by the demons from the heavens described by the Buddha. These demons can transform in endless ways, and what I saw is only one of their states. As I share my experience, keep in mind that it is not the whole picture. The demons from the heavens manifest in many ways. They may or may not go through a medium. If you practice with an improper mind in an external sect, the demon can appear to you in the form of a person when you are meditating; it doesn't need a medium.  
  
This sutra text says, "There in the dharma assembly, inexplicably, that person may obtain an enormous precious pearl." Because it says "There in the dharma assembly," I think that there are three parties: the medium, the speaker of dharma, and the listeners. The Venerable Master interprets "the person" as referring to the possessed person. That is one interpretation. However, from what I understand and from the other explanations that I've read, I think "the person" refers to someone who hasn't been possessed yet. Why? Because the Buddha spoke the Shurangama Sutra in order to warn those who are not yet possessed, but whose minds have already gone astray. If they are not alert they will be possessed by demons. The Buddha wants to warn them. When the skandhas of form, feeling, and thinking come to an end, you should be especially cautious, for you may experience many of these states, and you need to know how to deal with them.  
  
Two years ago, I went to the home of a layman who shaved his head like a monk's. He said that while meditating, a demon from the heavens possessed him and said, "Let me give you a 'wordless book from heaven,' or such and such a sutra." People went there because they were looking for a quick way to get enlightened. At that Way-place they used all kinds of methods, and I either saw or heard them talk about every one of the first thirty skandha-demon states. For example, I saw the tallies, gems, and treasure troves. I also witnessed them eating meals of one sesame seed and one grain of wheat, or eating gluttonously. For example, in the case of "obtaining an enormous pearl" when you are meditating, someone will say, "May I give you this pearl?" If your mind is moved and you wish to have it, then through the medium, you stretch your hands out to take it. Once you accept it, you're in for trouble. I'll talk about my personal experience. When I went to a certain place two years ago, the layman told me, "I can give you a wordless book from heaven. If you practice according to it for three years, you can obtain great spiritual powers." That day my mind was rather swayed, and I thought, "If you want to give me a 'wordless book from heaven', fine."  
  
He said, "To accept it, raise both hands, and I'll give it to you."  
  
After I received it, I went home, and the next day I kept reciting things that I did not understand. It sounded like Japanese, and then Thai, and then I was singing army songs dating from the Japanese Meiji reign, songs which I had never sung before. Although my voice is usually pretty bad, when I was singing those army songs, I could sing very high and very low, and it sounded better than the singers on television. I think the 'wordless book from heaven' is something like the tallies mentioned in the sutra.  
  
There are two possibilities in the place where the dharma is spoken. The first is that you have not been possessed by the demon, and you cannot see what is happening. If you have not ended the form skandha, then you cannot see, either. In the other case, when you are meditating, the possessed person can see, and so can you. In one case, you and the possessed person are both in samadhi, and you can see whatever he gives you. You can also see the external state, but it's just an illusion that he conjures up. In the other case, you cannot see, but your mind moves. The person says, "Can I give you this thing?" If you say, "Yes," then things change. However, if you say, "I don't want it," then the demon from the heaven cannot possess you, because it has to follow its own rules, too. As far as I know, all the external sects in Taiwan fall under the first thirty skandha-demon states, before the thinking and consciousness skandhas have been ended.  
  
Our present interpretation may differ somewhat from the real incidents I just spoke of. In such situations, the demons from the heavens may appear in these ways to harm you and prevent you from attaining the Way. Since everyone is at a different level of cultivation, they appear in different ways each time. I just wanted to offer this for everyone to consider.  
 **Sutra:  
  
He is fond of talking about treasure troves in other locations, or of remote and hidden places where sages and worthies of the ten directions dwell. Those who follow him often see strange and unusual people.  
  
Commentary:**  
He is fond of talking about treasure troves in other locations. What does he like to say? He says, "Hey, in a certain place there are gold, silver, and all kinds of jewels. Do you want some?" He spreads such rumors to delude the assembly. Or he is fond of talking of remote and hidden places where sages and worthies of the ten directions dwell. He tells people, "There are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas cultivating there without your knowing it." Those who follow him often see strange and unusual people. They may give off light or have other strange characteristics.  
  
K4 Giving the name and pointing out the harm.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This is a ghost or spirit of the mountain forests, earth, cities, rivers, and mountains that in its old age has become a demon. The person it possesses may advocate promiscuity and violate the Buddha's precepts. He may covertly indulge in the five desires with his followers. Or he may appear to be vigorous, eating only wild plants. His behavior is erratic, and he disturbs and confuses the good person. But when the demon tires, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
What kind of creature is this? This is a ghost or spirit of the mountain forests, earth, cities, rivers, and mountains that in its old age, after a long time, has become a demon. The person it possesses may advocate promiscuity and violate the Buddha's precepts. His lust-filled thoughts cause him to break the precepts. He may covertly indulge in the five desires with his followers, the people who are with him. The five desires are wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep. Or he may appear to be vigorous, eating only wild plants. His behavior is erratic. He does not sit in meditation or cultivate. He only engages in unbeneficial ascetic practices, and he disturbs and confuses the good person, causing him to stop cultivating. But after a while, when the demon tires and grows bored, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law.  
  
K5 Instructions to be aware and not become confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. Awaken to this early on, and don't fall into the demon's trap. Don't enter the demonic cycle of birth and death. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
J8 Greed for spiritual powers.  
K1 Samadhi leads to craving and seeking.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves spiritual powers and all manner of transformations, so he investigates the source of transformations as he greedily seeks for spiritual powers.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person who is cultivating the Way and practicing samadhi is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves spiritual powers. He has another false thought. He decides he wants to have great spiritual powers and all manner of transformations, so that he can display the eighteen transformations in midair. He wants to be able to emit water from the upper part of his body and fire from the lower part he wants to emit fire from the upper part of his body and water from the lower part. He longs to be like the Arhats who can manifest these eighteen transformations while floating in the air, so he investigates the fundamental source, the principle of these transformations, as he greedily seeks for spiritual powers.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
A person is still vulnerable to possession by demons even after he has broken through the form and feeling skandhas. Breaking through the skandhas of form, feeling, thinking, formations, and consciousness is a very ordinary matter. It doesn't mean he truly has samadhi power and won't get possessed anymore. He is at a very high level; but even at that high level, he can still be possessed. Why? Because he still harbors love and greed in his mind. He may be greedy for knowledge, for spiritual powers, or for responses. His greed opens the door. He cannot become free from demonic possession just by thinking about it. In fact, he will only be more liable to become possessed.  
  
