**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 8**

**CHAPTER 5**

**The Formations Skandha**

H4 The characteristics of the demons of the formations skandha.
I1 Overview of the beginning and end.
J1 In the beginning, one cultivates but has not yet broken through this region.
K1 Review of the ending of the previous thinking skandha.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, when the good person who is cultivating samadhi has put an end to the thinking skandha, he is ordinarily free of dreaming and idle thinking, so he stays the same whether in wakefulness or in sleep. His mind is aware, clear, empty, and still, like a cloudless sky, devoid of any coarse senseimpressions. He contemplates everything in the world, the mountains, the rivers, and the earth, as reflections in a mirror, appearing without attachment and vanishing without any trace; they are simply received and reflected. He does away with all his old habits, and only the essential truth remains.

Commentary:**

Ananda, when the good person. Which good person is being referred to here? The good person is the one who is developing the skill of directing the hearing inward to hear the inherent nature. He is cultivating the great Shurangama Samadhi. And who exactly is that person? He is simply whoever cultivates. "The good person" does not refer to any particular individual; it's not an exclusive title. If you cultivate, then it refers to you. If I cultivate, it refers to me. If he or she cultivates, it refers to him or her. Everyone has a share in it. That is, you have a share if you cultivate, but not if you don't. It's completely fair.

That good person is the one who is cultivating samadhi. Cultivation refers to diligently sitting in meditation, not to eating all day long. You should sit in meditation, listen to the sutras, and study the Buddhadharma. What should you cultivate? Samadhi power. How do you cultivate samadhi power? Sit in meditation. Samadhi arises from precepts, so the first step is to hold the precepts. Once you take the precepts, you must hold the precepts and never indulge in sexual misconduct. Men and women should observe propriety, as Lord Guan Yu did. He was faithful to his wife all his life. He never drew near another woman. Do you see his ruddy face? It testifies to his magnanimous, proper energy. Now that you have taken the precepts, I want to tell you that you must remain faithful to your spouse. You may not get involved in extramarital affairs and go looking for partners everywhere. Don't break the rules. You should accord with propriety and be open and upright in your conduct; only then will you attain samadhi. After taking the precepts, you will develop samadhi. From samadhi, wisdom will develop.

How do people get possessed by demons? If you have a little samadhi and your wisdom is insufficient, you may encounter demonic obstacles. If your skill in samadhi is deep enough, you will be able to conquer the demons.

[January 1983]

If you want to have proper samadhi, holding the precepts is certainly a prerequisite. It sets the foundation. Once we have a firm foundation, we can erect pillars on top of it. The pillars represent samadhi, and the foundation represents precepts. We must strictly uphold the precepts. This is very, very important. If you don't set a good foundation, then the pillars will not stand, and your samadhi will be deviant.

What is meant by wisdom? Once the pillars are erected and the walls are put in, the house can be built. What's the use of a house? It can be a place for people to bow to the Buddhas and to hear lectures on the sutras. We can teach people to change their faults and renew themselves. That's the function of wisdom.

Precepts are the substance, samadhi is the appearance, and wisdom is the function. We should be very clear about this. If you lack precepts, then you won't have any samadhi. Without samadhi, you cannot develop wisdom. Likewise, if you don't set the foundation well, the pillars you erect will not be stable, the walls will cave in, and the house will collapse and be useless. Therefore, the three non-outflow studies of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom are all indispensable. We should pay close attention to this.

He has put an end to the thinking skandha. Among the five skandhas of form, feeling, thinking, formations, and consciousness, the thinking skandha is destroyed. In his mind's interaction with the thinking skandha, he has conquered it. Having broken through the thinking skandha, he is ordinarily free of dreaming and idle thinking. The state he has reached is not a state of not eating or not sleeping. In this state, one still sleeps and eats, but no longer dreams. Confucius once said, "Alas, I'm getting decrepit. It's been so long since I saw the duke of Zhou in a dream!"

This was the duke who protected the King Wu in the Zhou dynasty. Why didn't Confucius have any dreams? Probably it was because by that time in his life, Confucius had partially broken through the thinking skandha. However, since he was not aware of it, he wondered, "Hey! How come I don't dream anymore? Oh, I must be getting old." Confucius had some skill in cultivation, and it's likely that he had destroyed the thinking skandha without knowing it. He didn't understand, so he decided that he no longer had dreams because he was old. Once the thinking skandha is destroyed, dreams are gone.

So he stays the same whether in wakefulness or in sleep. If you have read classical Chinese literature, you may know a story called the Warlord Defeats Duan at Yan which relates how a warlord named Zheng married a girl named Jiang. She gave birth to Lord Zhuang and Gong Shuduan. Lord Zhuang was called "Born Upon Waking" because his mother was asleep when she started to give birth to him, and when she woke up, he was born.

To that cultivator, the state of wakefulness is the same as the state of sleep. In other words, when he's asleep, it's as if he were awake. He can be like that because he is not upside-down and thus has no dream-thinking. When you have broken through the thinking skandha, you can leave upside-down dream-thinking far behind and ultimately attain the state of nirvana. If you haven't broken through the thinking skandha, this upside-downness will not go away. You should pay attention to this point.

In our study of the Buddhadharma, the five skandhas discussed in the Shurangama Sutra are extremely important. Furthermore, you should know how to untie the six knots. If you do not understand these knots, then you will never be able to untie them and become free. If you can untie them, you will obtain freedom. His mind is aware, clear, empty, and still. At this point he may be sleeping or awake, but for him, the two states are the same. What kind of state is this? The person actually sleeps very little. He's a light sleeper. He can replenish his energy just by closing his eyes for a while, unlike some people who sleep from dawn to dusk and from dusk to dawn. The reason they never seem to get enough sleep is because they have not broken through the thinking skandha. They tend to doze off a lot. When he breaks through the thinking skandha, he becomes alert and clear-minded. Waking and sleeping become the same for him. There is no difference. If you talk while he's sleeping, he will hear you. That's a subtle and wonderful state. Don't think you can scold him while he's asleep, for he knows what you are saying. He just doesn't let you know that he knows. What a wonderful state that is! Some beings in the heavens neither eat nor sleep, and are always alert and wide-awake. "His mind is aware, clear, empty and still," like a cloudless sky.

There?s a Chinese saying, "No clouds for ten thousand miles, just ten thousand miles of sky." In the clear sky, the bright sun shines for thousands of miles around. In that state, the cultivator's mind is devoid of any coarse sense-impressions. All the shadows of coarse sense-data that characterized his former state are gone. He contemplates everything in the world, the mountains, the rivers, and the earth, as reflections in a mirror, appearing without attachment and vanishing without any trace. His perception of the world and everything in it is like a bright mirror which reflects things and is empty when the things are gone. They leave no traces. No matter what state comes along, the cultivator does not become attached to it. When the situation passes, nothing remains. When it's gone, it's simply gone. It is said, "The mind of the past cannot be grasped, the mind of the present cannot be grasped, and the mind of the future cannot be grasped." The three minds cannot be obtained. That's why there is no attachment when they come, and no trace left when they go. They are simply received and reflected.

He does away with all his old habits. He empties himself of all old habits, stinking habits, evil habits, and bad habits. Take a look at the bad habits people have. Some people like to say really foul things, that's a stinky habit. Some people say mean things, that's an evil habit Some people are generally arrogant and haughty. We have so many bad habits. But that cultivator has gotten rid of all those habits, and only the essential truth remains. The only thing left is the thought of essential truth, which is the eighth consciousness. At this point the first six consciousnesses and the seventh consciousness are all gone. Now only the eighth consciousness remains, and it must be transformed into the great perfect mirror wisdom of the Buddha. He has now reached this stage, but has not yet transformed it. That's what is meant by "only the essential truth remains."

K2 Introduction to the region of the formations skandha.
 **Sutra:

From this point on, as the origin of production and destruction is exposed, he will completely see all the twelve categories of living beings in the ten directions. Although he has not fathomed the source of their individual lives, he will see that they share a common basis of life, which appears as a mirage, shimmering and fluctuating, and is the ultimate, pivotal point of the illusory sense faculties and sense objects. This is the region of the formations skandha.

Commentary:**

From this point on, as the origin of production and destruction is exposed. This refers to the origin of birth and death, which lies in the subtle movements of the seventh and sixth consciousnesses. At this point, the thinking skandha has been destroyed, and the cultivator has reached the formations skandha. Therefore, as the origin is revealed, he will completely see all the twelve categories of living beings in the ten directions. He exhaustively understands each of the twelve categories, which include beings born from eggs up to beings not completely without thought.

Although he has not fathomed the source of their individual lives, he will see that they share a common basis of life, which appears as a mirage, shimmering and fluctuating. He does not completely understand how each individual came into being, but he does perceive the origin of all the twelve categories of beings. This origin appears to him like a mirage. Sometimes in the spring you may see what seems to be a body of water in the distance, but when you reach the spot there is no water. Zhuang Zi called this mirage a "wild horse," a poetic reference to the cloud of dust stirred up by a galloping horse. In the Shurangama Sutra, it's literally called "solar flames." It refers to the vapor that rises from the earth in the springtime, forming a mirage. It's said that wherever these mirages appear, the geomantic properties are pretty good. Thus, whether the Buddhist sutras read "solar flames" or "wild horse," the reference is to mirages. "Shimmering" means that there's a bit of light, but it's not clear. "Fluctuating" means that the state of disturbance is not very great.

And is the ultimate, pivotal point of the illusory sense faculties and sense objects. The six sense faculties are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. These are all illusory, not real. In Chinese, "pivotal point" is expressed by characters for the pivot on which a Chinese door hangs and the place where the pivot is anchored so that the door can be opened and closed. Nowadays we use two metal hinges, but in ancient China the doors were hung on pivots that were anchored in holes. This situation is known as the region of the formations skandha.

J2 Ultimately it breaks up and reveals its false source.
 **Sutra:

Once the basic nature of this shimmering fluctuation returns to its original clarity, his habits will cease, like waves subsiding to become clear, calm water. This is the end of the formations skandha. This person will then be able to transcend the turbidity of living beings. Contemplating the cause of the formations skandha, one sees that subtle and hidden false thoughts are its source.

Commentary:**

Once the basic nature of this shimmering fluctuation returns to its original clarity, his habits will cease, like waves subsiding to become clear, calm water. The nature of this small amount of light is such that after a long while, it will revert to its original stillness and clarity. Once it settles and becomes clear, the original, pure nature appears. When that happens, those kinds of habits will disappear like subsiding waves.

