**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 3**

**CHAPTER 2**

**The Five Skandhas**

M2 He specifically explains that what is false is true.   
N1 The five skandhas are the treasury of the Thus Come One.   
O1 A general statement.  
  
**Sutra:  
"Ananda, why do I say that the five skandhas are basically the wonderful nature of true suchness, the treasury of the Thus Come One?  
  
Commentary:Ananda, why do I say that the five skandhas are basically the wonderful nature of true suchness, the treasury of the Thus Come One?** I will tell you, Ananda.   
  
O2 A specific explanation.   
P1 The form skandha.   
Q1 Explains the dharma with an analogy.   
  
**Sutra:   
  
"Ananda, consider this example: when a person who has pure clear eyes looks at clear, bright emptiness, he sees nothing but clear emptiness, and he is quite certain that nothing exists within it.**   
  
**Commentary:Ananda, consider this example: when a person who has pure clear eyes looks at clear, bright emptiness, he sees nothing but clear emptiness.** His eyes are not diseased, unlike the person who had a film over his eyes. He looks at space - clear for thousands of miles. “He sees nothing but clear emptiness.” It is just empty space, nothing else. There aren’t any clouds in it. **And he is quite certain that nothing exists within it.** In that emptiness there isn’t anything at all. The treasury of the Thus Come One is the same way. In the treasury of the Thus Come One, if you truly understand, there isn’t anything at all. That’s what the Sixth Patriarch was talking about when he said, “Basically, there is not one thing; where can the dust alight?” That experience, too, is the treasury of the Thus Come One.  
  
**Sutra:   
  
"If, for no apparent reason, the person does not move his eyes, the staring will cause fatigue, and then of his own accord, he will see strange flowers in space and other unreal appearances that are wild and disordered.   
  
Commentary:** The person is the one mentioned above who with clear eyes looks at empty space and finds that there is nothing at all there. Empty space is all there is. **If, for no apparent reason, the person does not move his eyes** - if he fixes his gaze on emptiness and does not move - **the staring will cause fatigue.** He stares with unmoving eyes, looking straight into empty space and after a long time he gets tired. **Then of his own accord, he will see strange flowers in space.** After looking at emptiness for a long time, he sees things in it - for example, strange flowers, that is to say, unreal ones. Why are there strange flowers? Because he has looked for so long that his eyes have become fatigued, and so all kinds of strange flowers appeared, as well as **other unreal appearances that are wild and disordered.** There are not only strange flowers, but other things he has never seen before, in the five colors and six hues, things which all seem to be real but are not. Perhaps the head of an animal is seen on a human body, or perhaps a person’s head is seen with an animal’s body. Many irrational things are seen in emptiness - things never seen before - because the eyes become blurry from too much staring. This kind of circumstance is concerned with the skandha of form.   
  
**Sutra:   
"You should know that it is the same with the skandha of form.   
  
Commentary:**Now we look at all the things in the world that have form and appearance and we think every one of them is real. In actuality, they follow the same principle as the example of the person who stares into space so that the “staring causes fatigue” and who “of his own accord” sees strange flowers in space. **You should know that it is the same with the skandha of form.** It is like that, too.   
  
Q2 Explains the analogy in detail.  
  
**Sutra:   
"Ananda, the strange flowers come neither from emptiness nor from the eyes.   
  
Commentary:Ananda**, do you know that the skandha of form is the wonderful true suchness nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One? You should know, Ananda, that not any of **the strange flowers -** those strange flowers and all the other wild and disordered unreal appearances - **come neither from emptiness nor from the eyes**.   
  
**Sutra:   
  
"The reason for this, Ananda, is that if the flowers were to come from emptiness, they would return to emptiness. If there is a coming out and a going in, the space would not be empty. If emptiness were not empty, then it could not contain the appearance of the arisal and extinction of the flowers, just as Ananda’s body cannot contain another Ananda.   
  