K2 A demon dispatches a deviant force to possess a person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
The demon that has been lying in wait sees its chance and sends a spirit to possess a person, through whom it speaks the sutras and the dharma.  
  
K3 The demon's words and deeds that mislead others.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This person, truly unaware that he is possessed by a demon, also claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks spiritual powers, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. The possessed person may hold fire in his hands and, grasping a portion of it, put a flame on the head of each listener in the fourfold assembly. The flames on top of their heads are several feet high, yet they are not hot and no one is burned. Or he may walk on water as if on dry land; or he may sit motionless in the air; or he may enter into a bottle or stay in a bag; or he may pass through window panes and walls without obstruction. Only when attacked by weapons does he feel ill at ease. He declares himself to be a Buddha and, wearing the clothing of a lay person, receives bows from bhikshus. He slanders dhyana meditation and the moral regulations. He scolds his disciples and exposes people's private affairs without fear of ridicule or rejection.  
  
Commentary:**  
This person is truly unaware that he is possessed by a demon. He also claims that he himself has reached the wondrous fruition of unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks spiritual powers, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma.  
  
The possessed person may hold fire in one of his hands and, grasping a portion of it with his other hand, put a flame on the head of each listener in the fourfold assembly. One by one he puts a flame atop the heads of each of the people in the audience. The flames on top of their heads are several feet high. When he puts the flames there, they are small, and they grow bit by bit until they are several feet high. Yet they are not hot and no one is burned. They do not spread or set anything else on fire. Or he, the possessed person, may walk on water as if on dry, flat land; or he may walk or sit motionless in the air. There is nothing holding him up in the air, but he can sit in it.  
  
Or he may enter into a bottle or stay in a bag; or he may pass through window panes and walls without obstruction. The doors and windows may be closed, but he can easily pass through them without opening them. He's not hindered in the least. Only when attacked by weapons does he feel ill at ease. He is afraid of being cut by knives and pierced by spears. That is because he still has a physical form which obstructs him. Although he has five of the spiritual powers, he still fears being wounded by weapons. He declares himself to be a Buddha and, wearing the clothing of a lay person, not the attire of left-home people, receives bows from bhikshus. Dressed as a layperson, he receives bows from left-home people. He slanders dhyana meditation and the moral regulations as being useless and incorrect. And he scolds his own disciples and exposes people's private affairs. He discloses people's secrets without fear of ridicule or rejection by others.  
 **Sutra:  
  
He often talks about spiritual powers and self-mastery. He may cause people to see visions of Buddhalands, but they are unreal and arise merely from the ghost's power to delude people. He praises the indulgence of lust and does not condemn lewd conduct. He uses indecent means to transmit his dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
He often talks about various sorts of spiritual powers and self-mastery. He may cause people to see visions of Buddhalands throughout the ten directions, but they are unreal and arise merely from the ghost's power to delude people. He himself does not have any real skill in cultivation. What he praises most is the indulgence of lust. He says, "It's truly the most wonderful thing there is. It's the source of Bodhi and nirvana." And he does not condemn lewd conduct. He says, "There's nothing wrong with it. Don't bother holding precepts." He uses indecent means to transmit his dharma. He uses all this impure behavior as a means to transmit the dharma.  
  
K4 Giving the name and pointing out the harm.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This is a powerful nature spirit: a mountain sprite, a sea sprite, a wind sprite, a river sprite, an earth sprite, or a grass and-tree sprite that has evolved over long ages. It may be a dragon-goblin; or a rishi who has been reborn as a goblin; or again a rishi who, having reached the end of his appointed time, should have died, but whose body does not decay and is possessed by a goblin. In its old age it has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person. But when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This is a powerful nature spirit: a mountain sprite, a sea sprite, a wind sprite, a river sprite, an earth sprite; or a grassand- tree sprite that has evolved over long ages. It may be a dragon-goblin; or it may be a rishi who, having cultivated for perhaps a thousand, two thousand, three thousand, or five thousand years, has been reborn as a demon-goblin at the end of his life. Or again, it may be a rishi who, having reached the end of his appointed time, should have died, but whose body after his death does not decay or change, and is possessed by a goblin. In its old age it has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person's power of samadhi. But eventually, when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. So long as the demon is there, the person possesses awesome spiritual power. But once the demon leaves, then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law and their activities will be curtailed.  
  
K5 Instructions to be aware and not become confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
Ananda, you should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the demonic cycle of transmigration. Don't fall into the demons' snare. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells. J9 Greed for profound emptiness.  
K1 Samadhi leads to craving and seeking.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves to enter cessation, so he investigates the nature of transformations as he greedily seeks for profound emptiness.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
He looks into how things in a state of existence can transform into nothingness, and how nothingness can transform into things which exist. He studies the way these transformations take place, hoping to experience a profound state of emptiness.  
  
K2 A demon dispatches a deviant force to possess a person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. The demon watches and waits, and when it sees a chance, its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma. The demon speaks through that person's mouth.  
  
