**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 1**

**CHAPTER 6**

**Ananda Repents and Seeks the Truth**

I2 He reveals the true nature that is inherent and causes him to see the substance of the Tathagata’s treasury.
J1 Ananda renounces the false and seeks the true.
K1 He is sorrowful and repentant.

**Sutra: When Ananda heard that, he again wept sorrowfully, placed his five limbs on the ground, knelt on both knees, put his palms together, and said to the Buddha, “Since I followed the Buddha and left home, what I have done is to rely on the Buddha’s awesome spirit. I have often thought, ‘There is no reason for me to toil at cultivation’ expecting that the Tathagata would bestow samadhi upon me. I never realized that he could not stand in for me in body and mind. Thus, I lost my original mind and although my body has left the home-life, my mind has not entered the Way. I am like the poor son who renounced his father and roamed around."

Commentary:** The Buddha has said that because Ananda was obstructed by his learning he had not realized sagehood. He had neglected samadhi and concentrated on acquiring erudition. **When Ananda heard that, he again wept sorrowfully.** Why did he cry? He realized he had been wasting his time, and the fact that he had not attained sagehood was truly pitiful. So he burst into tears. Then, too, the Buddha had instructed him about his true mind, and feeling very grateful to the Buddha for that, he was moved to tears.

He **placed his five limbs on the ground**. Ananda then placed his hands, feet, and head on the ground. After he bowed deeply this way he did not rise but **knelt on both knees, put his palms together, and said to the Buddha**.

Ananda was crying and talking at the same time, like a child who goes out to play and gets beaten up, and runs crying home to his parents to tell how he’s been bullied. Now it is as if Ananda had taken a beating. What kind of beating? He’s lost his basic frame of reference. As he explains it: **Since I followed the Buddha and left home, what I have done is to rely on the Buddha’s awesome spirit.** Ananda was the Buddha’s attendant, doing such things as helping straighten the Buddha’s robe when he ascends the high seat. He left home, but as I mentioned before, one can leave the worldly home, the home of the three realms, and the home of affliction, and Ananda had left only the worldly home. He still hadn’t left the other two. Now Ananda confesses that, although he has left home and bowed to the Buddha as his teacher, he still hasn’t changed his way of thinking. What was that? He relied on the Buddha’s awesome virtue. He thought, “As, I have the Buddha for a cousin. Who else in the whole world has the Buddha for a cousin?” He was extremely arrogant. He thought he had something both powerful and influential to depend on. He relied on the Buddha’s awesome virtue and spiritual penetrations.

**I have often thought, ‘There is no reason for me to toil at cultivation’ expecting that the Tathagata would bestow samadhi upon me.** He thought to himself, “I have the Buddha for a cousin, I don’t have to cultivate. I don’t have to go through the bitterness and suffering of cultivation. Why not? Because my cousin had become a Buddha, why should I have to cultivate? The Buddha can give me samadhi-power.” Ananda thought it wasn’t necessary for one to cultivate samadhi-power oneself. The Buddha could just give it to him. Think it over. Isn’t that naive?

**I never realized that he could not stand in for me in body and mind**, Ananda says. I believe that none of us could think like that. We all know that one cannot stand in for another. But Ananda says that he really didn’t know that the Buddha’s body is the Buddha’s and his body was his body, and that the Buddha’s mind is the Buddha’s mind and his mind was his mind. We cannot substitute for one another. The Buddha cannot represent Ananda in body and mind and he cannot represent the Buddha in body and mind. He didn’t know that he himself had to cultivate Samadhi-power.

**Thus, I lost my original mind.** Because of that I took a great loss, Ananda admits. **And although my body has left the home-life -** that is, he has become a monk - **my mind has not entered the Way -** that is, he has not obtained samadhi-power.

**I am like the poor son who renounced his father and roamed around.** Ananda is referring, by way of analogy, to the case of an extremely wealthy elder who enjoyed many blessings. He had a son who didn’t make use of his father’s assets, but went out into the world to suffer poverty. What Ananda means is, “I followed the Buddha to leave home but I didn’t cultivate the Way. Because I lack samadhi-power, I’m a poor son. Actually, I could have taken on the Buddha’s family business, but, without any samadhi-power, I still don’t have the authority to receive the dharma riches amassed as a result of the Buddha’s merit and virtue.” So Ananda sobbed grievously, just like a child.

**Sutra:
"Therefore, today I realize that although I am greatly learned, if I do not cultivate, it is the same as if I had not learned anything; just as someone who only speaks of food will never get full."**

**Commentary:Therefore, today I realize**: I just now realize this. I did not know before. **Although I am greatly learned, if I do not cultivate, it is the same as if I had not learned anything.** If I simply know a lot of things but don’t put them into practice I will be like a stone man who can talk but not act. In other words, Ananda could remember things, he was widely learned and had a good memory, but he had no skill, no gong fu when it came to actual practice. He had never actually done it. If he does not put his learning into practice, it is the same as if he didn’t know anything at all.

**Just as someone who only speaks of food will never get full.** It’s like someone who continually talks about things to eat. For instance people who like vegetarian food say, “Let’s make vegetable dumplings, they’re really good.” Or "Let’s make oil cakes as they do in Manchuria, they’re even better.”

Those who eat meat say, “Such and such a Chinese restaurant is the best in town, the food there is really good. Let’s go have Chinese food.” Americans like to eat Chinese food. So they discuss the various dishes by name, but just speaking about them and never getting around to eating them is no way to get full. There’s another saying:

Every day you count others money
but not half a cent of it is yours.
Not cultivating in accord with dharma
amounts to the same thing.

It doesn’t matter what dharmas you know, if you don’t cultivate the Way, that’s being the same as someone who counts other people’s money. You have no share in it. If you don’t actually go and cultivate, there will be no result from your efforts.