Commentary:** You should know **the reason for this, Ananda**, is just as with the doctrine I have explained above, **that if the flowers were to come from emptiness**, if you say the flowers and the wild and disordered unreal appearances emerge from the emptiness, **they would return to emptiness**. Since they are produced from emptiness, they should return to emptiness also. **If there is a coming out and a going in, the space would not be empty.** If the strange flowers can come forth from emptiness and can return to and enter emptiness, it wouldn’t be emptiness. Emptiness is called emptiness because there is not a single thing in it. If something comes out of it and goes back into it, it can’t be counted as emptiness, because there would be something in it. **If emptiness were not empty, then it could not contain the appearance of the arisal and extinction of the flowers.** If emptiness is not emptiness, the appearance of flowers would have nowhere to come forth and nowhere to be extinguished. **Just as Ananda’s body cannot contain another Ananda.** Emptiness doesn’t have anything in it, so the flowers do not come from emptiness. Otherwise, emptiness would not be empty and it would be like your body, Ananda, which cannot contain another Ananda. No other Ananda can come into your body, and in the same way, if space is to be empty, it cannot contain external things.   
  
**Sutra:   
"If the flowers were to come from the eyes, they would return to the eyes.   
  
Commentary:** Perhaps you say that because the eye’s staring causes fatigue, the eyes themselves give rise to the strange flowers and the wild and disorderly, unreal appearances. **If the flowers were to come from the eyes, they would return to the eyes.**  
**Sutra:   
  
"If the nature of the flowers were to come from the eyes, it would be endowed with the faculty of seeing. If it could see, then when it left the eyes it would become flowers in space, and when it returned it should see the eyes. If it did not see, then when it left the eyes it would obscure emptiness, and when it returned, it would obscure the eyes.   
  
Commentary: If the nature of the flowers were to come from the eyes, it would be endowed with the faculty of seeing.** Given that it comes from the eyes, it should therefore have a seeing nature. **If it could see -** if the flowers in space had a seeing nature - **then when it left the eyes it would become flowers in space, and when it returned it should see the eyes.** When it went out, there would be no flowers in the eyes, and when it returned the flowers would see the eyes. **If it did not see -** if when it came back it did not see the eyes, **then when it left the eyes it would obscure emptiness, and when it returned, it would obscure the eyes.** It would be as if there were a film on the eyes and as if the film would disappear when the flowers went out. But when it returned, it would obstruct the eyes. Your eyes won’t hold anything, and so if the flowers in space returned to your eyes, where could your eyes put them?  
  
**Sutra:   
  
"Moreover, when you see the flowers, your eyes should not be obscured. So why is it that the eyes are said to be ‘pure and bright’ when they see clear emptiness?   
  
Commentary: Moreover, when you see the flowers, your eyes should not be obscured.** Still, if you assume that the flowers come from your eyes, when you see the flowers out in space, your eyes should not have a film on them; there should be nothing obstructing them. **Why is it that the eyes are said to be “pure and bright” when they see clear emptiness?** Why is it that the eyes are said to be pure and bright when they see clear emptiness, devoid of the flowers? Your eyes are said to be “pure and bright” because there is no film on them.   
  
Q3 Concludes by returning the false to the true.   
  
**Sutra:   
  
"Therefore, you should know that the skandha of form is empty and false, because it neither depends on causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.   
  
Commentary: Therefore, you should know -** because of what has just been said, you should know that **the skandha of form** basically **is empty and false, because it neither depends on causes and conditions for existence** - it does not exist because of causes and conditions, **nor is spontaneous in nature.**P2 The feeling skandha.   
Q1 Teaches with an analogy.   
  
**Sutra:   
  
"Ananda, consider the example of a person whose hands and feet are relaxed and at ease and whose entire body is in balance and harmony. He is unaware of his life processes, because there is nothing agreeable or disagreeable in his nature. However, for some unknown reason, the person rubs his two hands together in emptiness, and sensations of roughness, smoothness, cold, and warmth seem to arise from nowhere between his palms.   
  