K3 The demon's words and deeds that mislead others.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This person, unaware that he is possessed by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks emptiness, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. In the midst of the great assembly, his physical form suddenly disappears, and no one in the assembly can see him. Then out of nowhere, he abruptly reappears. He can appear and disappear at will, or he can make his body transparent like crystal. From his hands and feet he releases the fragrance of sandalwood, or his excrement and urine may be sweet as thick rock candy. He slanders the precepts and is contemptuous of those who have left the home life.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This person is unaware and does not realize that he is possessed by a demon from the heavens. He claims he has already reached the wonderful fruition of unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks the deep emptiness of cessation, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. In the midst of the great assembly, his physical form suddenly disappears, and no one in the assembly can see him. The demon's spiritual powers cause the possessed person's body to suddenly vanish. He was there speaking the dharma, but suddenly no one can see him. This is the "emptiness of people and dharmas." People and dharmas are both gone. Then, after a few minutes, from out of nowhere, he abruptly reappears. He can appear and disappear at will. If he wants to appear, he appears. If he wants to disappear, he disappears. He is in control and can do either with ease.  
  
Or he can make his body appear transparent like crystal, so you can see right through it. From his hands and feet, at the flick of a wrist, he releases the fragrance of sandalwood, or his excrement and urine may be sweet as thick rock candy. He slanders the precepts. He says, "Don't bother about holding precepts. That is a small vehicle matter. Why should you hold them? There is no great meaning in it." And he is contemptuous of those who have left the home-life. He says, "Don't leave the home-life. If you want to cultivate, go ahead and cultivate. You don't have to leave home to do it. What difference is there between being a layperson and a left-home person anyway?" That's how he slanders left-home people.  
 **Sutra:  
  
He often says that there is no cause and no effect, that once we die, we are gone forever, that there is no afterlife, and that there are no ordinary people and no sages. Although he has obtained a state of empty stillness, he covertly indulges his greedy desires. Those who give in to his lust also adopt his views of emptiness and deny cause and effect.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
He often says that there is no cause and effect. "Don't believe in the law of cause and effect," he says. "It's totally wrong. There is no such thing." He says that once we die we are gone forever. "Once you die, you are gone forever, just like a light that gets snuffed out." He says that there is no afterlife, and that there are no ordinary people and no sages. "There's no such thing as rebirth, nor are there common people or sages. Those are just figures of speech."  
  
Although he has obtained a state of empty stillness, he covertly indulges his greedy desires. Although he's arrived at some sort of theory of emptiness, he indulges in lust on the sly. Those who give in to his lust adopt his views of emptiness. As victims of the demon's energy, the people who engage in lust with him also come to believe that everything is empty and deny cause and effect. They feel there is no need to believe in cause and effect.  
  
K4 Giving the name and pointing out the harm.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This is an essence that was created during an eclipse of the sun or moon. Having fallen on gold, jade, a rare fungus, a unicorn, a phoenix, a tortoise, or a crane, the essence endowed it with life, so that it did not die for thousands or tens of thousands of years and eventually became a spirit. It was then born into this land and in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person. But when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. Then both the disciples and the teacher will get in trouble with the law.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
What is this? This is an essence that was created during an eclipse of the sun or moon. When there is an interaction between the sun and moon, an eclipse of the sun and moon, an essence falls to the ground. Having fallen on gold, jade, a certain kind of rare fungus, a unicorn, a phoenix, a tortoise, or a crane, the essence endowed it with life, so that it did not die for thousands or tens of thousands of years and eventually became a spirit. It was then born into this land and in its old age has become a demon. It disturbs and confuses the good person who is cultivating samadhi.  
  
But eventually, when it tires of doing so, it will leave the other person's body. It will cease to possess him. Then both the teacher and his disciples will get in trouble with the law. They will be restrained by the law.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
Venerable Master: You must use dharma-selecting vision and wonderful-contemplative wisdom to regard this kind of state. When you contemplate, don't get attached and think, "I'm contemplating." Wonderful-contemplative wisdom functions like a mirror; it's similar to the great perfect mirror wisdom. However, while the great perfect mirror wisdom reveals the actual appearance of all dharmas effortlessly, wonderful-contemplative wisdom requires the power of contemplation in order to be clearly aware. If you can maintain an objective point of view, then you won't be ensnared by such improper views. If you recognize the state, then you won't be turned by it.  
  
Disciple: I have a question. Monkey (in the book Journey to the West) was born from a rock. How did that rock give birth to a monkey? Can such phenomena occur after a rock has been exposed to the essence of the sun and moon over several tens of thousands of years? Is Monkey's case the same as that described in the sutra? That is, there is an essential energy created during an eclipse of the sun and the moon, and it is absorbed by such things as gold, jade, a rare fungus, a unicorn, a phoenix, a tortoise, or a crane, transforming them into demons. From reading the book, it seems to me that Monkey had a few good roots. He knew that transmigration entailed a lot of suffering, and so after eight hundred years, he started on a quest for the Way. He mastered various spiritual arts and later became a dharma protector in Buddhism.  
  
Monkey was an example of a good being, but here the text is talking about spirits, sprites, ghosts, and monsters who turn into demons in their old age. Under what conditions do they turn into demons when they get old? It seems that these demons are like bandits because they do evil. Is it the case that some turn into demons while others don't, because some are good and others aren't?  
  
Venerable Master: Monkey was only a demon, and there are many other cases which are similar. Monkey probably ran into trouble as he was cultivating at the level of the thinking skandha, and so as a result, he turned into a monkey that could ascend to the heavens and burrow into the earth. He is exactly what the Shurangama Sutra calls "a representative of the demons." As for other demons, when they are tired of being demons, of course they will also take refuge in the Triple Jewel. With a single thought of reflecting within and awakening, they can become disciples of the Buddha. Before they awaken, they are still demons. The older demons get, the greater their spiritual powers become. The young ones aren't that strong and their spiritual powers aren't that great. The older ones have inconceivable strength and spiritual powers, which is why they are called demons. Demons are even more powerful than ghosts. The Chinese have the term "demonic ghost" because ghosts can turn into demons.  
  
Have you heard about the "as-you-wish demon woman"? She had been a ghost in the Zhou dynasty, but because she didn't follow the rules, she was struck by lightning. However, the lightning didn't destroy her completely, and she pulled herself back together with a concentrated effort. Then she cultivated and became a demon who went around taking people's lives, because she wanted to increase her own power and the power of her retinue. Each time she caused a person's death, the other demons would congratulate her: "You'rereally powerful!" It's similar to how other officials act toward an official who has just been promoted. A demon's power increases with the number of people it kills, until even ghosts have to follow its orders.  
  