The thinking skandha is like a rapidly flowing torrent. The comparison was made earlier in the sutra. Now the analogy is to waves, as in a swift current or a torrent. When the waves subside, the water clears and settles. This is the end of the formations skandha. The thinking skandha is like a gushing torrent, whereas the formations skandha is like ripples on the water. When only the consciousness skandha remains, there are no more waves in the clear, settled water. This is called "the end of the formations skandha."

This person will then be able to transcend the state of the turbidity of living beings. Contemplating the cause of the formations skandha, one sees that subtle and hidden false thoughts are its source. When you reach this point you still have false thinking, but it is not so apparent. It is hidden and obscured, not easy to detect at all. These extremely subtle false thoughts are the source of the formations skandha.

I2 The ten speculations therein.
J1 Two theories on the absence of cause.
K1 Describes the source and shows the error.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, you should know that when the good person has obtained proper knowledge in his practice of shamatha, his mind is unmoving, clear, and proper, and it cannot be disturbed by the ten kinds of demons from the heavens. He is now able to intently and thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings. As the origin of each category becomes apparent, he can contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and pervasive fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate on that pervasive source, he could fall into error with two theories of the absence of cause.

Commentary:**

Ananda, you should know that when the good person has obtained proper knowledge in his practice of the still reflection of shamatha or concentration, his mind is unmoving, clear, and proper. Within samadhi, his mind becomes bright and concentrated, and it cannot be disturbed by the ten kinds of demons from the heavens. They can't disturb the cultivator. He is now able to have the chance to intently and thoroughly investigate samadhi and fathom the origin of all twelve categories of beings.

As the origin of each category becomes apparent, as he exposes the source of each category, he can contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and pervasive fluctuation. He contemplates this elusive state which is difficult to detect The pervasive fluctuation is a subtle movement that occurs within the seventh consciousness. But if he suddenly initiates a change and begins to speculate about that pervasive source, the perfect inherent nature, he could fall into error with two theories of the absence of cause.

K2 Detailed explanation of their appearance.
L1 He sees no cause for the origin of life.
M1 He describes the measure of his vision.
 **Sutra:

First perhaps this person sees no cause for the origin of life. Why? Since he has completely destroyed the mechanism of production, he can, by means of the eight hundred merits of the eye organ, see all beings in the swirling flow of karma during eighty thousand eons, dying in one place and being reborn in another as they undergo transmigration. But he cannot see beyond eighty thousand eons.

Commentary:**

The first of the two theories of the nonexistence of cause is that this person sees no cause for the origin of life. He sees that, at the source of it all, there is no cause which makes a person a person. Why? He has completely destroyed the mechanism of production. That is, he has cut off the thinking skandha. The formations skandha is like ripples on the water. After he has broken through the thinking skandha, he has "destroyed the mechanism of production." The mechanism that produces false thoughts has been destroyed, and he does no more false thinking. Why did the text say earlier that a person has no more dreams after he breaks through the thinking skandha? It's because he has destroyed the mechanism that creates false thinking.

He can, by means of the eight hundred merits of the eye organ, see all beings in the swirling flow of karma during eighty thousand eons. Although each sense organ has a potential of twelve hundred merits, the eye organ does not function in total capacity and has only eight hundred merits. Once he breaks through the thinking skandha, he can see the events that occur within eighty thousand eons. He sees beings dying in one place and being reborn in another as they undergo transmigration. The flow of karma created by living beings in this world can be likened to a current or to the sea. He can see beings swirling in that flow over a period of eighty thousand great eons, dying in one place and being reborn in another, lime after lime. But he cannot see any of the events that occur beyond eighty thousand eons.

M2 He comes up with a wrong speculation.
 **Sutra:

Therefore, he concludes that for the last eighty thousand eons living beings in the ten directions of this and other worlds have come into being without any cause.

Commentary:**

Therefore, since he cannot see the events that occurred more than eighty thousand great eons ago, he concludes that for the last eighty thousand eons living beings in the ten directions of this and other worlds have come into being without any cause. They just come into being by themselves, without any cause or conditions. They are born spontaneously.

M3 He mistakes the principle and falls for an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of this speculation, he will lose proper and pervasive knowledge, fall into externalism, and become confused about the Bodhi nature.

Commentary:**

Because of this speculation, this conjecture that goes off-track, he will lose proper and pervasive knowledge, fall into externalism, join an external sect, and become confused about the Bodhi nature, the nature of the Bodhi mind.

L2 He sees no cause for the end of life.
M1 He describes the measure of his vision.
 **Sutra:

Second, perhaps this person sees no cause for the end of life. And why? Since he perceives the origin of life, he believes that people are always born as people and birds are always born as birds; that crows have always been black and swans have always been white; that humans and gods have always stood upright and animals have always walked on four legs; that whiteness does not come from being washed and blackness does not come from being dyed; and that there have never been nor will there be any changes for eighty thousand eons.

Commentary:**

What is the second view? Perhaps this person sees no cause for the end of life. The first is that he sees no cause for the beginning of things, and here he sees no cause for the end. And why? Since he perceives the origin of life, the beginning of all living beings, he believes that people are always born as people and birds are always born as birds. Believing that he has been enlightened and has attained great wisdom, he thinks he knows. What does he think he knows? He says, "People are people in life after life, and birds are birds in life after life."

Crows have always been black. They are black to begin with; they don't have to be dyed that color. And swans have always been white. They are white from birth. Humans and gods have always stood upright. Humans and celestial beings all walk erect. And animals have always walked on four legs. Animals walk horizontally, with their four legs on the ground. This is all fixed. Their whiteness does not come from being washed, and their blackness does not come from being dyed. For example, crows are black, but they weren't dyed black. Also, swans did not have to be washed to become white. And there have never been nor will there be any changes for eighty thousand eons.

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Disciple: Since the person is able to see events that happened within twenty thousand, forty thousand, and even eighty thousand great eons, why is he unable to see people being reborn in other paths as they undergo transmigration?

Venerable Master: That's an interesting question. You must realize that although the text says he can see for twenty thousand great eons, he is actually under the influence of a false state. One thought is equivalent to limitless eons, and limitless eons are just one thought. He feels it is twenty thousand eons, but it may not really be that long; he is still caught up in a false state. Controlled by false thinking, he experiences a totally unreal state in which he sees pigs being pigs and cows being cows for twenty thousand eons. Although he feels that it's that way, his perception is not correct. If it were really twenty thousand eons, then of course pigs would undergo transmigration and would not remain as pigs during all that time! The fact that he claims that they do shows that he is totally fake. Although he says that he can see for twenty thousand great eons, it's not necessarily such a long time. That's only his own feeling.

For instance, Mr. Wu from Taiwan said, "Oh, I feel that I was together with so-and-so in the Sixth Patriarch's dharma assembly during the Tang dynasty."

That's just the kind of state we are discussing. The very fact that he feels this to be the case indicates that it is not true; if it were true, there would have to be some evidence. And he shouldn't go around advertising himself. If what he said were true, how could he bear to leave so soon after being reunited with that person? Has he really put everything down? Why is he going back to Taiwan to attend to other business? He made that claim just to confuse people. Those people, unable to distinguish right from wrong, exclaim, "Incredible! He must be psychic, he knows that he was with this person back in the Tang dynasty." So what? if you know that but you don't cultivate, you'll still fall and become a ghost.

Therefore, you have to perceive things clearly; it takes genuine wisdom to know why a person speaks a certain way. Mr. Wu saw that so-and-so was quite influential at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas and at Gold Mountain Monastery, and he thought it would be advantageous to claim that he was associated with that person. That person silently acknowledged the claim, which was equivalent to saying, "Right, he and I really did study the dharma together in the assembly of the Great Master, the Sixth Patriarch." Notice how that elevates his own status. It is just like when another person came to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas and talked about how we all supported him. These cases are very similar, but they used different methods to deceive people.

Pay close attention to this. As I said before, the false paves the way for the true. First there is the false, which makes people all muddled and confused. Later, some people who seek the truth set off in quest of the proper dharma. When people reach a dead-end, they begin to pursue the proper dharma. Therefore,

That which is contrary is the movement of the Way.
That which is weak is the function of the Way.
Purity is the source of the turbidity.
Movement is the foundation of stillness.

The Way contains opposites; when we study the Buddhadharma, we must have genuine dharma-selecting vision so that we can distinguish true dharmas, false dharmas, black dharmas, white dharmas, proper dharmas, and deviant dharmas. If you can recognize them, you'll be all right. If you're so muddled that you don't recognize what's true and what's false, if you jump to conclusions without analyzing things carefully, then you're in for trouble.

For that reason, we should constantly investigate the Shurangama Sutra. The couplet on the main entrance to our Wayplace says, "The Avatamsaka dharma assembly and the Shurangama Platform." Since we are in the Shurangama Platform, we are now investigating the fifty skandha demons and afterwards we will study the perfect penetrations of the twenty-five sages. Then we can investigate the four clear, unalterable instructions on purity. In this way, we will investigate the Shurangama Sutra, passage by passage, section by section, until we understand it clearly. Nowadays the followers of demons, goblins, ghosts, and freaks claim that the Shurangama Sutra is false. Hearing them, people lose their faith and say, "Oh, the Shurangama Sutra is false; no matter what you say, it's false."

We should believe in reason. If a person's words make sense, we should believe them. If they don't make sense, if they do not accord with the proper dharma and the precepts, then even if what they say is true, we should regard it as false. How can we distinguish the true from the false, the black from the white? Don't be so muddled that you take wrong knowledge and views as correct, and proper knowledge and views as incorrect. To do that would be to seriously invert right and wrong. You would lose your vision and become blind, because you wouldn't be able to tell black from white. People who hold to wrong knowledge and views undergo the retribution of having no eyes, because they have blinded others and led others astray. Pay close attention to this. The law of cause and effect is very serious; it is not off by a bit. From my experience, I know that we cannot do even the slightest wrong deed, for if we do, we will soon have to undergo the retribution.

M2 He comes up with a wrong speculation.
 **Sutra:

He says, "As I now examine to the end of this life, I find the same holds true. In fact, I have never seen Bodhi, so how can there be such a thing as the attainment of Bodhi? You should now realize that there is no cause for the existence of any phenomena."

Commentary:**

This person is able to see the events that occur within eighty thousand great eons, so he says, "As I now examine to the end of this life, the life of this physical body, I find the same holds true." Just like the living beings that he perceives within eighty thousand great eons, his body also has no source from which it comes. He says, "In fact, I have never seen Bodhi. I have yet to see what Bodhi looks like, so how can there be such a thing as the attainment of Bodhi? I've looked throughout the eighty thousand great eons and haven't even caught a glimpse of Bodhi, so why should I believe that it is possible to attain Bodhi? You should now realize that there is no cause for the existence of any phenomena; for no reason whatsoever, they come into being."