Commentary:Ananda, consider the example of a person whose hands and feet are relaxed and at ease.** He is at leisure with nothing in particular to do. **And whose entire body -** the Chinese here is literally “the hundred bones” - **is in balance and harmony.** The meaning is that he is very natural. **He is unaware of his life processes.** All of a sudden it is as if he himself forgets his own body and life, **because there is nothing agreeable or disagreeable.** “Disagreeable” refers to a state of suffering. “Agreeable” refers to a state of bliss. He does not experience either suffering or bliss. **However, for some unknown reason, the person rubs his two hands together in emptiness.** That person has no reason to put his two hands together and rub them in emptiness, but when he does, **sensations of roughness, smoothness, cold, and warmth seem to arise from nowhere between his palms.** Some people’s hands are very rough, some people’s hands are supple and soft, as if there were a little oil on them. That softness is what is meant here by “smoothness.” Or he may feel that his hands are cold; when he wrings them for a long time they become warm. These are all parts of the function of feeling. The function of feeling comes about when you have a kind of awareness which arises in your mind. The text says that they arise “for some unknown reason”: that the appearances of roughness, smoothness, cold, and warmth are empty and false.   
  
**Sutra:   
  
"You should know that it is the same with the skandha of feeling.   
  
Commentary:** Of the five skandhas, **you should know that it is the same with the skandha of feeling.**

Q2 Explains the analogy in detail.  
  
**Sutra:   
  
"Ananda, all this illusory contact does not come from emptiness, nor does it come from the hands.   
  
Commentary:** The form skandha was discussed before; now the feeling skandha is being discussed. **Ananda, all this illusory contact** - this empty, false, unreal, contact - **does not come from emptiness, nor does it come from the hands.**  
  
**Sutra:“The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it came from emptiness, then since it could make contact with the palms, why wouldn’t it make contact with the body? It should not be that emptiness chooses what it comes in contact with.   
  
Commentary:The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it came from emptiness -** if the awareness of contact, his feeling, came from emptiness, **then since it could make contact with the palms, why wouldn’t it make contact with the body?** Why wouldn’t it come into contact with the entire body? **It should not be that emptiness chooses what it comes in contact with.** Basically, emptiness has no knowing awareness. It would not have a sense of awareness which would make it choose the hand and not choose the body. It would not have that kind of thought. So the feeling does not come from emptiness. It does not come from the hand, either.   
  
**Sutra: “If it came from the palms, it could be readily felt without waiting for the two palms to be joined.   
  
Commentary: If it came from the palms** - if the feelings of smoothness, roughness, cold, and warmth came from the palms, **it could be readily felt without waiting for the two palms to be joined.** If the feelings came from the palm, there would be no need to wait until the palms come together before the feelings could exist.   
  
**Sutra: “What is more, if it were to come from the palms, then the palms would know when they were joined. When they separated, the contact would return into the arms, the wrists, the bones, and the marrow, and you also should be aware of the course of its entry.**   
  
**Commentary: What is more, if it were to come from the palms -** here is another doctrine. If the feeling came out of the palm, **then the palms would know when they were joined.** When you placed your palms together, the palms would know it. **When they separated, the contact would return into the arms, the wrists, the bones, and the marrow.** When you separated your palms, the awareness of contact should return through the hands to the arms by way of the wrists, and perhaps into the bones and marrow. **And you also should be aware of the course of its entry.** How could it get inside without your knowing if it’s smooth or rough or cold or warm? Why wouldn’t you know what its course was, what path it took, when it went into the arm?   
  
**Sutra: “It should also be perceived by the mind because it would behave like something coming in and going out of the body. In that case, what need would there be to put the two palms together to experience what is called ‘contact’?   
  
Commentary: It should also be perceived by the mind because it would behave like something coming in and going out of the body.** It is certain that one would know in one’s mind when the awareness of contact went out and when it returned, because naturally, there would be something which would perhaps go out of or perhaps come into the body. **In that case, what need would there be to put the two palms together** - why would you have to wait for the palms to be together before you know there is contact - **to experience what is called “contact”?**Q3 Concludes by returning false to true.   
  
Sutra:   
**“Therefore, you should know that the skandha of feeling is empty and false, because it neither depends on causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.**   
  
**Commentary: Therefore, you should know that the skandha of feeling is empty and false.** The feeling skandha is an empty falseness. **Because it neither depends on causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.**P3 The thinking skandha.  
Q1 Teaches with an analogy.  
  
**Sutra: “Ananda, consider the example of a person whose mouth waters at the mention of sour plums, or the soles of whose feet tingle when he thinks about walking along a precipice.   
  