Later, when the as-you-wish demon woman met me, she took refuge with the Triple Jewel. Thus she was a demon who took refuge with the Buddha. Everything in this world is wondrous and inconceivable. This sutra describes only a small portion. If we were to go into detail, each skandha has myriads of different kinds of demons. The sutra mentions one kind to give people a general idea, so that they know to avoid thoughts of greed and craving. If you have no desire, you need not fear any demon whatsoever. If you are devoid of greed or desire, no demon can trouble you. Demons will come in only when they see that you've opened yourself up to them. If you always keep the doors closed, they won't come in.  
  
Demons get born in the heavens because they have cultivated many blessings. The sutras talk about demons from the heavens, but you shouldn't think they are only in the heavens. They can go to the heavens, but they are not always there. Demons in the human realm that are endowed with spiritual powers can also be considered demons from the heavens. If the demons in the heavens need them to go there to cheer them on in battle and to increase their power, they can go at any time. Although they are born in the heavens, they still have desires and huge tempers and are incredibly stubborn. It's just because of their belligerent character that they become demons. If they weren't so aggressive and hot-tempered, then they would join the Buddhas' retinue. Those with bad tempers and heavy ignorance join the demons' retinue.  
  
As for what kind of retribution they will receive in the future, that's a very distant question that cannot be answered. If they encounter someone with great spiritual powers but are rather resistant to being taught and transformed, they may be pulverized into nothingness. Even if they aren't pulverized, if they do a lot of evil and fail to reform, if they still turn away from enlightenment to unite with the worldly dust and continue to be confused, then they will have to undergo retribution and great suffering. They may fall among the animals and become foxes or weasels. It is the spirits of demons that cause them to turn into such creatures. They may become snakes or rats, or various other strange animals. These are all transformations of beings endowed with malicious demonic energy. Fierce beasts such as tigers are so powerful because they are aided by a bit of demonic power.  
  
K5 Instructions to be aware and not become confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
You should be aware of this well in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration of the demon king. If you are confused and do not understand, if you do not wake up, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
J10 Greed for immortality.  
K1 Samadhi leads to craving and seeking.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, this good person is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within samadhi, his mind craves long life, so he toils at investigating its subtleties as he greedily seeks for immortality. He wishes to cast aside the birth and death of the body, and suddenly he hopes to end the birth and death of thoughts as well, so that he can abide forever in a subtle form.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Further, in the unhindered clarity and wonder that ensues after the feeling skandha is gone, now that the skandha of feeling has become empty, dear, and subtle, this good person who is cultivating samadhi is untroubled by any deviant mental state and experiences perfect, bright concentration. Within that perfect, subtle samadhi, a change suddenly occurs. What is it? His mind craves long life. All of a sudden he thinks, "It would be most wonderful to live forever and not have to die." So he toils at investigating its subtleties. He painstakingly searches into its most esoteric and subtle aspects as he greedily seeks for immortality. He wants to live forever and never grow old.  
  
He wishes to cast aside and renounce the birth and death of the body, literally "share-and-section birth and death." This refers to each individual's birth and death. Each person has a share, and each person has a section. What is meant by "share"? You have a body, and I have a body, too. You are a person, and I am also a person. You have your share, and I have my share. What about "section"? It is the life span, the interval from birth to death. "Section" can also refer to the physical stature, from head to toe. And he suddenly hopes to end the birth and death of thoughts as well. Ordinary people undergo the physical birth and death of the body. A fourth stage Arhat has ended that kind of birth and death, but still has to undergo the birth and death of thoughts. This refers to thought process in which one thought is produced and another perishes in an endless flow. When he no longer undergoes physical birth and death, he suddenly hopes to end the birth and death of thoughts as well, so he can abide forever in a subtle form, a very refined and attentuated form. To abide forever means to obtain eternal life.  
  
K2 A demon dispatches a deviant spirit to possess a person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time a demon from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Right when he entertains a thought of greed for long life, at that time a demon king from the heavens seizes the opportunity it has been watching and waiting for. Its spirit possesses another person. The demon king sends one of its followers to possess a person and uses him as a mouthpiece to expound the sutras and the dharma for the cultivator.  
  
K3 The demon?s words and deeds that mislead others.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This person, unaware that he is possessed by a demon, claims he has reached unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks long life, he arranges a seat and speaks the dharma. He is fond of saying that he can go places and come back without hindrance, perhaps traveling ten thousand miles and returning in the twinkling of an eye. He can also bring things back from wherever he goes. Or he may tell someone to walk from one end of the room to the other, a distance of just a few paces. Then even if the person walked fast for years, he could not reach the wall. Therefore people believe in the possessed person and mistake him for a Buddha.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Since this person's mind is totally controlled by the demon from the heavens, he himself is unaware that he is possessed by a demon. He claims that he has reached the wondrous fruition of unsurpassed nirvana. When he comes to see that good person who seeks long life, he arranges a dharma-seat and speaks the dharma.  
  
He is fond of saying that he can go places and come back without hindrance. What does this demon like to say? He says, "In this very moment I can go some place a thousand or even ten thousand miles away, and return in the same moment. I can go to Japan without taking a plane, buy merchandise and bring it back with me. If you don't believe it, I'll give you a demonstration." He is always showing off his spiritual powers. He wants people to see the inconceivable feats he can perform. He says, "I can go and come freely, in no time at all, perhaps traveling ten thousand miles and returning in the twinkling of an eye. I can go and return in the time it takes you to inhale and exhale."  
  
Not only that, he can also bring things back from wherever he goes. He can buy things and bring them back. "You don't believe me?" he'll say. "See this item? It came from such and such a company in Japan, their exclusive model, only available for purchase on site." Then he shows them a radio or a tape recorder of Japanese make, which has not passed through customs or been imported, and which actually was manufactured by the company in Japan.  
  