Actually, he can only see within the range of eighty thousand great eons, and he has no idea of what occurs beyond that period of time. When the Buddha was in the world, an old man came to the monastery wishing to leave the home-life. The Buddha was away on the road and not at the monastery. The Arhats there all took a look at the old man, who was probably over eighty years old, with wrinkled skin, white hair, and an unsteady gait. Whenever a person requested to leave the home-life, the Arhats would look into his past causes and future effects. Now they contemplated the old man's causes and found that in the past eighty thousand eons he had not planted a single good root; he had not done any good deeds. The great Arhats said, "Since you didn't plant good roots, you cannot leave the home-life."

You shouldn't think leaving home is so easy. To leave home, you have to plant good roots for Bodhi in life after life. So the Arhats told the old man, "Although you wish to leave the home-life now, since you don't have any good roots, we can't allow you to leave home. You'd better go."

When the old man heard that he began to cry. He began to weep as he thought about his unlucky fate. At such an advanced age, he had wished to leave the homelife and had been rejected by the Buddha's disciples. As he walked along crying, he thought, "I might as well commit suicide. I could hang myself or throw myself into the river. I don't want to live anymore." However, his one thought of sincerity evoked a response. The Buddha came back and asked him, "What are you crying for?"

He said, "I wanted to leave the home-life, but the Buddha wasn't at the monastery and the Buddha's disciples wouldn't allow me to leave home. They said that I hadn't planted any good roots or done any good deeds in the last eighty thousand great eons. That's why I think I'd be better off dead. There's no point in living." The Buddha said, "Don't cry anymore. I will help you. I will let you leave the home-life. Come with me to the monastery." Thus the old man returned to the monastery and left the home-life under the Buddha. All of the Buddha's disciples were perplexed.

"Strange! The Buddha accepts only those who have good roots. Why did the Buddha accept that old man, who didn't have any good roots?" the disciples wondered The Buddha told them, "You Arhats can only see the events that occur within eighty thousand great eons. You don't know what goes on beyond this period. More than eighty thousand great eons ago, this old man was a woodcutter in the mountains. One day he saw a tiger and climbed up a tree to save himself. The tiger started gnawing at the tree, intending to devour the man. When it had just about chewed through the tree, the man got so nervous that he cried out, "Namo Buddha!" The tiger immediately left. When it had gone far away, the man climbed down from the tree and went home, saved from being eaten by the tiger. His one recitation of "Namo Buddha" planted the seed for a good root more than eighty thousand years ago. It is now time for that seed to sprout and bear fruit. That's why he is now able to leave the home-life. The Buddha's explanation resolved his disciples' doubts.

The cultivator of samadhi says there is no cause for the existence of anything because he is unaware of the events occurring beyond the period of eighty thousand great eons.

M3 He mistakes the principle and falls for an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of this speculation, he will lose proper and pervasive knowledge, fall into externalism, and become confused about the Bodhi nature.

Commentary:**
Because of this speculation, he will lose proper and pervasive knowledge and views, fall into externalism, and become confused about the Bodhi nature. He will not understand the Bodhi nature.

K3 Concludes that it is an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

This is the first external teaching, which postulates the absence of cause.

Commentary:**
It maintains that there is no origin or cause for anything.

J2 Four theories regarding pervasive permanence.
K1 Describes their source and shows the error.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is unmoving, clear, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate on its pervasive constancy, he could fall into error with four theories of pervasive permanence.

Commentary:**

Ananda, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is unmoving, clear, and proper. His proper mind has the wisdom that develops from samadhi, and it can no longer be disturbed by demons. By now, the demon kings can no longer use their tricks to disturb his samadhi. But sometimes transformations happen in his own formations skandha, causing him to have wrong ideas. These are known as "demons of one's own mind."

He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. He examines the ephemeral and elusive origin of all beings and finds a subtle movement a constant vibration. But if he begins to speculate on its pervasive constancy, that subtle fluctuation, he could fall into error with four theories of pervasive permanence. This person could give rise to wrong speculations and be ensnared in the views of pervasive permanence. What are the four theories?

K2 Detailed explanation of their appearance.
L1 He speculates that the mind and states are permanent.
 **Sutra:

First, as this person thoroughly investigates the mind and its states, he may conclude that both are causeless. Through his cultivation, he knows that in twenty thousand eons, as beings in the ten directions undergo endless rounds of birth and death, they are never annihilated. Therefore, he speculates that the mind and its states are permanent.

Commentary:**

First as this person thoroughly investigates the nature of the mind and its states, he may come up with a wrong view and conclude that both are causeless. There is no source from which they spring.

Through his cultivation, he knows that in twenty thousand eons, as beings in the ten directions undergo endless rounds of birth and death, they are never annihilated. Through the cultivation of samadhi, he becomes aware of the production and destruction of all living beings within twenty thousand eons. He sees them going through the endless cycle, being born and dying, over and over. Yet they are never annihilated. Therefore, he speculates that the mind and its states are permanent and will never change.

L2 He speculates that the four elements are permanent.
 **Sutra:

Second, as this person thoroughly investigates the source of the four elements, he may conclude that they are permanent in nature. Through his cultivation, he knows that in forty thousand eons, as living beings in the ten directions undergo births and deaths, their substances exist permanently and are never annihilated. Therefore, he speculates that this situationi is permanent.

Commentary:**

What is the second theory? As this person thoroughly investigates the source of the four elements, earth, water, fire, and air, he may conclude that they are permanent in nature. He claims the natures of earth, water, fire, and air are permanent and indestructible. Actually earth, water, fire, and air are created from the false thoughts of living beings and have no substance at all. Without any substance, how can they be permanent? That is a misconception. Through his cultivation, he knows that in forty thousand eons, as living beings in the ten directions undergo births and deaths, their substances exist permanently and are never annihilated. Therefore, he speculates that this situation is permanent. He says that the nature of their births and deaths is permanent and unchanging. It has never been interrupted. That is the second theory.

L3 He speculates that the eight consciousnesses are permanent.
 **Sutra:

Third, as this person thoroughly investigates the sixth sense faculty, the manas, and the consciousness that grasps and receives, he concludes that the origin of mind, intellect, and consciousness is permanent. Through his cultivation, he kows that in eighty thousand eons, as all living beings in the ten directions revolve in transmigration, this origin is never destroyed and exists permanently. Investigating this undestroyed origin, he speculates that it is permanent.

Commentary:**

Third, as this person thoroughly investigates the sixth sense faculty, the sixth (mind) consciousness, the manas consciousness, which was previously called the defiled consciousness, and the consciousness that grasps and receives, he concludes that the origin of mind, intellect and consciousness, of the sixth and seventh consciousnesses, is fundamentally permanent.

Through his cultivation of the skill of directing the hearing inward to listen to the inherent nature, he knows that in eighty thousand eons, as all living beings in the ten directions revolve in transmigration, undergoing repeated births and deaths, this origin is never destroyed and exists permanently and without change. Investigating this undestroyed origin, he speculates that it is permanent and not subject to change.

L4 He speculates that the cessation of thoughts is permanent.
 **Sutra:

Fourth, since this person has ended the source of thoughts, there is no more reason for them to arise. In the state of flowing, halting, and turning, the thinking mind, which was the cause of production and destruction, has now ceased forever, and so he naturally thinks that this is a state of non-production and non-destruction. As a result of such reasoning, he speculates that this state is permanent.

Commentary:**

Fourth, since this person has ended the source of thoughts, there is no more reason for them to arise. Once he breaks through the thinking skandha, the cause for false thoughts to arise is gone. He has samadhi power over the thoughts in his mind. With an unmoving, dear, and proper mind, he has no opportunity to entertain false thoughts. In the state of flowing, halting, and turning of the formations skandha, the thinking mind, which was the cause of production and destruction, has now ceased forever. He no longer has false thoughts, and so he naturally thinks that this is a state of non-production and nondestruction. As a result of such reasoning, he speculates that this state is permanent and unchanging.

K3 Concludes that it is an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of these speculations of permanence, he will lose proper and pervasive knowledge, fall into externalism, and become confused about the Bodhi nature. This is the second external teaching, which postulates pervasive permanence.

Commentary:**

Because of these speculations, these four theories of pervasive permanence, he will lose the wisdom of proper and pervasive knowledge, fall into externalism, and become confused about the Bodhi nature. Once he starts following external teachings, he will not be able to understand the Bodhi nature. This is the second external teaching, which postulates pervasive permanence.

J3 Four upside-down theories.
K1 Describes the source and shows the error.
 **Sutra:

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate about self and others, he could fall into error with theories of partial impermanence and partial permanence based on four distorted views.

Commentary:**

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. When this good person cultivates and attains solid samadhi, his mind becomes proper, so (external) demons have no chance to obstruct him. However, demons may arise within his own mind. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all twelve categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation that appears in the formations skandha at this stage in his cultivation.

But if he begins to speculate about self and others, he could fall into error with theories of partial impermanence and partial permanence based on four distorted views. Indulging in false thoughts about self and others, he creates demons in his own mind and comes up with four distorted views. He says that things are both permanent and impermanent, both produced and destroyed, both moving and still, both deified and pure, and both alive and dead. He defends both sides of the issue and refuses to make a decision. He says, "This way is right and that way is also right." He says things are impermanent, but he also says things are permanent. That's upside down. His lack of resolution confuses people.

K2 Detailed explanation of their appearance.
L1 Speculation regarding self and others.
 **Sutra:

First, as this person contemplates the wonderfully bright mind pervading the ten directions, he concludes that this state of profound stillness is the ultimate spiritual self. Then he speculates, "My spiritual self, which is settled, bright and unmoving, pervades the ten directions. All living beings are within my mind, and there they are born and die by themselves.**

**Therefore, my mind is permanent while those who undergo birth and death there are truly impermanent."

Commentary:**

What does he say in his first theory? First, as this person who cultivates the Way contemplates the wonderfully bright mind fully pervading the ten directions, he concludes that this state of profound stillness and purity is the ultimate spiritual self. Then he speculates, "My spiritual self, which is settled, bright and unmoving, pervades the ten directions. My mind is in a state of unmoving suchness, replete with samadhi power and wisdom that are perfectly bright and unmoving."