Commentary: Ananda**, now I will go on to explain the skandha of thinking for you. The skandha of thinking also is the nature of the Thus Come One’s treasury; it also is the nature of wonderful true suchness. Consider, for example, **a person whose mouth waters at the mention of sour plums**. Ananda, the skandha of thinking is like a person whose mouth begins to pucker as soon as sour plums are as much as mentioned, **or the soles of whose feet tingle when he thinks about walking along a precipice.** Say that on a very high mountain a very, very deep ten thousand foot gorge yawns below the rocks; if you stand at the edge of that precipice, the soles of your feet will ache. In fact, one need not even speak of actually going to the edge of the precipice; just thinking about it - once the thought enters your mind - you will be aware of an aching in your soles. How does it arise? It arises from the skandha of thinking. Without having eaten any sour plums, but simply from the mere mention of them – “Ah, sour plums are really sour!” - your mouth puckers, and the saliva begins to flow. So there’s a Chinese proverb:   
  
Sour plums can cure thirst,   
But painted cakes cannot satisfy hunger.

Why is it that sour plums can cure thirst? It is because the skandha of thinking produces this kind of awareness. During the Three Kingdoms period in China, Cao Cao, a contemporary of Guan Gong, went to Chu Zheng, accompanied by his massive army of more than a million. Ten miles from Chu Zheng they lost the way. They didn’t know where they were and the troops didn’t have any water to drink or any food to eat. They became obsessed by thirst, felt sick, and were unable to walk. They were all about to die of thirst. Cao Cao, who was clever as a fox, issued an order. “Don’t stop to rest. Ahead is a grove of plum trees. When we get there, everyone can eat some plums.” As soon as he mentioned the plums the soldiers’ mouths began to water and their thirst was abated. They marched on in search of the plum grove. As it turned out, there wasn’t any plum grove, but his mention of plums had satisfied their thirst.  
  
**Sutra:“You should know that it is the same with the skandha of thinking.   
  
Commentary:You should know that it is the same with the skandha of thinking,** the skandha of thought.   
  
Speaking of painted cakes reminds me of a story. Once there was a stingy man who decided to make a gift. “When is your birthday?” he asked his friend. “On your birthday I will give you a present. I’ll give you a present worth a dollar.” The other fellow, who was also stingy, said, “Thanks a lot. On your birthday I’ll give you a present, too.” “What are you going to give me?” the first one asked. “I’ll give you a cake.” And the second one took a piece of paper and drew a picture of a cake on it. “There,” he said, “I’ll give you that.”   
  
At that point, a third stingy fellow who was standing by taking all this in said, “That’s still a lot of trouble. When your birthday comes, I’ll give you a birthday cake this big. In fact, now I’ve shown you how big it will be, and that counts as having given it to you. No need for me to draw a picture of it.”  
  
The third one not only couldn’t give up a dollar to buy a present, when the second one drew a picture, he still felt that was too extravagant, so he just made a gesture and counted it as having given a birthday cake.   
  
Q2 Explains the analogy in detail.   
  
**Sutra: “Ananda, you should know that the watering of the mouth caused by the mention of the plums does not come from the plums, nor does it come from the mouth.   
  
Commentary:** This situation of the mouth puckering at the mention of sour plums does not arise from the plums. It is because of the functioning of the skandha of thinking.   
  
**Sutra: “The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it were produced from the plums, the plums should speak for themselves, why wait for someone to mention them? If it came from the mouth, the mouth itself should hear, and what need would there be to wait for the ear? If the ear alone heard, then why doesn.t the water come out of the ear?   
  
Commentary: The reason for this, Ananda -** as to the circumstance I have described above, **is that if it were produced from the plums** - if the watering of the mouth was produced from the plums - **the plums should speak for themselves.** The plums themselves should speak, it should not be necessary for a person to speak of them. But the plums do not speak for themselves, and one must still wait for a person to speak of the plums for someone’s mouth to water. **If it came from the mouth** - if it were because of the mouth that saliva flows - **the mouth itself should hear.** The mouth should be what hears someone speak of plums. It should not be the ear that hears. **And what need would there be to wait for the ear?** Why wait for the ear to hear it? It should be sufficient for the mouth to hear it. **If the ear alone heard -** if the hearing nature functioned only when something enters the ear, **then why doesn’t the water come out of the ear?** If the ear and the mouth haven’t any connection with each other, then when the ear hears someone speak of sour plums, the saliva should come out of the ear. After all, it was the ear that heard it. Is there any such principle as that?   
  