Or he may tell someone to walk from one end of the room to the other, a distance of just a few, maybe seven or eight, paces. Then even if the person walked fast for years, he could not reach the wall. He couldn't cover that small floor-space at a dead run even in a year's time. Seeing such displays, therefore people believe in the possessed person and mistake him for a Buddha. They think, "Oh! This is a Buddha coming to teat us the dharma."  
 **Sutra:  
  
He often says, "All beings in the ten directions are my children. I gave birth to all Buddhas. I created the world. I am the original Buddha. I created this world naturally, not due to cultivation."  
  
Commentary:**  
  
He often says, "You know, all beings in the ten directions are my children. I gave birth to all Buddhas. Do you know whose sons the Buddhas are? They are my sons." He shamelessly boasts that he gave birth to all Buddhas. "I created the world. I am the original Buddha. I was the first Buddha. There weren't any Buddhas before me. I created this world naturally, not due to cultivation. I created this world spontaneously. And I was already a Buddha when I came into the world. I didn't have to cultivate to become a Buddha."  
  
K4 Giving the name and pointing out the harm.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This may be a chamunda sent from the retinue of the demon in the Heaven of Sovereignty, or a youthful pishacha from the Heaven of the Four Kings that has not yet brought forth the resolve. It takes advantage of the person's luminous clarity and devours his essence and energy. Or perhaps without having to rely on a teacher, the cultivator personally sees a being that tells him, "I am a vajra spirit who has come to give you long life." Or the being transforms itself into a beautiful woman and engages him in frenzied lust, so that within a year his vitality is exhausted. He talks to himself; and to anyone listening he sounds like a goblin. The people around him do not realize what is happening. In most cases such a person will get in trouble with the law. But before he is punished, he will die from depletion. The demon disturbs and confuses the person to the point of death.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This may be a chamunda sent from the retinue of the demon in the Heaven of Sovereignty. Chamunda is a Sanskrit word that means "slave ghost," a ghost that does the work of a slave. It also means "jealous ghost" because it is always jealous of anything good that anyone else has. It tries to thwart people who want to study the Buddhadharma. If someone wants to be good, it drags him in a bad direction. It's a bad ghost. The demon in the Heaven of Sovereignty sends this kind of ghost to disturb the cultivator of samadhi. Or it may send a youthful pishacha from the Heaven of the Four Kings. Pishacha ghosts specialize in devouring essence. They eat the essence of various grains and plants and of humans as well. When men and women engage in sexual conduct a kind of essence flows forth, and that's what they eat. Whenever people engage in sexual conduct, there are lots of ghosts waiting on the sidelines to eat the essence. It's very dangerous.  
  
This is a pishacha ghost that has not yet brought forth the resolve. It takes advantage of the person's luminous clarity and devours his essence. Those who have not brought forth the resolve, such as the youthful pishacha and others, crave the cultivator's bright clarity and his soul. They consume his essence, but he remains unaware of it.  
  
Or perhaps without having to rely on a teacher, the cultivator personally sees a being that tells him, "I am a vajrawielding dharma-protecting spirit who has come to give you long life. Now I've come to give you longevity. You'll be able to live a long time." Or after saying that, the being transforms itself into a beautiful woman and engages him in frenzied lust. "Frenzied" means that they engage in this activity of lust over and over again, nonstop, so that within a year his vitality is exhausted. Under the strain, his vitality is depleted before a year is up. His essence, energy, and spirit all "dry up," because this is too excessive. The key word here is "frenzied." It's not describing any ordinary occurrence. It's not referring to the usual manner in which such activities are performed. It's certain that the beautiful woman says, "The more you indulge in lust, the longer your life will be. You will attain long life." In his greed for long life, he fails to realize his life is getting shorter by the minute. He's totally spent before a year is up.  
  
At that time he talks to himself. Actually he's not talking to himself, he's conversing with the demon. And while he's doing so, to anyone listening he sounds like a goblin. He's conversing with the demon, but the people around him don't see it. I've encountered this kind of demon before.  
  
I once met a man who was visited by a woman every night. She didn't come to him in the daytime, but every evening as soon as she came, everyone in the household could hear the clack-clack of a woman's high heels on the floor boards. Although they could hear the sound, they could not see her. Whenever the woman came, the man would strip, hop in bed, and have at it, not caring whether anyone was around or not. That was an instance of this type of ghost. Later on, a shaman in the area went to his home to exorcise the ghost. That night, when the demon came, she conversed with the shaman.  
  
"Fine," she said. "You want to cure this man? All right, from today on he'll be fine. But from this point, I'm going to start coming to your household. We'll have a little contest of dharmas." After that, she actually went to the shaman's home, and his older brother engaged in this sort of improper activity from morning to night with the demon. I'll tell you, this demon is really powerful. The people around him do not realize what is happening.  
  
They are not aware of this situation. In most cases such a person will get in trouble with the law, and his activities will be curtailed by the law. But before he is punished, before he is brought to trial, he will die from depletion. While still in prison, he dies from the total depletion of his essence, energy, and spirit. The demon disturbs and confuses the person to the point of death. The demon destroys the person's samadhi-power to the extent that he perishes.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
When I was young, I liked to fight with demons. I fought with them until all the demon armies in the universe wanted to gang up on me. I nearly lost my life on many occasions. Because of this, later on, no matter how much I have wished to fight with demons again, I haven't dared to use any dharma against them. Many demons come to bully me, but I always practice forbearance and don't offer any opposition. I gather them in and influence them with kindness and compassion instead of subduing them with the dharma of subduing.  
  
I remember that at the Virtue Society in Manchuria, the dean of the training school was called Xu Guilan. There were fifty or sixty students in the Virtue Society, and one of them became possessed by a demon. Xu Guilan, thinking that she had some authority as the dean of the training school, tried to get rid of the demon. She spat a mouthful of cold water at the possessed girl, but the demon didn't leave.  
  