He says, "Since my mind pervades the ten directions, all living beings are contained within my mind, and there they are born and die by themselves, over and over. Therefore, my mind is permanent and not subject to birth and death, while those who undergo birth and death there are truly impermanent. The living beings in my mind are continually undergoing birth and death. Therefore, they must be impermanent in nature. My mind pervades the ten directions, permanent and unchanging. But the beings within it, undergoing birth and death, are impermanent."

L2 Speculation regarding worlds.
 **Sutra:

Second, instead of contemplating his own mind, this person contemplates in the ten directions worlds as many as the Ganges' sands. He regards as ultimately impermanent those worlds that are in eons of decay, and as ultimately permanent those that are not in eons of decay.

Commentary:**
Second, instead of contemplating his own mind, this person contemplates in the ten directions worlds as many as the Ganges' sands. He does not look within his mind, as above when he saw his own mind pervading the ten directions. Rather, he looks outside at the worlds in the ten directions, as numerous as the Ganges' sands.

He regards as ultimately impermanent those worlds that are in eons of decay, and as ultimately permanent those that are not in eons of decay. He sees a certain world that has reached the eon of decay in the cycle of becoming, dwelling, decay and emptiness, and he claims that it is ultimately impermanent in nature. Seeing another world that is not in the eon of decay, he says that it is ultimately permanent. So there are both impermanence and permanence.

L3 Speculation regarding his body and mind.
 **Sutra:

Third, this person closely examines his own mind and finds it to be subtle and mysterious, like fine motes of dust swirling in the ten directions, unchanging in nature. And yet it can cause his body to be born and then to die. He regards that indestructible nature as his permanent intrinsic nature, and that which undergoes birth and death and flows forth from him as impermanent.

Commentary:**
In the third distorted theory, this person closely examines his own mind and finds it to be subtle and mysterious. He scrutinizes his own mind in its most subtle and mysterious aspects. These aspects, which are so elusive that they can hardly be perceived, characterize the formations skandha. These states are like tiny ripples on water, or like fine motes of dust swirling in the ten directions. The continuous flowing movement is unchanging in nature. And yet it can cause his body to be born and then to die. It causes his body to undergo repeated births and deaths. He regards that indestructible nature of the flowing movement as his permanent intrinsic nature. He says, "This is the permanence of my own nature." And that which undergoes birth and death and flows forth from him as impermanent. He says, "All the beings that are born and die, over and over, flowing forth from this permanent nature of mine, are themselves impermanent in nature."

L4 Speculation regarding neither self nor others.
 **Sutra:

Fourth, knowing that the skandha of thinking has ended and seeing the flowing of the skandha of formations, this person speculates that the continuous flow of the skandha of formations is permanent, and that the skandhas of form, feeling, and thinking which have already ended are impermanent.

Commentary:**

Fourth, knowing that the skandha of thinking has ended and seeing the subtle flowing, like ripples, of the skandha of formations as he cultivates, this person speculates that the continuous flow of the skandha of formations is permanent. Seeing no change in it, he concludes, "Oh, it must be permanent in nature." And that the skandhas of form, feeling, and thinking which have already ended are impermanent. Since they are gone, he thinks they must be impermanent.

K3 Concludes that it is an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of these speculations of impermanence and permanence, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature. This is the third external teaching, which postulates partial permanence.

Commentary:**

Because of these four wrong theories based on his speculations of impermanence and permanence, he will lose proper and pervasive knowledge, fall into externalism, id become confused about the Bodhi nature. He says, "This part is permanent and that part is impermanent." Because he has these inverted theories and doesn't even understand their implications himself, he adopts the ideas of external teachings and becomes confused about the actual nature of Bodhi. This is the third external teaching, which postulates partial permanence. This third inverted theory advocated by external sects maintains that things are partially permanent and partially impermanent.

J4 Four theories regarding finiteness.
K1 Describes the source and shows the error.
 **Sutra:

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate about the making of certain distinctions, he could fall into error with four theories of finiteness.

Commentary:**

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. This refers to any good person who cultivates the samadhi of directing the hearing inward to listen to his own nature, thus attaining perfect penetration of the ear organ. When he has broken through the three skandhas of form, feeling and thinking, he has solid samadhi and his mind is proper. Thus, the demons of the heavens and those of external sects cannot affect him in any way. When the two skandhas of form and feeling still existed, the demons from the heavens were able to disturb his mind directly. When he reached the thinking skandha, the demons could no longer do so; they had to possess another person in order to disrupt his samadhi. Now, at the stage of the formations skandha, the demons cannot disturb his samadhi even if they possess another person. That's what is meant by a "firm, unmoving, and proper" mind. The demons can not get at him.

He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all twelve categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. He contemplates this most concealed, ephemeral nature of living beings, within the subtle movement of the formations skandha. But if he begins to speculate about the making of certain distinctions. He ponders and reflects, and makes four kinds of distinctions, which will be discussed below. He could then fall into error with four theories of finiteness. Once he gets to thinking, he comes up with four theories of finiteness which belong to external teachings.

K2 Detailed explanation of their appearance.
L1 Speculation regarding the three periods of time.
 **Sutra:

First, this person speculates that the origin of life flows and functions ceaselessly. He judges that the past and the future are finite and that the continuity of the mind is infinite.

Commentary:**

The first of the four distinctions regards the three periods of time, the past, the present, and the future. It's said, "You may search for the mind in the three periods of time, but the mind is not there." The mind of the past cannot be obtained, the mind of the present cannot be obtained, and the mind of the future cannot be obtained. Why not? Let's consider the past. What is the past? The past has already gone by, so the mind of the past cannot be obtained. As for the present it never stops. Right now, you say this is the present, but it has already become the past. If you then say this is the present it too has passed. The present never stays fixed, so where is your present mind? What about the future mind? The future has not come yet. Since it hasn't arrived, it doesn't exist, either. Therefore,

You may search for the mind in the three periods of time,
but it is not there.
Where there is no mind, false conditions do not exist.

Since even the mind is gone, where could there be any false thoughts? If you can understand this principle, you will find that there actually aren't any! In the treasury of the Tathagata, there is nothing at all.

This cultivator, however, has developed an attachment. What is he attached to? The ideas of finite and infinite. He says things are either finite or infinite, setting up so-called "theories" of what is finite and infinite. First, this person speculates that the origin of life flows and functions ceaselessly. In the state of the formations skandha, he conjectures that the origin of the twelve categories of living beings flows and functions without interruption. This ceaseless flowing and functioning is a manifestation of the formations skandha.

At that time, he judges that the past and the future are finite. He says that the past and the future are both bounded, but that's nonsense. How could the past and the future be finite? Based on his false speculations and attachments, he says that they are finite, but in fact, they are infinite. In the course of cultivation, his mind has become muddled, and he has no wisdom. Having broken through the thinking skandha, he gets confused and strays off the proper path in the formations skandha. That's why he makes conjectures of the finite and the infinite. And he reckons that the continuity of the mind is infinite. He says, "This present mind continues without interruption in the present. It has no limit or boundary, and is infinite."

L2 Speculation regarding what he hears and sees.
 **Sutra:

Second, as this person contemplates an interval of eighty thousand eons, he can see living beings; but earlier than eighty thousand eons is a time of stillness in which he cannot hear or see anything. He regards as infinite that time in which nothing is heard or seen, and as finite that interval in which living beings are seen to exist.

Commentary:**

What is the second distinction? It is the distinction of what he can see and hear and what he cannot see and hear. He takes what he can see and hear as one side, and what he cannot see and hear as the other side, so he falls into duality again. Neither side is the Middle Way.

Second, as this person contemplates an interval of eighty thousand eons, he can see living beings. When he sits in meditation, his samadhi allows him to contemplate an interval as long as eighty thousand great eons, and he can perceive all the twelve categories of beings within that time. But earlier than eighty thousand eons is a time of stillness in which he cannot hear or see anything. He can see with extreme clarity the events within the interval of eighty thousand eons. He can see beings undergoing endless rounds of birth and death. But he cannot see or hear what is happening outside of that interval.

He regards as infinite and unbounded that time in which nothing is heard or seen, and as finite and bounded that interval in which living beings are seen to exist. He falls into duality again, becoming attached to existence and nonexistence. Attaching to nonexistence means clinging to emptiness. Attaching to existence means clinging to forms. Neither accords with the Middle Way. Therefore the Buddha criticizes such a person for following an external sect.

L3 Speculation regarding self and others.
 **Sutra:

Third, this person speculates that his own pervasive knowledge is infinite and that all other people appear within his awareness. And yet, since he himself has never perceived the nature of their awareness, he says they have not obtained an infinite mind, but have only a finite one.

Commentary:**

Third, this person speculates that his own pervasive knowledge is infinite. The third distinction is the distinction between self and others. "Others" refers to living beings, and "self" refers to the cultivator himself. He makes yet another false speculation and becomes attached to it. He says, 'I feel that I possess the wisdom of pervasive knowledge." What is meant by pervasive knowledge? Pervasive knowledge means there is nothing that is not known; therefore, it has the quality of being infinite. And he says that all other people, all living beings, appear within his awareness. They are all contained within his wisdom. And yet, since he himself has never perceived the nature of their awareness, he says they have not obtained an infinite mind, but have only a finite one. Living beings have not obtained a boundless mind, but he himself has. Because he does not know the nature of their knowledge, he says that they have not obtained a boundless mind and do not have boundless wisdom, but have only a bounded wisdom. That is the distinction of self and others.

L4 Speculation regarding production and destruction.
 **Sutra:

Fourth, this person thoroughly investigates the formations skandha to the point that it becomes empty. Based on what he sees, in his mind he speculates that each and every living being, in its given body, is half living and half dead. From this he concludes that everything in the world is half finite and half infinite.

Commentary:**

Fourth, this person thoroughly investigates the formations skandha to the point that it becomes empty. What is the fourth distinction? It is that of the living and the dead. He examines the formations skandha to the utmost extent, until it becomes empty. Based on what he sees and understands from his investigations, in his mind he speculates that each and every living being, in its given body, is half living and half dead. This is another false speculation and false attachment. He sees any given living being's body as half living and half dead. Since living beings are like that he draws conclusions about the whole world. From this he concludes that everything in the world is half finite and half infinite. Life is on the side of the finite, and death is on the side of the infinite. That's his conjecture. The more he runs, the farther away he gets.

K3 Concludes that it is an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of these speculations about the finite and the infinite, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature. This is the fourth external teaching, which postulates finiteness.