**Sutra: “Thinking about walking along a precipice is explained in the same way.  
  
Commentary: Thinking.** You think about a precipice - there you are standing on the rim of ten thousand foot gorge: your legs get weak and the soles of your feet ache. There is a doctor here: doctor, would you agree that such a thing happens? You should know why it is that the soles of one’s feet ache in such a situation. It is not even necessary to go and actually stand on the edge of the precipice; all you have to do is think about it. “Now I’m standing on the rim of a ten thousand foot precipice, and if I’m the least bit careless I will plummet over the side.” Right then the soles of your feet begin to ache and your legs grow weak. People speak of the power of suggestion. Where does the power of suggestion come from? You should find its source. So, **thinking about walking along a precipice is explained in the same way**. It is the same principle of the mouth watering when one speaks of sour plums. They are both a result of the skandha of thinking.   
  
Q3 Concludes by returning false to true.   
  
**Sutra: “Therefore, you should know that the skandha of thinking is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence, nor is spontaneous in nature.**   
  
**Commentary:**If it is not from causes and conditions and is not spontaneous in nature, then ultimately what is its nature?   
  
It is the nature of the Thus Come One’s treasury, the wonderful nature of true suchness of the treasury of the Thus Come One. **Therefore, you should know -** you ought to know, Ananda - **that the skandha of thinking is empty and false.** The skandha of thinking, one of the five skandhas, is empty and false. It is empty and false in its arising, and empty and false in its extinction.   
  
What is the origin of this empty and false arising? It arises from within the wonderful nature of true suchness of the Thus Come One’s treasury. From the truth, falseness arises, and so these empty and false things occur. Where do these doctrines of the mouth puckering and the feet aching come from? They come from empty falseness. And where does empty falseness come from? It comes from the wonderful nature of true suchness of the Thus Come One’s treasury. **Since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence, nor is spontaneous in nature.**P4 The skandha of activity.   
Q1 Teaches with an analogy.  
  
**Sutra: “Ananda, consider, for example, a swift rapids whose waves follow upon one another in orderly succession, the ones behind never overtaking the ones in front.   
  
Commentary:** What was discussed above was the skandha of thinking. This section of text discusses the skandha of activity. The character *xing*, “activity”, is also read *heng*. The skandha of activity is like a rapids, a place where the water current flows fastest. **Ananda, consider, for example, a swift rapids whose waves follow upon one another in orderly succession, the ones behind never overtaking the ones in front.** The waves in front race on ahead, and more waves follow behind them. As you look at it there are waves to the left, and waves to the right, and yet though no one is watching over it, it is very orderly. For the most part, the waves are of one size, and the big ones are conspicuous for being too much wave all at once. Those waves are like the activity in people’s minds. In the mind, in the eighth consciousness, one thought arises and disappears and is followed by the next thought. The arisal and disappearance of thoughts is like the waves on water. They move **in orderly succession,** each connected to the next, and that next connected to the one that follows, like the thoughts in people’s minds: one thought ceases and the next arises. One thought is extinguished, and the next thought arises; that thought ceases, and still another thought arises, thought after thought without cease. They continue in orderly succession like the waves, never overtaking one another. The waves that come behind can’t run ahead and overtake the ones in front. In the same way, your later thought cannot race ahead of your earlier thought. So between them there is very orderly activity, without the least bit of mistake or confusion. At first glance waves don’t seem to have distinct boundaries, but actually waves move along one by one in very orderly succession without cease.   
  
**Sutra:“You should know that it is the same with the skandha of activity.   
  
Commentary:** The skandha of activity, the fourth of the five skandhas, is just like that swift rapids. The waves of thought in people’s minds continue ceaselessly in orderly succession and that causes people to move from youth to middle age, and from middle age to old age. Once old, they die. And this is the same principle as the waves following on one another.

Q2 Explains the analogy in detail.   
  
**Sutra:“Ananda, thus the nature of the flow does not arise because of emptiness, nor does it come into existence because of the water. It is not the nature of water, and yet it is not separate from either emptiness or water.   
  