It said, "Okay, you want to get rid of me? Then I'll possess you instead, and see what you do about that!"  
  
Thereupon, the possessed girl got better, and Xu Guilan herself was possessed by the demon. Earlier, Guo Hong said he had used this method of reciting a mantra and then spitting on the possessed person, and the person had run off. Probably the demon who possessed him didn't have enough power, and so it left. But the demon that possessed Xu Guilan wasn't afraid of being spat on with cold water, and it didn't go away. Then Xu Guilan started acting demonic. She could no longer live at the Virtue Society and had to move back home. The demon came to disturb her every day at her home, throwing her family into a turmoil.  
  
What demon was this? It was a gibbon spirit, a very large one. When it came, it engaged in sexual intercourse with Xu Guilan. It would possess her body and torture her. Sometimes it would confuse her to the point that she would utter how much she loved it, and so on. Then they would have sex, and after it was over, Xu Guilan would be bleeding from her eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth. The gibbon spirit sucked away all her energy and essence, leaving her paralyzed and near death.  
  
The Virtue Society sent someone to see our monastery's abbot who was known throughout Manchuria as the Filial Son Wang. They had heard that he had great virtue and could subdue the demon, so they sought him out. However, the abbot would always ask me to take care of such matters. He never dealt with them himself, but always sent me to resolve whatever problems there were. This happened many times, such as when the family of Gao Defu in Danangou village was in trouble.  
  
This time the abbot also asked me to go, and so I went. When they informed the gibbon spirit of my coming, guess what it said? "Ah! You wasted your efforts asking him to come. It won't work. Even if you asked Ji Gong to come, it wouldn't scare me." It was not afraid of anything. When I went there, the gibbon spirit came, and we had a real fight! After two days of nonstop fighting, I finally subdued it. The woman recovered. I have been through many experiences such as this.  
  
I'm not willing to interfere in other people's business anymore. For example, although I see that a certain person has an eagle spirit on her, and it is causing her head to shake involuntarily, I'm not going to do anything about it. I act as if I didn't see it. Why? Because I'm cultivating forbearance! Even if someone were to defecate on my head, I would bear it and not get angry. My motto now is that I will not contend with anyone. Guo Hong, you'd better be careful not to stir up trouble in the future. You must have a few good roots, or else that demon would easily have possessed you. This is no laughing matter.

K5 Instructions to be aware and not become confused.  
 **Sutra:  
  
You should be aware of this in advance and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are confused and do not understand, you will fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, you should be aware of this in advance, understand the principle involved, and not get caught up in the cycle of transmigration. If you are aware of the demonic state, you won't fall into the demon's trap. You won't end up in the retinue of demons. But if you are confused and do not understand, there will be no politeness involved. It's certain you will fall into the Relentless Hells. You will not be shown the slightest favor.  
  
I3 The Buddha exhorts those in the Dharma-ending Age.  
J1 False boasting of accomplishment to sagely fruition.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, you should know that in the Dharma-ending Age, these ten kinds of demons may leave the home-life to cultivate the Way within my dharma. They may possess other people, or they may manifest themselves in various forms. All of them will claim that they have already accomplished proper and pervasive knowledge and awareness.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, you should know that, especially in the Dharma Ending Age, these ten kinds of demons, the ones that appear in the ten demonic states associated with the thinking skandha, may leave the home-life to cultivate the Way within my Buddhadharma. They may possess other people. The demon kings may possess other people, or they may manifest themselves in various forms. They may display their spiritual powers as demon kings and manifest all kinds of forms. They may appear as Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats, or gods. Demon kings can manifest in any kind of body. All of them will claim that they have already accomplished proper and pervasive knowledge and awareness.

"Proper and pervasive knowledge" refers to the Buddha, who has both proper knowledge and pervasive knowledge. "Proper knowledge" means knowing that "the mind produces the myriad dharmas." "Pervasive knowledge" means knowing that "the myriad dharmas are the mind itself." When someone has genuine proper and pervasive knowledge and views, he becomes a Buddha, one of proper and pervasive knowledge. However, demons pretend to be Buddhas and claim to have attained proper and pervasive knowledge.  
  
When Shakyamuni Buddha was about to enter nirvana, he summoned the demon king and commanded him, "You should abide by the rules. Follow the rules from now on. Don't violate them."  
  
The demon king replied, "So you want me to follow your rules? Fine. During the ending age of your dharma, I will wear your garments, eat your food, and defecate in your alms bowl." His meaning was that he would destroy the dharma from within. When the Buddha heard that he was worried. He wept and said, "There's really nothing I can do about you. Your method is the most poisonous, the most destructive."  
  
There is the saying: "The parasites on the lion's body eat the lion's flesh." This means that in the Dharma-ending Age, the demons are strong and the dharma is weak. There are a lot of demon kings. Therefore, cultivators must be very careful. What are demon kings like? In general, they are different from ordinary people. They have a demonic energy about them. There is something unusual about them, which reveals that they are demon kings.  
  
[January 1983]  
  
The Dharma-ending Age is a time when the dharma is weak and demons are strong. The Song of Enlightenment by Great Master Yong Jia says very clearly:  
  
Alas! In the evil time of the Dharma-ending Age,  
Living beings have few blessings; it is difficult to train them.  
Far indeed from the sages of the past, their deviant views are deep.  
Demons are strong, the dharma is weak; many are the wrongs and injuries.  
Hearing of the door of the Tathagata's sudden teaching,  
They regret not destroying it as they would smash a tile.  
  
"Alas" expresses a regretful sighing about the Dharma-ending Age. The evil time means this time is very evil and vile. All the monsters are appearing in the world.  
  
The computer is one of the biggest monsters, and television is a small monster. The small monster helps the big one out and the big monster wants to devour all the people. It wants to take people's jobs away. This is a very evil age. Living beings have no blessings. They are tense and nervous from morning to night, and people suffer from diseases of the heart, liver, lungs, spleen, and kidneys. Such diseases strike people because they are infected with deviant energy. They have been poisoned too deeply.  
  