Commentary:**

Because of these four speculations about the finite and the infinite. What does he conjecture? If it's not finite, then it's infinite. If it's not infinite, then it's finite. He keeps going back and forth like this, and generally does not stay on the Middle Way. He either goes too far or does not go far enough. Either he runs far away, or he doesn't even take a single step. Therefore, he will lose proper and pervasive knowledge and fall into externalism.

External teachings either go too far, or else they don't go far enough. Neither going too far nor coming up short is the Middle Way. We should cultivate the Middle Way. The Buddha spoke of the ultimate truth of the Middle Way as neither falling into emptiness nor falling into existence. If you lean to the side of emptiness or the side of existence, then you fall into duality. It's called an external teaching because there are two sides. And he will become confused about the true Bodhi nature. He does not recognize Bodhi. This is the fourth external teaching, which postulates finiteness.

J5 Four kinds of sophistry.
K1 Describes the source and shows the error.
 **Sutra:

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate on what he knows and sees, he could fall into error with four distorted, false theories, which are total speculation based on the sophistry of immortality.

Commentary:**

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. This refers to all good people who are cultivating and abiding in samadhi; this samadhi is cultivated by many people, not just one. Since the cultivator has a steady mind in which samadhi and wisdom are equally balanced, there is no opening for the demons to get at him. But although external demons cannot bother him, internal demons arise. Internal demons are the demons created from transformations in his own mind.

He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. He looks into the origin of the twelve categories of living beings, examining the primal purity of their nature. The constant fluctuation is a very subtle, attenuated motion that occurs in the formations skandha.

But if he begins to speculate on what he knows and sees. Before he has such thoughts, there is no problem. But as soon as those thoughts arise, there is trouble. As it's said, "Opening the mouth is a mistake. Entertain a thought is wrong." As soon as you have a false thought problems arrive.

He could fall into error with four distorted, false theories, which are total speculation based on the sophistry of immortality. Total speculation refers to the "nature that is totally speculation and attachment", which I have discussed before. It is a kind of false attachment. He becomes attached to something that is not true.

[January 1983]

Looking into the question of "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" is called "investigation." As I have said many times before, investigation means concentrating on one thing.

With concentration, it is efficacious.
With distraction, nothing is obtained.

Concentration can be compared to drilling a hole with an awl or to using a diamond drill to drill steel. The drill penetrating to the other side represents enlightenment. "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" refers to reciting in one's mind.

"Investigating" means searching, which is different from "speculating." Searching means concentrating and looking in one place, searching for "Who?" It means looking into a principle. Speculating, on the other hand, is not a single thought. Rather, it involves thinking about this and about that, and making comparisons. Speculation means having a lot of false thoughts, while investigation consists of one false thought. One who is speculating thinks about several things and cannot make up his mind. He thinks about the heavens and wonders what kind of clothes God wears, what kind of hat he wears, how big his eyes are, how long his ears are, and how wide his nose is. He speculates on God's measurements, trying to measure God's size in inches and feet. But ultimately, is God really the way he speculates him to be? He's never seen God, so his measurements may not be right.

He also thinks about the earth, speculating on the earth's gravitational pull. How big is the earth's center? How large is the earth's surface area? How many specks of dust are there on the earth? He estimates that the earth is composed of a hundred million times eighty-four thousand specks of dust amassed together. He's guessing and calculating on his own, but probably even a computer wouldn't be able to compute this figure. He tries to use himself as a computer to compute it but he can't come up with the head or tail of an answer, so he thinks it's rather freaky.

Therefore, "investigating" does not fall under the formations skandha; it is not under form, feeling, thinking, formations, or consciousness. "Reciting" means you recite in your mind, concentrating single-mindedly. For example, when you recite "Namo Amitabha Buddha," there is only the phrase "Namo Amitabha Buddha," and you have no other false thoughts. This is called fighting poison with poison. If you have lots of false thoughts, then the poison is too great and you will surely die.

K2 Detailed explanation of their appearance.
L1 Eight sophistries.

**Sutra:

First, this person contemplates the source of transformations. Seeing the movement and flow, he says there is change. Seeing the continuity, he says there is constancy. Where he can perceive something, he says there is production. Where he cannot perceive anything, he says there is destruction. He says that the unbroken continuity of causes is increasing and that the pauses within the continuity are decreasing. He says that the arising of all things is existence and that the perishing of all things is nonexistence. The light of reason shows that his application of mind has led to inconsistent views. If someone comes to seek the dharma, asking about its meaning, he replies, "I am both alive and dead, both existent and nonexistent, both increasing and decreasing." He always speaks in a confusing way, causing that person to forget what he was going to say.

Commentary:**

First, this person, who is about to go down the path of confusion, contemplates the source of transformations in his formations skandha. Seeing the movement and flow, he says there is change. He observes the flowing of the formations skandha and says it is undergoing changes. Seeing the continuity, he says there is constancy. Perceiving the formations skandha continuing on without cease, he calls it constancy. "Constant" means unchanging. Change implies impermanence, while lack of change implies permanence.

Where he can perceive something, he says there is production. When he contemplates the formations skandha, some areas are visible to him. He sees the subtle movements and describes them as "production." Where he cannot perceive anything, he says there is destruction. He cannot detect the tiny movements of the formations skandha, so he says this is "destruction." In other words, he can perceive the events within eighty thousand great eons, so he says they have come into being. He cannot see the events beyond eighty thousand eons, so he says they have ceased to be. This is similar to the previous cases.

He says that the unbroken continuity of causes is increasing. When the causes continue without interruption, he says there's an increase. That's another aspect of the formations skandha that he perceives. And that the pauses within the continuity are decreasing. Within the continuity there are pauses, and he says they are a decrease. For example, when the twenty-five sages described their perfect penetrations, one of them talked about the pause between inhaling and exhaling. That is also a "pause." He calls the pauses within the continuity "decreasing." But you shouldn't follow his theories, because he is making up his own terminology based on his perceptions, and they are fundamentally untrue. Don't look for rational principles in his theories. He just made them up, and they are totally irrational. That's why these are considered the views of external sects. There is no truth in them. He says that the arising of all things is existence. He watches things arise within the formations skandha, and he calls that existence. And that the perishing of all things is nonexistence. He calls the place where everything passes away and nothing exists "nonexistent." These are the four distorted theories. The light of reason shows that his application of mind has led to inconsistent views. If you examine his theories in light of reason, you see that they are all wrong. He used his mind in the wrong way. At this time, if someone comes to seek the dharma, asking about its meaning, requesting instruction on the principles of Buddhism, he replies to the person, "I am both alive and dead, both existent and nonexistent, both increasing and decreasing."

He always speaks in a confusing way. He invariably defends both sides of the issue. If he isn't talking about existence, then he's talking about nonexistence. If he's not discussing emptiness, then he's discussing form. Because he speaks from both sides, he cannot find the Middle Way, causing that person who is seeking the dharma to forget what he was going to say. Faced with the first person's nonsensical explanations, the questioner forgets all his questions and cannot recall what he came to seek instruction in. What kind of instruction would you call that? People come wanting to understand, but the cultivator confuses them until they lose all sense of what is right. They lose not only their train of thought, but also their original wisdom and clarity of mind. This person is confused, and he makes others confused, too.

L2 The sophistry of only "no."
 **Sutra:

Second, this person attentively contemplates his mind and finds that everything is nonexistent. He has a realization based on nonexistence. When anyone comes to ask him questions, he replies with only one word. He only says "No." Aside from saying "no," he does not speak.

Commentary:**

The person only knows about nothingness, so he talks in a crazy way. He denies the existence of everything. No matter what you ask him, he says "no." That's the only word he says. Second, this person attentively contemplates and examines his mind and finds that everything is nonexistent. Among the twelve categories of living beings, he feels that in the mind of the formations skandha, everything is gone. At the point where he sees nothing, he has a realization based on nonexistence. He thinks that he has attained wisdom based on "nonexistence." Actually, he doesn't understand. He has gone too far overboard, and his views are completely irrational. He's enlightened. What did he enlighten to? The word "no."

So when anyone comes to ask him questions, he replies with only one word. People think he must be a seasoned cultivator, because he keeps his eyes shut and nurtures his spirit, not saying a word all day long. He eats nothing except a few bananas. Thinking that he is a sage, they request the dharma from him. When they do, he really knows how to put on an act by giving one-word replies. This tactic is called "One-word Chan." People call it that because they don't understand what he's talking about. No matter what you ask him, he only says "No."

"How should I cultivate?" you ask.

"No."

"Should I recite the Buddha's name?"

"No."

"Do you think it would be a good idea to observe the moral rules and receive the precepts?"

"No."

His continual response of "no" bewilders you and you forget what you were going to say. You wonder, "What does he mean by 'no'? No what?" You can't figure it out, but then it finally hits you, "Oh! There really is nothing. It's truly nothing." Aside from saying 'no,' he does not speak. You may ask him one question, ten questions, a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand questions, but he will always answer 'no.' Then you think, "The Chan principles he's talking about must be too lofty; that's why we can't understand them."

L3 The sophistry of only ?yes.?
 **Sutra:

Third, this person attentively contemplates his mind and finds that everything is existent. He has a realization based on existence. When anyone comes to ask him questions, he replies with only one word. He only says 'Yes.' Aside from saying 'yes,' he does not speak.

Commentary:**

In the third kind of false sophistry, this person attentively contemplates his mind and finds that everything is existent. He looks into his mind and sees that the twelve categories of living beings all undergo birth and death in this place of existence. He has a realization based on existence. Actually, he has not realized any fruition. The sutra only says that in order to describe his mistake: He contemplates living beings and says, "Ah! They all exist." Perceiving this principle, he thinks he has become enlightened and has realized the fruition.

When anyone comes to ask him questions, he replies with only one word. No matter what dharma he is asked about, he only says "Yes."

"Would it be a good idea for me to leave the home-life and become a monk?" you ask him.

"Yes."

"Would it be good for me to take the five precepts?"

"Yes."

"What would be the best thing for me to do?"

"Yes."

Aside from saying "yes," he does not speak. He doesn't say anything but "yes," so you think, "Oh! This is really one-word Chan. He must be a lofty Sanghan. The dharma he speaks is so wonderful that I don't even understand it." It's wonderful precisely because you don't understand it. For example, if you understand what I'm now lecturing in this sutra, then it's not wonderful. "The dharma master keeps talking and talking, but I don't understand what's he saying," you may say.

In that case, it's wonderful for you. Simply because you don't understand, it is wonderful. Once you understand it, it's not wonderful anymore. Why not? Because you understand it! Whatever you don't understand is wonderful. Therefore, if you want the wonderful, don't study the Buddhadharma. If you don't study, then you won't know it and it will be wonderful. Regardless of what you say, he says "yes." Why is that? He believes he has become enlightened on account of the word "yes," and so he's transmitting that dharma to you.