Commentary: Ananda**, you should know this doctrine for what it is. **The nature of the flow**, that swift rapids which rushes along so quickly, **does not arise because of emptiness.** It is not because of emptiness that there are swift rapids. **Nor does it come into existence because of the water.** Although the waves are in the water, it is not because of the water that the waves exist. **It is not the nature of water -** the waves are not the water itself - **and yet it is not separate from either emptiness or water.** Where, then, does it come from?   
  
**Sutra: “The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it arose because of emptiness, then the inexhaustible emptiness throughout the ten directions would become an inexhaustible flow, and all the worlds would inevitably be drowned.   
  
Commentary:**Ananda, I will explain it for you further. Why do I say it is not from emptiness that the waves of the swift rapids arise? I will tell you. **The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it arose because of emptiness, then the inexhaustible emptiness throughout the ten directions would become an inexhaustible flow.** There is emptiness not only in this world, but in all the worlds throughout the ten directions. If the swift rapids were produced from emptiness, then the inexhaustible emptiness in the ten directions - emptiness which is completely without bounds or limit - would become an indescribably massive swift torrent. And, since the swift torrent would be so massive, **all the worlds would inevitably be drowned.** All of them would certainly be overwhelmed by the deluge, and all the people living in them and all the things contained in them would drown.   
  
**Sutra:“If the swift rapids existed because of water, then their nature would differ from that of water and the location and characteristics of its existence would be apparent.   
  
"If their nature were simply that of water, then when they became still and clear they would no longer be made up of water.   
  
Commentary: If the swift rapids existed because of water** - if you were to say it is because of the water that there are swift rapids which rush along so quickly, **then their nature would differ from that of water.** The basic nature of its substance would not be water. It should have a location and characteristics which would be apparent. But the swift rapids have no actual form or appearance.   
  
**If their nature were simply that of water -** if you were to say that the swift rapids were just water, **then when they became still and clear -** when there were no waves - **they would no longer be made up of water.** Without any waves there wouldn’t be any water. If you were to say that waves of the swift current are the water, then when the waves disappeared, the water would also disappear. A change in nature would inevitably result in a change in substance.   
  
**Sutra:“Suppose it were to separate from emptiness and water: there isn’t anything outside of emptiness, and outside of water there isn’t any flow.   
  
Commentary: Suppose it were to separate from emptiness and water -** you want to say that the swift rapids are apart from emptiness and water. But, **there isn’t anything outside of emptiness, and outside of water there isn’t any flow.** Outside of water there are no rapids. To say it is separate from water is also incorrect. You say it is not separate; but that is also incorrect. In the last analysis, Ananda, what would you say this is all about?   
  
It is not something that exists because of water or because of emptiness. Its source is the wonderful nature of true suchness of the Thus Come One’s treasury.   
  
Q3 Concludes by returning false to true.  
  
**Sutra: “Therefore, you should know that the skandha of activity is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.   
  
Commentary: Therefore** - earlier you said that causes and conditions and spontaneity are concerned here. Now **you should know that the skandha of activity is empty and false -** the skandha of activity, the swift rapids, is an empty falseness; it is not real - **since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.** This has been a discussion of the skandha of activity. Its source is also the treasury of the Thus Come One. But with the arisal of one ignorant thought, one becomes confused about the true and goes toward the false. You forget about the truth and go running after false things, and in this way the various empty and false appearances in the world are created.

P5 The consciousness skandha.   
Q1 Teaches with an analogy.  
  
**Sutra:“Ananda, consider, for example, a man who picks up a kalavinka pitcher and stops up its two holes. He lifts up the pitcher filled with emptiness and, walking some thousand li away, presents it to another country. You should know that the skandha of consciousness is the same way.**   
  
**Commentary:** Form, feeling, thinking, and activity have already been discussed, and now the skandha of consciousness will be explained. First I will give a general review of the first four.   
  
The skandha of form refers to things which have shape and appearance, which have material substance. When the staring eye looks into emptiness, strange flowers come into being. Although the strange flowers are empty and false, nonetheless they have form and appearance.   
  
Feeling means reception. When the hands are rubbed together, there arises an awareness of coarseness and smoothness and of cold and warmth.   
  
The skandha of thinking simply depends on the characteristic of thought. For instance, your ears hear someone speak of plums, and you begin to think about them. As soon as you do so, your mouth waters. This is a result of the skandha of thinking. “Thinking” here refers to false thinking.   
  