K2 He reveals his confusion and seeks instruction.

**Sutra: "World Honored One, now we all are bound by two obstructions and as a consequence do not perceive the still, eternal nature of the mind. I only hope the Tathagata will take pity on us poor and destitute ones and disclose the wonderful bright mind, and open my Way-eye."

Commentary:**Ananda again called: **World Honored One, now we all are bound by two obstructions.** Everyone of us in the great assembly is tied up by two obstructions. The first is the obstacle of affliction. The second is the obstacle of what is known. The obstacle of affliction arises with the attachment to self. The obstacle of what is known arises with the attachment to dharmas. As to the obstacle of what is known, if you think, “I know a lot,” that is an obstruction. It is not that the more people study things the more their knowledge increases; rather, the more they study the more they are obstructed by what they know. How is knowledge an obstruction? It makes people arrogant. “Take a look at me. I know things that none of you know. I am way beyond you. I can’t even be compared to you. All of you are ignorant. But as for me, why, my learning ability stands second to none in this world; it is rare even in the heavens, how much the less can it be found on earth.” As soon as that arrogance arises, it is the obstruction of what is known.

With the attachment to self comes the obstruction of afflictions. No matter what comes up you cannot see through it, you cannot let it go, and so you become attached to it. And once the attachment arises, the affliction follows right along. That’s the obstruction of affliction.

These are the two kinds of obstructions which Ananda says have bound up the members of the great assembly. “Bound” means that they have not obtained liberation. They cannot get free because they have these two kinds of obstructions.

**”And as a consequence do not perceive the still, eternal nature of the mind.** I don’t know the tranquil, unmoving, permanently abiding nature of my mind. Now, because I do not understand this doctrine, **I only hope the Tathagata will take pity on us poor and destitute ones and disclose the wonderful bright mind, and open my Way-eye.** Pity me, pity me.” He’s still relying on the Buddha. He is still not standing on his own. “Poor and destitute” means they had not obtained the dharma-wealth of the Shurangama Samadhi.

Ananda wants the Buddha to take pity on him and show him the wonderful, bright true mind and cause him to soon open his Way-eye, so that his wisdom can increase and he can accomplish sagehood. The essential thing is to accomplish sagehood.

J2 The Tathagata manifests the ultimate true substance.
K1 He displays light and promises to explain.

**Sutra: Then from the character wan [signifying “myriad virtues”] on his chest, the Tathagata poured forth precious light. Radiant with hundreds of thousands of colors, the brilliant light simultaneously pervaded everywhere throughout the ten directions to Buddha-realms as many as fine motes of dust, anointing the crowns of every Tathagata in all the jeweled Buddhalands of the ten directions. Then it swept back to Ananda and all in the great assembly.

Commentary:** Earlier in the sutra the Buddha emitted light from his face - a blazing light as brilliant as a hundred thousand suns. What did it represent? It represented the breaking up of the false: the false-thinking mind. Now he again emits light, this time from the insignia wan (“myriad”) on his chest. It represents the disclosing of the true: the true mind.

**Then from the character wan [signifying “myriad virtues”] on his chest, the Tathagata poured forth precious light.** You can see the character wan on Buddha images. It represents the adornment of the myriad virtues, since the Buddha’s virtuous practices have attained perfection. **Radiant with hundreds of thousands of colors, the brilliant light simultaneously pervaded everywhere throughout the ten directions to Buddha-realms as many as fine motes of dust.** The character wan poured forth precious light which radiated back and forth. It was an iridescent, shimmering light, with hundreds of thousands of colors, and it shone back and forth, pervading not only the Saha world, but all the Buddhalands simultaneously. Then it anointed **the crowns of every Tathagata in all the jeweled Buddhalands of the ten directions.** It illumined the crowns of Buddhas in as many Buddha-countries as there are fine motes of dust; it was as if their crowns reflected one another’s light. **Then it swept back to Ananda and all in the great assembly.** After it illumined the Tathagatas of the ten directions, the Buddha’s light returned and illumined Ananda’s crown, and the crowns of all the great Bodhisattvas, great Arhats, great bhikshus, the king, the officials, and the elder in the dharma assembly. The Buddha emitted this kind of light as a sign to make everyone understand the pure nature and bright substance of the permanently dwelling true mind.

**Sutra: And said to Ananda, “I will now erect the great dharma banner for you, to cause all living beings in the ten directions to obtain the wondrous subtle secret, the pure nature, the bright mind, and to attain the pure eye."

Commentary: And said to Ananda, “I will now erect the great dharma banner for you, to cause all living beings in the ten directions to obtain the wondrous subtle secret.”** The Buddha said to Ananda - referring to himself as “I” – “I will hoist a great dharma banner, not only for your sake but for the sake of all living beings in the ten directions, so that they may obtain the most extremely wonderful and infinitely subtle cause, that is, the secret cause mentioned in the title of the sutra.” It is secret because it is not known to most people before the Buddha has pointed it out to them, just like a vein of gold which has not been discovered by geologists: most people don’t know it is there. Once the gold is discovered, once the geologists arrive at the spot, investigate it and realize there is a deposit of gold there, then it can be mined. The secret cause is the same way.

”I will cause you to obtain **the pure nature, the bright mind, and to attain the pure eye**.” The nature is pure and clear, the mind is luminous. Because your nature is pure and your mind bright, you attain the pure eye, which is the Way-eye that Ananda has just asked the Buddha to open for him. It is also called the wisdom eye. “Pure” means to be free of even the slightest defilement; it indicates that the vision of the wisdom eye sees principles very clearly and truly. If you have the pure eye, you will be unobstructed and able to understand any principle.