L4 The sophistry of existence and non-existence.

**Sutra:

Fourth, this person perceives both existence and nonexistence. Experiencing this branching, his mind becomes confused. When anyone comes to ask questions, he tells them, "Existence is also nonexistence. But within nonexistence there is no existence." It is all sophistry and does not stand up under scrutiny.

Commentary:**

His fourth fallacious theory concerns existence and nonexistence. What is this theory? He says things both exist and do not exist. But he says things that don't exist cannot also exist and things that exist cannot also not exist. He does not know whether it's existent or nonexistent. He talks wildly, like a drunkard.

Fourth, this person perceives both existence and nonexistence within the formations skandha. He perceives the formations skandha to be like waves flowing ceaselessly, so he says that it exists. He says the pauses within the ceaseless flow are nonexistence. Experiencing this branching, his mind becomes confused.

His state has produced a branching off, just like on a tree, so he declares that things both exist and do not exist. His mind is confused because he doesn't have any true wisdom or samadhi. His wisdom and his samadhi are not balanced. At this point he becomes attached and cannot find his way out of the mess. He's confronted with a wrong road and doesn't know which road is right.

When anyone comes to ask questions and request instruction in the dharma, he tells them, "Existence is also nonexistence. Things that exist also do not exist. But within nonexistence there is no existence. But things that do not exist cannot come into existence." What already exists is also nonexistent. However, what is nonexistent does not exist. Ultimately, what kind of theory is that? It is all sophistry. That kind of reasoning is fallacious. He doesn't know what he's saying. That's why I said that he talks like a drunkard.

And what he says does not stand up under scrutiny. There's no way to hold a reasonable discussion with him. What can you do then? You can only use my method, which is to slap him across the mouth and see if he still talks about existence and nonexistence. If you slap him, he might react by asking, "Why did you hit me?" "But you don't exist, remember? So my slapping you also doesn't exist!" There's another tactic, you can take a knife and say, "Hey! I'm gonna kill you," and see whether or not he exists. You cannot reason with him. What he says cannot stand up under scrutiny, and you shouldn't ask him about it.

K3 Concludes that it is an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of these speculations, which are empty sophistries, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature. This is the fifth external teaching, which postulates four distorted, false theories that are total speculation based on the sophistry of immortality.

Commentary:**
Because of these four theories or speculations, which are empty sophistries. His theories are impossible imaginings. The things he says simply cannot be. There is no truth in his doctrines. For that reason, he will fail into externalism. Why is it called an external teaching? Because the principles in it are improper. His knowledge and views are wrong, so the principles he expounds are not ultimate. They don't get to the bottom of things. And he will become confused about the Bodhi nature. He doesn't know the true path to enlightenment. The genuine path of Bodhi is not clear to him. This is the fifth external teaching, which postulates four distorted, false theories that are total speculation based on the sophistry of immortality.

In the first theory, he says that he is both alive and dead, both existent and non-existent, both increasing and decreasing. In the second case, he answers all questions with the word "no." He says "No, no, no" all day long, never saying any other word. No matter what anyone says to him, he just says "no." If you ask a thousand or ten thousand questions, you'll get that many replies of "no." In the third case, he says "yes" to everything.

"Can I be a thief?" you ask.

"Yes."

"Can I take the precepts?"

"Yes."

"Is it all right to eat excrement?"

"Yes."

"Is it all right to drink urine?"

"Yes."

"Can you die?"

"Yes."

"Can you go on living in this world?"

"Yes."

No matter what you say, he says "yes," a thousand or ten thousand times. There is nothing that is not a "yes." His "yes" signifies existence, everything exists.

In the fourth case, which is the one under discussion right now, he says that existence implies non-existence, but that non-existence does not imply existence. Ultimately, what kind of principle is that? It's the kind of principle that he expounds these four distorted theories based on the sophistry of immortality. His theories are incoherent and unclear.

They are total speculation, with no reality to them. In the past I explained

1) the nature that is totally speculation and attachment,
2) the nature that arises dependent on something else, and
3) the perfectly accomplished real nature.

I don't know if everyone is clear about the principle. What is the "nature that is totally speculation and attachment"? Suppose you see a rope lying on the ground on a night when there isn't much moonlight. You may think, "Oh, is it a snake?" That's the "nature that is totally speculation and attachment". Actually, it's a rope, but you make the false judgment that it is a snake. Suppose you see the silhouette of a tree or a plant on a moonless night, and you think, "Oh, could that be a ghost?" and you get scared.

Maybe at night you see a dog, and you think, "Oh, is that a wolf or a tiger?" That's the "nature that is totally speculation and attachment" at work. When you get a better look, you realize that it's just a dog, not a wolf or a tiger. That's the "the nature that arises dependent on something else'". Based on the dog, your "nature that is totally speculation and attachment" comes into being. It is really a dog. What is a dog? It is an animal. Because you have the "nature that is totally speculation and attachment", you mistake it for a wok, a tiger, or some sort of strange creature. The same thing happens when you see a plant.

You thought that rope was a snake, but when you get a better look, you see that it's only a rope. The rope is called the "nature that arises dependent on something else". What is the "nature that arises dependent on something else"? Well, what is the rope made from? It's made from hemp. The hemp is called the "perfectly accomplished real nature". Hemp can be made into a rope, and that is the "nature that arises dependent on something else". Based on the "perfectly accomplished real nature", the "nature that arises dependent on something else" comes into being. Then when you do not see and recognize it dearly, the "nature that is totally speculation and attachment" comes into being. Here the follower of this external teaching is the same. What he says isn't the way things really are. He comes up with these false theories that are totally based on speculation and attachment.

J6 The sixteen ways in which form can exist after death.
K1 Describes the source and shows the error.
 **Sutra:

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate on the endless flow, he could fall into error with the confused idea that forms exist after death.

Commentary:**

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. This refers to any good person who cultivates and attains solid samadhi. Because he has firm samadhi and a proper mind, the demon kings cannot have their way with him. Their tricks are all played out. But although the demons' tricks cannot touch him, demons can arise right within his own mind. These demons of the mind are the most difficult to subdue.

He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all twelve categories of beings, that is, the fundamental source of all living beings, and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. He observes the elusive, light, and fleeting original nature of the twelve categories of living beings. This original nature is just the formations skandha, which is characterized by subtle fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate on the endless flow, the subtle fluctuation which is like the continual motion of waves on the water, he could fall into error with the confused idea that forms exist after death. Speculating that there is existence after death, his mind becomes confused.

K2 Detailed explanation of their appearance.
 **Sutra:

He may strongly identify with his body and say that form is himself; or he may see himself as perfectly encompassing all worlds and say that he contains form; or he may perceive all external conditions as contingent upon himself and say that form belongs to him; or he may decide that he relies on the continuity of the formations skandha and say that he is within form.

Commentary:**

He may strongly identify with his body and say that form is himself. The person who entertains this kind of wrong attachment may want to make his body tough and durable. He claims that form, which is comprised of the four elements, is simply himself. Or he may see himself as perfectly encompassing all worlds and say that he contains form. He may see that his own nature is perfectly fused and unobstructed, and that all worlds in the ten directions are contained in it. Therefore, he says that he contains form. What kind of form? He says, "I have an immense form." Or he may perceive all external conditions as contingent upon himself and say that form belongs to him. He may say that external conditions follow him everywhere, and that the four elements of form all belong to him. Or he may decide that he relies on the continuity of the formations skandha and say that he is within form.
 **Sutra:

In all of these speculations, he says that forms exist after death. Expanding the idea, he comes up with sixteen cases of the existence of forms.

Commentary:**

In all of these speculations, he says that forms exist after death. In the above discussion about form and external conditions, there were four theories. He said:

1. The four elements of form belong to him;
2. The four elements of form are himself;
3. Form is within himself, so that he is big and form is small; and
4. Apart from him, there is no form.

In general, his talk is nonsense. There is no logic in it In these four theories, he speculates that there is existence after death. Expanding the idea, he comes up with sixteen cases of the existence of forms. He takes the above four theories and applies them to the four skandhas of form, feeling, thinking, and formations, thus obtaining sixteen cases of the existence of forms. Another way to formulate the sixteen cases is to combine the four skandhas of form, feeling, thinking, and formations and the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air. It's useless to ask him how he came up with these views, because there is basically no logic in them. They don't make any sense. I cannot figure them out myself, because they are unclear to begin with.
 **Sutra:

Then he may speculate that afflictions are always afflictions, and Bodhi is always Bodhi, and the two exist side by side without contradicting each other.

Commentary:**
Four times four makes sixteen ways in which forms can exist. He sees that the four theories can be applied to each of the four skandhas of form, feeling, thinking and formations, or to the four elements of earth, water, fire and air. Then he may speculate that afflictions are always afflictions, and Bodhi is always Bodhi. He says that afflictions are afflictions forever, and Bodhi is Bodhi forever, and that the statement, "Afflictions are simply Bodhi" is wrong. And the two exist side by side without contradicting each other. He claims that these two function side by side without disrupting each other, that they are mutually cooperative. But this idea is fundamentally wrong. It's basically impossible. Why does he talk like this then? Because he is confused about Bodhi.

K3 Concludes that it is an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of these speculations about what exists after death, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature. This is the sixth external teaching, which postulates confused theories of the existence of forms after death in the realm of the five skandhas.

Commentary:**

The four skandhas of form, feeling, thinking, and formations are multiplied by four to generate sixteen cases for the existence of forms. He says that forms exist after death, and so because of these speculations about what exists after death, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature, his inherent enlightened nature.

This is the sixth external teaching, which postulates confused theories of the existence of forms after death in the realm of the five skandhas. "The five skandhas" here actually refers only to the four skandhas of form, feeling, thinking, and formations, and not to consciousness. He says that after people die, they continue to have form and appearance. In his disoriented state of mind, he invents this kind of theory.

J7 Eight ideas about the non-existence of form.
K1 Describes the source and shows the error.
 **Sutra:

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper, and can no longer be disturbed by demons. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate on the skandhas of form, feeling, and thinking, which have already ended, he could fall into error with the confused idea that forms do not exist after death.

Commentary:**

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper. This refers to any person who cultivates samadhi power. He has solid samadhi and wisdom, and can no longer be disturbed by demons. Although his wisdom is not ultimate and true wisdom, the demon kings cannot do anything to him. However, he is not yet able to subdue the demons of his own mind. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all twelve categories of living beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. He looks into the fundamental nature of all living beings, which is elusive, light and ephemeral and characterized by subtle movements.