Activity means movement. It is ceaseless. People are first young, and they become middle aged, and then old, and then they die. Thought after thought arises and is extinguished, thought after thought without cease. This is the skandha of activity.   
  
The skandha of consciousness involves the making of distinctions. It discriminates, considers, and seeks advantages from circumstances. Thus, Ananda had not developed his skill, had not cultivated samadhi power, but was greedy for erudition: that is to seek advantage from circumstances. The functionings of the mind which seeks advantages from circumstances are not actual.   
  
Now the skandha of consciousness will be explained. **Ananda, consider, for example, a man who picks up a kalavinka pitcher.** “Kalavinka” is a Sanskrit word which means “wonderfully sounding bird.” The kalavinka pitcher is made from the shape of that bird and has two holes. The call of the “wonderfully sounding bird” is extremely beautiful. It is able to cry out while still in the egg. Its sound transcends that of all other birds; and so everyone likes to hear it. The man in the Buddha’s example **stops up its two holes.** He plugs up the two holes in the kalavinka pitcher. **He lifts up the pitcher filled with emptiness and, walking some thousand li away, presents it to another country.** What has he done? He has filled the pitcher up with emptiness. He takes the emptiness a thousand li away. A Chinese li is about a third of a mile. Maybe he walked, maybe he took a boat. At that time there weren’t any airplanes or cars or trains. Now we can cover a thousand li in a day and think nothing of it. But at that time the way to cover a thousand li was to walk. What did he do with the emptiness? He made a gift of it to another country. Would you say this is possible?   
  
**You should know that the skandha of consciousness is the same way.** The skandha of consciousness, the mind that makes distinctions, involves the same principle as capturing some emptiness and carrying it a thousand li to give to someone.   
  
**Sutra: “Thus, Ananda, the space does not come from one place, nor does it go to another.   
  
Commentary:** The man made a gift of emptiness, but are the emptiness from one place and the emptiness of another place of two kinds? Basically there is no distinction between them. Emptiness is all the same. If you capture a bottle of emptiness in one place and take it a thousand li away to another country and pour it out, it unites with the emptiness there. What distinction is there between them? Emptiness neither comes nor goes.   
  
Q2 Explains the analogy in detail.  
  
**Sutra: “The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it were to come from another place, then when the stored up emptiness in the pitcher went elsewhere there would be less emptiness in the place where the pitcher was originally.   
  
Commentary:The reason for this, Ananda** - why do I say that the emptiness does not come from one place nor go to another place? With emptiness there is no coming or going. **If it were to come from another place, then when the stored up emptiness in the pitcher went elsewhere -** in the kalavinka pitcher one stores a pitcherful of emptiness, and then one goes elsewhere - then **there would be less emptiness in the place where the pitcher was originally.** You took a pitcherful of emptiness, so the emptiness in that place is less, right? Does it look to you like the emptiness is less? Does the place you took the pitcher to have more emptiness?   
  
So this is a case of having nothing to do and going to look for something to do. Consciousness is also like that. Not having anything to do, it makes distinctions in the east, makes distinctions in the west, makes distinctions among various characteristics and among all kinds of situations. It is the same principle as putting some emptiness in a pitcher and carrying it off to another country to give as a gift.   
  
**Sutra:“If it were to enter this region: when the holes were unplugged and the pitcher was turned over, one would see emptiness come out.   
  
Commentary:**If there were a leaving and entering, if you say the emptiness is taken from one region to another region, then you would be able to see emptiness come out when the pitcher was unplugged and turned over. If you say you don’t see it, then emptiness is non existent. If you could see it, it wouldn’t be emptiness. So you cannot transport emptiness. You cannot move emptiness from one place to another.   
  
Q3 Concludes by returning false to true.  
  
**Sutra:“Therefore, you should know that the skandha of consciousness is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.   
  
Commentary:Therefore -** because of this, Ananda - **you should know that the skandha of consciousness is empty and false** - it, too, is empty and false - **since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence** - it is not because of causes and conditions that consciousness exists - **nor is spontaneous in nature.** Nor is there consciousness because of spontaneity. Its origin, too, lies in the wonderful nature of true suchness of the Thus Come One’s treasury.