You think it's nice to watch television, to talk on the phone, to listen to the radio, and to play with the computer, but you don't realize the harm that these things do to your heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys. They cause people to act inhuman and ghosts to act unlike ghosts. That's a sign that the world is starting to go bad. We have been born in a time when living beings have no blessings and are difficult to teach. You may advise them not to watch television or listen to the radio, but they insist on doing those things. Tell them not to listen to music, but they listen on the sly. It's not easy to teach the upside down living beings in this terrible age.  
  
"Far indeed from the sages of the past." They are very far from the Buddhas. "Their deviant views are deep." Everyone has deviant knowledge and deviant views; no one has proper knowledge and proper views. Their deviant views are too deep. "Demons are strong, the dharma is weak." In this age the demons prosper and the dharma is very feeble. "Many are the wrongs and injuries." You hurt me, and I hurt you. We hurt each other out of resentment. "Hearing of the door of the Tathagata's sudden teaching." If they hear of the Buddha's proper dharma-eye treasury, the dharma-door of the sudden teaching, "they regret not destroying it as they would smash a tile." They regret not being able to wreck it immediately, as they would smash a tile to bits. That's how much they hate the Buddhadharma. This is the way we are now.  
  
Therefore, we Buddhists who live at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas should not keep radios, televisions, or musical records in our homes; we should get rid of these. No matter how busy we are, we should attend the morning and evening ceremonies and the sutra recitations. We should not be absent from these activities. If you are a layperson and you cannot make it to the temple, you may do the morning and evening ceremonies, recite sutras, and investigate the Buddhadharma at home. Don't spend your spare time watching television or listening to the radio, being no different from people of the outside world.  
  
The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is different from the outside world, and we should not let ourselves be influenced by the common crowd. All of you at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas should devote your attention to the Buddhadharma and to studying and practicing the principles in the Buddhist sutras. If you memorize the Shurangama Sutra, that will make me extremely happy. Even at home, you should read and recite the Shurangama Sutra, the Dharma Flower Sutra, and the Avatamsaka Sutra. What's the point of coming to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas if you don't understand the Buddhadharma at all? It's meaningless. If you don't understand anything and you have no idea what people are talking about during discussions, then your being here is too pitiful.  
  
J2 They use lust in their teaching.  
 **Sutra:  
  
They praise lust and break the Buddha's moral precepts. The evil demonic teachers and their demonic disciples that I just discussed transmit their teaching through licentious activity. Such deviant spirits take over cultivators' minds, and after as few as nine lives or as many as a hundred generations, they turn true practitioners entirely into followers of demons.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
They praise lust. How can one tell if someone is a demon? Demons do not praise proper methods of practice. They praise lust and openly advocate sex. And they break the Buddha's moral precepts. They say, "The Buddha's precepts are useless. Don't keep them. The Buddha's precepts were for adherents of the small vehicle to practice. We are great vehicle Bodhisattvas, great vehicle Buddhas. Since we have already become Buddhas, we don't need to hold the precepts." The evil demonic teachers of dharma and their demonic disciples, the disciples of the demon kings, that I just discussed transmit their teaching through licentious activity. They practice lust with each other and praise it, saying, "It is the finest and most wonderful dharma door. The principle of true emptiness and wonderful existence lies right within this." Such deviant spirits, that is, those who extol lust, take over cultivators' minds. Because the cultivators' minds are confused by the deviant demons who have possessed them, they crave sex and openly advocate lust. It's all because the demons have taken over their minds.  
  
And after as few as nine lives or as many as a hundred generations, they turn true practitioners entirely into followers of demons. At the minimum, it takes nine lives. What does one "life" mean? Is it the period from a person's birth until his death? No. Rather, it refers to a period of a hundred years. Therefore nine lives is nine hundred years. At the most, it takes over a hundred generations. One generation represents thirty years, and so a hundred generations is three thousand years. It takes a minimum of nine lives to turn a true cultivator completely into a member of the demon's retinue.  
  
At the other extreme, it might take as long as a hundred generations from the time the demon confuses him until he becomes part of the demon's retinue. Although he has been confused, he still has to pass through several more lives. Only after a long time does he officially join the demon's retinue. Before that time, his nature is not totally demonic. Do you know what demons are transformed from? Demons were originally people. A person who is not upright may become a demon, but it doesn't happen that fast. The demon king hounds him, follows him, and keeps confusing him. The process takes from as short a time as nine lives to as long as a hundred generations.  
  
J3 They are beguiled by demons and fall into the hells.  
 **Sutra:  
  
When their lives are over, they are bound to end up as one of the demonic hordes. They will lose their proper and pervasive knowledge and fall into the Relentless Hells.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
When their lives are over, when the allotted time has passed, anywhere from nine lives to a hundred generations, and the practitioners die, they are bound to end up as one of the demonic hordes. They cannot become demon kings, since there is only one king. There are not that many demon kings. They can only become run-of-the-mill demons, common citizens of the demon populace. They will lose their proper and pervasive knowledge. They will lose proper knowledge and views and will have only wrong knowledge and views; and they will follow along in the deeds done by the demon king. And eventually they will fall into the Relentless Hells. After they use up their blessings as demons, their lives will end and they will fall into the hells.  
  
J4 Exhortation to compassionately rescue them to repay kindness.  
 **Sutra:  
  
You need not enter nirvana yet. Although you are completing your attainment to the level beyond learning, hold nonetheless to your vows to enter the Dharma-ending Age. Bring forth great compassion to rescue and take across living beings who have proper minds and deep faith. Do not let them become possessed by demons. Help them instead to attain proper knowledge and views. I have already rescued you from birth and death. By venerating the Buddha's words, you will be repaying the Buddha's kindness.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, you need not enter nirvana yet. Don't enter nirvana yet. Stay here in the world and teach and transform living beings on my behalf. Although you are completing your attainment to the level beyond learning, hold nonetheless to your vows to enter the Dharma-ending Age. For all practical purposes, you have already attained the state beyond learning. The Buddha says, "You should keep your compassionate vows. When the proper dharma is gone and the Dharma Image Age has passed, the  
  
1. At this point Ananda has realized the second fruition of Arhatship, but has not yet actually attained the level beyond learning. However, the path of cultivation to reach that accomplishment is clear to him, so he can be considered as having attained that level.  
  