But if he begins to speculate on the three skandhas of form, feeling, and thinking, which have already ended, he could fall into error with the confused idea that forms do not exist after death. He says that there is no existence after death. That's the kind of upside-down theory that he comes up with.

K2 Detailed explanation of their appearance.
 **Sutra:

Seeing that his form is gone, his physical shape seems to lack a cause. As he contemplates the absence of thought, there is nothing to which his mind can become attached. Knowing that his feelings are gone, he has no further involvements. Those skandhas have vanished. Although there is still some coming into being, there is no feeling or thought, and he concludes that he is like grass or wood.

Commentary:**

Seeing that his form skandha is gone, his physical shape seems to lack a cause. His body has no support. It's been given away. As he contemplates the absence of thought, there is nothing to which his mind can become attached. He has broken through the thinking skandha, and it is gone. There is no place left for his mind to get hung up. He has no more false thinking. Knowing that his feelings are gone, that his feeling skandha is gone, he has no further involvements with external conditions. Those three skandhas of form, feeling, and thinking have vanished. Although there is still some very small trace of coming into being, that is, although the formations skandha still exists, there is no feeling or thought, and he concludes that he is like grass or wood. Since he's devoid of feeling and thinking, he considers himself to be the same as grass and wood.
 **Sutra:

Since those qualities do not exist at present how can there be any existence of forms after death? Because of his examinations and comparisons, he decides that after death there is no existence. Expanding the idea, he comes up with eight cases of the nonexistence of forms.

Commentary:**

Since those qualities do not exist at present. "Qualities" refers not only to form, but to mind as well. He says that the material aspects of form and mind are gone now. This is referring to the four skandhas of form, feeling, thinking, and formations. Remember that he says his body is like grass or wood. That means he doesn't have any awareness. Although he is alive, there's nothing at all. How can there be any existence of forms after death? if he cannot find any sign of existence, anything with actual form and appearance, right now in his living state, how could there be anything with form after he dies?

Because of his examinations and comparisons, he decides that after death, there is no existence. He mulls over the idea, looking at it from all angles. "If there are no forms in life, how can there be any after death? There are no forms after death either." If there is no evidence of the skandhas of form, feeling, thinking, and formations while he is alive, then there shouldn't be any evidence of them after death either. Expanding the idea, he comes up with eight cases of the nonexistence of form. There are four cases of the nonexistence of the skandhas of form, feeling, thinking, and formations during life, and four cases of their nonexistence after death. They are all gone.
 **Sutra:

From that, he may speculate that nirvana and cause and effect are all empty, that they are mere names and ultimately do not exist.

Commentary:**

From that, because he reasons that the four skandhas do not exist, based on the eight cases of nonexistence he may speculate that nirvana and cause and effect are all empty. He says that there is no nirvana, and he denies cause and effect. If it were really that way, there would be no reason for people to cultivate or become Buddhas. Why? According to his theories, there isn't anything at all. He thinks that they are mere names and ultimately do not exist. They are nothing but names; they do not really exist. That's what he says.

K3 Concludes that it is an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of those speculations that forms do not exist after death, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature. This is the seventh external teaching, which postulates confused theories of the nonexistence of forms after death in the realm of the five skandhas.

Commentary:**

He says that after death, there isn't anything at all. Everything is empty. Because of those speculations that forms do not exist after death, he will fall into a kind of externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature. This is the seventh external teaching, which postulates confused theories of the nonexistence of forms after death inthe realm of the five skandhas. He says that there is no existence after death within the five skandhas. That's the sort of distorted theory that his mind comes up with.

J8 Eight kinds of negation.
K1 Describes the source and shows the error.
 **Sutra:

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. In this state where the skandha of formations remains, but the skandhas of feeling and thinking are gone, if he begins to speculate that there is both existence and nonexistence, thus contradicting himself, he could fall into error with confused theories that deny both existence and nonexistence after death.

Commentary:**

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. Again, this refers to any good person who cultivates his samadhi power, making it strong and solid. Although external demons cannot get at him, the demons of his own mind are difficult to subdue. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all twelve categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. He observes the mind which is elusive and fleeting. At this point there are still subtle movements in the formations skandha.

In this state where the skandha of formations remains, but the skandhas of feeling and thinking are gone, if he begins' to speculate that there is both existence and nonexistence, if he says that things both exist and do not exist, thus contradicting himself. His own "self" is obliterated. It no longer exists. If you were to say that things exist then he would also exist. If you say things don't exist, then he doesn't exist either. When he contradicts himself, he is also destroying himself. He denies his own theories. He could fall into error with confused theories that deny both existence and nonexistence after death. He says that after he dies, there is neither existence nor nonexistence. Then what is there? Is "neither existence nor nonexistence" the Middle Way? No. He has no regard for the Middle Way, nor has he attained the Middle Way. This is where he has gone wrong and become confused.

K2 Detailed explanation of their appearance.
 **Sutra:

Regarding form, feeling, and thinking, he sees that existence is not really existence. Within the flow of the formations skandha, he sees that nonexistence is not really nonexistence.

Commentary:**

Regarding form, feeling, and thinking, the three skandhas that he has already broken through, he sees that existence is not really existence. He perceives a state of existence, and yet it is not really existence. Within the flow of the formations skandha, he sees that nonexistence is not really nonexistence. Within the subtle fluctuation of the skandha of formations, he sees that what does not exist also seems to exist. Therefore, there is neither existence nor nonexistence. He formulates this kind of theory.
 **Sutra:

Considering back and forth in this way, he thoroughly investigates the realms of these skandhas and derives an eightfold negation of forms. No matter which skandha is mentioned, he says that after death, it neither exists nor does not exist.

Commentary:**

Earlier he saw a situation in which the previously existing form, feeling, and thinking became nonexistent, and the flowing of the formations skandha, which could later cease to exist, was still existing then. Considering back and forth in this way, he investigates this way and that trying to discover the underlying principle. He thoroughly investigates the realms of these four skandhas of form, feeling, thinking and formations, viewing them from all angles, and derives an eightfold negation of forms. There are eight cases, all of which deny the existence of forms. No matter which skandha is mentioned, he only has one answer, he says that after death, it neither exists nor does not exist. He says that after death, the skandhas of form, feeling, thinking, and formations are neither existing nor nonexistent.
 **Sutra:

Further, because he speculates that all formations are changing in nature, an 'insight' flashes through his mind, leading him to deny both existence and nonexistence. He cannot determine what is unreal and what is real.

Commentary:**

Further, because he speculates that all formations are changing in nature. He further investigates the nature of the formations skandha. Because the formations skandha has subtle movements, it is ever flowing and changing. Then an "insight" flashes through his mind, leading him to deny both existence and nonexistence. A mistaken insight occurs to him, and he decides that existence and nonexistence are both invalid. Is this the Middle Way? No, he doesn't understand the ultimate meaning of the Middle Way. That's why he has no regard for the Middle Way. He only considers existence and nonexistence. So he cannot determine what is unreal and what is real. Things are neither unreal nor real. You say something is real, but he denies it. You say it's unreal, but he denies that too. Since he maintains that it's neither real nor unreal, he is at a loss.

K3 Concludes that it is an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of these speculations that deny both existence and nonexistence after death, the future is murky to him and he cannot say anything about it. Therefore, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature. This is the eighth external teaching, which postulates confused theories that deny both existence and nonexistence after death in the realm of the five skandhas.

Commentary:**

Because of these various speculations which he made above that deny both existence and nonexistence after death, the future is murky to him and he cannot say anything about it. He says that after death there is both existence and nonexistence. He cannot perceive the future end of the formations skandha. Since he cannot know it, there is nothing he can discuss, nothing he can say. Therefore, he will fall into externalism by following an external teaching, and he will become confused about the fundamental Bodhi nature. This is the eighth external teaching, which postulates confused theories that deny both existence and nonexistence after death in the realm of the five skandhas. He says that after one dies, there is existence and yet no existence in the realm of the five skandhas. Because his mind is utterly confused, he arrives at this kind of theory.

J9 Seven theories on the cessation of existence.
K1 Describes the source and shows the error.

Sutra:

 **Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate that there is no existence after death, he could fall into error with seven theories of the cessation of existence.

Commentary:**

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. The good person who cultivates samadhi has developed solid samadhi power and a proper mind, so the demons have no way to bother him.

He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all twelve categories of living beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. He contemplates their hidden, light, and ephemeral nature. At this point, there are subtle fluctuations in the formations skandha. But if, since he cannot perceive any state beyond the formations skandha, he begins to speculate that there is no existence after death, he could fall into error with seven theories of the cessation of existence. This person could come to believe in seven kinds of cessation.

K2 Detailed explanation of their appearance.
 **Sutra:

He may speculate that the body will cease to exist or that when desire has ended, there is cessation of existence; or that after suffering has ended, there is cessation of existence; or that when bliss reaches an ultimate point, there is cessation of existence; or that when renunciation reaches an ultimate point there is cessation of existence.

Commentary:**
He may speculate that the body will cease to exist. He contemplates that in all places where living beings have bodies, their bodies will eventually perish. These places are the four great continents, Jambudvipa in the south, Purvavideha in the east, Aparagodaniya in the west and Uttarakuru in the north, and also the six desire heavens.

Or he may surmise that when desire has ended, beyond the desire realm, in the heavens of the first dhyana (of the four dhyanas), known as the Ground of the Happiness of Leaving Birth, there is cessation of existence. In the first dhyana, you separate from the defilements of living beings and experience joy. Or that after suffering has ended, in the heavens of the second dhyana, known as the Ground of the Joy of Developing Samadhi, there is cessation of existence. At this point, you feel joy because you have attained samadhi.

Or that when bliss reaches an ultimate point, there is cessation of existence. He may speculate that the state of ultimate bliss in the heavens of the third dhyana will also come to an end. The third dhyana is called the Ground of the Wonderful Bliss of Leaving Joy, because one transcends happiness and experiences a subtle bliss. He surmises that the third dhyana heavens will also cease to be. Or he judges that when renunciation reaches an ultimate point, in the heavens of the fourth dhyana, known as the Ground of the Purity of Renouncing Thought, there is cessation of existence. He surmises that the heavens of the four stations of emptiness, in which there is no hindrance of form, will also cease to be.

The time passes by very quickly. Without our realizing it, the summer is already over. In China, Confucius compared life to a ceaselessly flowing stream. Time that has gone by can never return. Someone also said, "An inch of time is worth an ounce of gold, but an ounce of gold can hardly buy back an inch of time." An inch of time is as valuable as an ounce of gold. If you lose gold, it's possible to recover it. Once time has gone by, however, there is no way to get it back. Therefore, time is even more valuable than gold. Thus, in Buddhism we say, "An inch of time is an inch of life." When time grows short, one's life is also shorter. We must certainly cherish our time and not casually let it go by in vain.

During this summer, we have begun our days at six o'clock in the morning, either meditating or studying the sutras. From early in the morning until nine o'clock at night every person has applied himself or herself diligently to cultivation. I believe that this period has been more precious than gold, more valuable than diamonds. Everyone has been together, being permeated and influenced by what we have heard and cultivated. This is a most precious and valuable time in our lives. It's a pity that the time has passed by in the twinkling of an eye. Although it is nearly over, the Buddhadharma that each of us has learned has planted a precious Vajra seed in our mind, in the field of our eighth consciousness. In the future it will certainly bear the indestructible fruit of Vajra, which is also the Buddha-fruit, we will become Buddhas.

When will we become Buddhas? It depends on our how diligently we till and irrigate the fields. The seed has been planted in the ground, but just as in farming, we have to water it, pull the weeds, and till the soil, making it soft so that the seed can sprout. How do we pull the weeds out? Weeding means that at all times, we must guard against the arising of very subtle thoughts and get rid of all false thoughts.

Every day we must apply effort in our cultivation in this way, just as farmers tend and irrigate their fields. Give it some water and pull out the weeds, day by day, and the Vajra seed you have planted in the ground will produce a Bodhi sprout. After your Bodhi sprout comes up and grows into a Bodhi tree, it will bear the Bodhi fruit. But you have to protect that Bodhi sprout. If you neglect to water it and tend to it, then it will wither away. What is meant by watering? if you study the Buddhadharma every day, you are irrigating your Bodhi sprout with the water of the dharma, and in time, your Vajra fruit will ripen. If you don't continue to care for this Vajra seed after the session is over, then it will not be easy for to sprout. You must protect your Vajra seed well. Don't go back to doing the things you used to like doing. Follow the rules and behave yourselves. Don't be as wild and reckless as you used to be. If you follow the rules, then you are in accord with the Buddhadharma. If you don't then you are not. We should certainly abide by the rules and regulations. Don't be so lax and unrestrained. This is my hope for each one of you.

During this summer session of lectures on the Shurangama Sutra, it has surely been the case that, "Once it enters your ears, it is forever a seed of the Way." As soon as the principles of this sutra pass through your ears, they remain forever in the field of your eight consciousness as seeds of Bodhi.
 **Sutra:

Considering back and forth in this way, he exhaustively investigates the limits of the seven states and sees that they have already ceased to be and will not exist again.

Commentary:**

Considering back and forth in this way, he exhaustively investigates the limits of the seven states mentioned above and sees that they have already ceased to be and will not exist again. They don't seem to exist at present and since they are already gone, they will not come into being again. These are the seven kinds of cessation of existence.

K3 Concludes that it is an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of these speculations that existence ceases after death, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature. This is the ninth external teaching, which postulates confused theories of the cessation of existence after death in the realm of the five skandhas.

Commentary:**
Because of these speculations that existence ceases after death, in whit he maintains that there is nothing what-so-ever after death, that everything is annihilated, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature, about the nature of proper enlightenment. This is the ninth external teaching, which postulates confused theories of the cessation of existence after death in the realm of the five skandhas. In his confused mind, he thinks that existence ceases after death in the realm of form, feeling, thinking, and formations.

J10 Five kinds of immediate nirvana.
K1 Describes the source and shows the error.
 **Sutra:

Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate on existence after death, he could fall into error with five theories of nirvana.

Commentary:**
Further, in his practice of samadhi, the good person's mind is firm, unmoving, and proper and can no longer be disturbed by demons. Since he has solid samadhi power and a pure and proper mind, the demon kings cannot affect him in any way. He can thoroughly investigate the origin of all twelve categories of beings and contemplate the source of the subtle, fleeting, and constant fluctuation. He examines their mind, which is hidden, light, and clear and in which there is a subtle fluctuation. But if he begins to speculate on existence after death, he could fall into error with five theories of nirvana. Beyond the formations skandha, he perceives existence again. Based on the constant, ceaseless fluctuations in the formations skandha, he makes false conjectures of existence and comes to believe in five theories regarding nirvana.

K2 Detailed explanation of their appearance.
 **Sutra:

He may consider the heavens of the desire realm a true refuge, because he contemplates their extensive brightness and longs for it; or he may take refuge in the first dhyana, because there his nature is free from worry; or he may take refuge in the second dhyana, because there his mind is free from suffering; or he may take refuge in the third dhyana, because he delights in its extreme joy; or he may take refuge in the fourth dhyana, reasoning that suffering and bliss are both ended there and that he will no longer undergo transmigration.

Commentary:**

He may consider the heavens of the desire realm a true refuge. That's where he will go. He considers the heavens of the desire realm to be his refuge. Why? Because he contemplates their extensive brightness and longs for it. The heavens of the desire realm appear to be perfect and brilliant, so he gets attached to them and yearns to go there. He takes them as his haven, as the state of nirvana. He thinks the desire realm is a place of true happiness.

Or he may take refuge in the first dhyana, because there his nature is free from worry. He may think that the beings in the heavens of the first dhyana, the Ground of the Joy of Leaving Birth, have left behind the worries and afflictions of living beings and experience a sense of joy. Thus he wishes to be born there. Or he may take refuge in the second dhyana, because there his mind is free from suffering. In his cultivation, he may reach the heavens of the second dhyana, where his mind no longer suffers, because he has developed samadhi. These heavens are known as the Ground of the Joy of Developing Samadhi.

Or he may take refuge in the third dhyana, because he delights in its extreme bliss. He may believe that the bliss of the third dhyana is extremely fine. He thinks he will get whatever he wishes for there, so he considers those heavens to be a state of nirvana. Or he may take refuge in the fourth dhyana, reasoning that suffering and bliss are both ended there and that he will no longer undergo transmigration. He may say that in the fourth dhyana, the Ground of the Purity of Renouncing Thought, suffering and bliss are both gone and so there is no further rebirth in the three realms. Since it is extremely pure, he considers it a state of nirvana and wants to take refuge there.
 **Sutra:

These heavens are subject to outflows, but in his confusion he thinks that they are unconditioned; and he takes these five states of tranquility to be refuges of supreme purity. Considering back and forth in this way, he decides that these five states are ultimate.

Commentary:**
These heavens are subject to outflows, but in his confusion he "mistakes a thief for his own son" and thinks that they are unconditioned; and he takes these five states of tranquility to be refuges of supreme purity. He feels that these five states are peaceful and secure, and that they are especially supreme and pure places of refuge. Considering back and forth in this way, going round and round, he decides that these five states are ultimate. He reckons they are all ultimate states where he can attain nirvana. He does not realize that these heavens are still subject to outflows.

K3 Concludes that it is an externalist teaching.
 **Sutra:

Because of these speculations about five kinds of immediate nirvana, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature. This is the tenth external teaching, which postulates confused theories of five kinds of immediate nirvana in the realm of the five skandhas.

Commentary:**
Because of these five speculations described above about five kinds of immediate nirvana, he will fall into externalism and become confused about the Bodhi nature. He loses sight of the enlightened nature of Bodhi. This is the tenth external teaching, which postulates confused theories of five kinds of immediate nirvana in the realm of the five skandhas. His theories are incorrect and upside-down.

I3 Conclusion on the harm, and command to offer protection.
J1 Showing how this happens due to interaction.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, all ten of these crazy explanations may occur in dhyana as one's mental effort interacts with the formations skandha. That is why these 'insights' appear.

Commentary:**

Ananda, all ten of these crazy, erroneous explanations discussed above may occur in dhyana, the "stilling of thought," as one's mental effort interacts with the formations skandha. What is the problem here? Before you have broken through the formations skandha, your cultivation of samadhi interacts and battles with the formations skandha. If your own proper knowledge and proper views are victorious, you can leap over this hurdle. If the formations skandha wins, then you become possessed by a demon. That is why these crazy "insights" and crazy explanations appear.

J2 Confusion will bring harm.
 **Sutra:

Dull and confused living beings do not evaluate themselves. Encountering such situations, they mistake their confusion for understanding and say that they have become sages, thereby uttering a great lie. They will fall into the Relentless Hells.

Commentary:**

Dull and confused living beings do not evaluate themselves. Living beings are stubborn, muddled, and unaware. They fail to reflect on who they are and what kind of disposition they have. Encountering such situations, when such states arise, they are confused, but because they don't have the guidance of a wise teacher who has clear vision, they mistake their confusion for understanding and say that they have become sages. They claim they have become enlightened and become Buddhas, thereby uttering a great lie. Because they tell such an outrageous lie, they will definitely fall into the Relentless Hells.

J3 Command to offer protection.
 **Sutra:

After my nirvana, all of you should pass on the Tathagata's teachings, transmitting and revealing them to those in the Dharma-ending Age, so that living beings everywhere can awaken to these truths. Do not let demons arise in their minds and cause them to commit grave offenses. Offer protection so that wrong views will be eradicated.

Commentary:**

After my nirvana in the future, Ananda and all of you in the great assembly should pass on the Tathagata's teachings, the words I have spoken, transmitting and revealing them to those living beings in the Dharma-ending Age, so that living beings everywhere can awaken to these truths. You should cause all living beings to understand these principles. Do not let demons arise in their minds and cause them to commit grave offenses. Don't let people create their own bad karma in this way. Offer protection so that wrong views will be eradicated. Maintain and support the Buddhadharma, and put an end to wrong views.
 **Sutra:

Teach them to awaken to true principles in body and mind, so that they do not stray off the Unsurpassed Path. Do not let them aspire to and be content with small attainments. You should become kings of great enlightenment and serve as guides of purity.

Commentary:**
Teach them to awaken to true principles in body and mind. Help living beings in the Dharma-ending Age to understand the real and ultimate doctrine in body and mind, so that they do not stray off the Unsurpassed Path. Don't let them chase after superficial dharmas and fail to seek the fundamental dharma. When living beings meet a fork in the road, they will not know which branch to take. Do not let them aspire to and be content with small attainments. Don't allow those who aspire to the unsurpassed path of enlightenment to become complacent and satisfied with attaining a little. You should become kings of great enlightenment and serve as guides of purity. Be pure models and pure leaders. Do not be content with small attainments. Instead you should increase your efforts and advance.