Dharma-ending Age will come. At that time bring forth great compassion to rescue and take across living beings who have proper minds and deep faith. Ananda, you should bring forth a mind of great kindness and compassion and save living beings whose minds are proper in the Dharma-ending Age."  
  
Do not let them become possessed by demons. Rescue living beings and cause them to have deep faith in you, so that they will not be confused by the demon kings. Do not allow the demon kings to have their way with people. Help them, the living beings in the Dharma-ending Age, instead to be on guard and to attain proper knowledge and views. That means you and me, living beings right now, not anyone else. You should urge yourself on. Keep a proper attitude and outlook.  
  
Shakyamuni Buddha says, "Ananda, I have already rescued you from birth and death. You have already ended birth and death. You are already a second-stage Arhat, and you understand the way to reach the fourth stage of Arhatship, so for all practical purposes we can say that your birth and death are now ended. By venerating the Buddha's words, you will be repaying the Buddha's kindness. Now listen to the Buddha's instruction; do what the Buddha tells you and don't forget it. By honoring and obeying the Buddha, you are repaying the Buddha's deep kindness."  
  
What does it mean to repay the Buddha's kindness? If we listen to the Buddha's instructions, we are repaying the Buddha's kindness. If we want to repay the Buddha's kindness, we must obey the Buddha. If Ananda wants to repay the Buddha's kindness, Ananda should listen to the Buddha. If we want to repay the Buddha's kindness, we should also listen to the Buddha. We should listen to Shakyamuni Buddha and to the dharma masters when they explain the sutras and the principles. That's why at the very start I said you all should listen to the Buddha. I'm not a Buddha; I should also listen to the Buddha. No matter what, we shouldn't ignore the Buddha's advice.  
  
I4 Conclusion on the harm, and command to offer protection.  
J1 Showing how the states come about from interaction.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, all ten of these states may occur in dhyana as one's mental effort interacts with the thinking skandha.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, all ten of these states which have just been explained may occur in the still contemplation of dhyana when you have applied enough effort to reach that level. Where do those states come from? They can happen as one's mental effort interacts with the thinking skandha. They are changes that occur in the thinking skandha as a result of pressure applied in cultivation. When you are cultivating with maximum effort, such states will manifest. But when they manifest, don't "mistake a thief for your own son"; don't be confused by those states. When you meditate, your mental effort interacts with the thinking skandha. They engage in battle. It's like a war. If your samadhi power is victorious, then the thinking skandha will be conquered. But if the thinking skandha wins out and your skill in samadhi fizzles, you will be caught in a demonic state, and then these kinds of things will happen.  
  
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 always getting attached to things. They are obstinate and inflexible, stupid and without wisdom. They do not take proper stock of themselves. Encountering such situations, such demonic states, in their confusion they fail to recognize them. The most important thing is that if you can recognize states, then you won't be turned by them. If you are clear about them, you will not be confused. If you don't understand, then you will be confused. Confusion is basically a lack of recognition. And what happens when people fail to recognize states?  
  
They say that they have become sages. They say things like, "Do you know about me? I've become a Buddha already. And I'll tell you, it was really easy for me. It was cheaper than buying a couple pieces of tofu." That's really too easy, isn't it? Such people say that they are Buddhas, that they have realized the Way, that they are enlightened, that they have penetrated their meditation topic, and that they've got it all figured out.  
  
For example, someone who came here today was of the same type as the "American Sixth Patriarch" who came a few days ago. He didn't bow to the Buddhas or stupas. The sutra describes the possessed person as not bowing in temples or to shrines. He didn't bow to the Buddha or listen to the dharma. He just ate lunch and left. The reason he left was that his demon dragged him away. He was so filled with demonic energy that he felt too uncomfortable to stay for even one minute more after eating his lunch. You should recognize what he was all about. His manner indicated that he thought he was already a Buddha, so he didn't need to bow to the Buddha.  
  
Thereby uttering a great lie. They will fall into the Relentless Hells. He is bound to fall into the Relentless Hells in the future. Don't look only at the short term. It may take as little as nine lives, or it may take up to a hundred generations. He didn't listen to the Buddhadharma because of the demonic energy that had taken over him. Even if he wanted to listen, his entire body felt too uneasy, so he couldn't sit or stand still. I've told you about this before, and you should all pay attention. After this, whenever you go to a temple or Buddha hall, you must respect the temple rules. Do what the other people are doing. Don't stand when everyone else is bowing to the Buddha. That looks very bad. Anyone who acts like that won't be able to study the Buddhadharma no matter where he goes. When you study the Buddhadharma, you must be receptive, humble, and sincere.

J3 Command to offer protection.  
 **Sutra:  
  
In the Dharma-ending Age, after my nirvana, all of you should pass on the Tathagata's teachings, so that all living beings can awaken to their meaning. Do not let the demons of the heavens have their way. Offer protection so that all can realize the Unsurpassed Way.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
In the Dharma-ending Age, after my nirvana, all of you should pass on the Tathagata's teachings. "All of you" refers to Ananda and all the great Bodhisattvas, great Arhats, and great bhikshus in the assembly, as well as to the great elders. Here the Buddha is exhorting them, "You must continue the transmission of the Tathagata's teachings down to the Dharma-ending Age, so that all living beings can awaken to their meaning, and so they can understand the principles of the Shurangama Sutra. Tell them about the fifty kinds of skandha demons, about the demons of the form, feeling, and thinking skandhas which I have explained for you. Be sure to propagate this teaching so everyone can hear it. Do not let the demons of the heavens have their way. If you let the demons do as they please, then you are in for trouble. Offer protection, maintain and support the Buddhadharma, so that all can realize the fruition of the Unsurpassed Way."