**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 3**

**CHAPTER 4**

**The Twelve Places**

N3 The twelve places are the treasury of the Thus Come One.
O1 A general statement.

**Sutra: “Moreover, Ananda, why do I say that the twelve places are basically the wonderful nature of true suchness, the treasury of the Thus Come One?

Commentary: Moreover, Ananda,** I will explain it further for you. You should listen carefully. **Why do I say that the twelve places are basically the wonderful nature of true suchness, the treasury of the Thus Come One?** A “place” refers to a specific location. What are these twelve places? They are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind - they make six - and forms, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and dharmas - another six; together they make twelve places. Sometimes they are also called the twelve entrances, like the six entrances mentioned above. But, the twelve places also include forms, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and dharmas. The combination of the six sense organs and six defiling objects are called the twelve places.

O2 A specific explanation.
P1 The place of the eye and form.
Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ and object.

**Sutra:“Ananda, look again at the trees in the Jeta Grove and the fountains and pools.

Commentary:Ananda, look again at the trees in the Jeta Grove and the fountains and pools.** Take a look at Prince War Victor’s grove of trees.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

**Sutra: “What do you think? Do these things come into being because the forms are produced and thus the eyes see, or because the eyes produce the characteristics of form?

Commentary: “What do you think?”** the Buddha asks Ananda’s opinion. “**Do these things come into being because the forms are produced and thus the eyes see, or because the eyes produce the characteristics of form?** Is it that the forms are produced and the eyes see them, or is it that the eyes produce these characteristics of form? Explain this doctrine for me. I’ll listen.” The Buddha has another question, and I believe that by now Ananda has a bit of a headache. How do I know that? Because he didn’t say anything. He didn’t answer. So the Buddha continues:

Q3 Discusses each and refutes both.
R1 Refutes the possibility that the eyesight gives rise to form.

**Sutra: “Ananda, if the organ of sight were to produce the characteristics of form, then the nature of form would be obliterated when you see emptiness, which is not form. Once it was obliterated, everything that is manifest would disappear. Since the characteristics of form would then be absent, who would be able to understand the nature of emptiness? The same is true of emptiness.

Commentary:Ananda, if the organ of sight were to produce the characteristics of form -** if you say that the existence of the organ of sight produces the external defiling objects, the characteristics of form - **then the nature of form would be obliterated when you see emptiness, which is not form. Once it was obliterated, everything that is manifest would disappear.** The nature of form would disappear, and when the characteristics of form were obliterated, everything would disappear. **Since the characteristics of form would then be absent, who would be able to understand the nature of emptiness?** Who could know of emptiness? **The same is true of emptiness.** The proposition that the eye produces the characteristic of emptiness would be wrong for the same reasons.

R2 Refutes the possibility that form gives rise to the eyesight.

**Sutra:“If, moreover, the defiling objects of form were to produce the eye’s seeing, then seeing would perish upon looking at emptiness, which is not form, and once it perished, everything would disappear. Then who would be able to understand emptiness and form?

Commentary: If, moreover, the defiling objects of form were to produce the eye’s seeing -** if you want to say that forms produce the eyes’ seeing, then when there isn’t any form the eyes could not see, **then seeing would perish upon looking at emptiness, which is not form.** Emptiness is not form. It has no form or appearance. If you postulate that seeing is produced from forms, then you should not be able to see emptiness, and when there was no form, there would not be any seeing. **Once it,** the seeing, **perished, everything would disappear.** When the seeing was gone, nothing could be seen. **Then who would be able to understand emptiness and form?** Who would know that one thing was emptiness and that something else was form? If there were no seeing, who could know?

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

**Sutra:
“Therefore, you should know that neither seeing nor form nor emptiness has a location, and thus the two places of form and seeing are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary: Therefore,** because of this, Ananda, **you should know that neither seeing nor form nor emptiness has a location, and thus the two places of form and seeing** - now just as to form and seeing, both places **are empty and false.** Form has no nature of its own, and the seeing has no nature of its own, either. **Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** Rather, they are false views which are produced from within the wonderful nature of true suchness of the Thus Come One’s treasury. P2 The place of the ear and sound.
Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ and object.

**Sutra: “Ananda, listen again to the drum being beaten in the Jeta** **Garden when the food is ready. The Assembly gathers as the bell is struck. The sounds of the bell and the drum follow one another in succession.

Commentary:** This passage explains the two places of the ear and sound. **Ananda, listen again to the drum being beaten in the Jeta** **Garden when the food is ready -** when the food has been prepared, the drum is hit, and everyone comes to eat. **The Assembly gathers as the bell is struck.** If you want to gather together, you strike the bell. Nowadays, when it is time to eat, it is not a drum which is hit but rather an instrument called the “wooden fish.” It is a hollow woodblock shaped like a big fish. When it is time to eat, the fish is beaten, and it makes the sound bong, bong, bong. So in Chinese it is called a bong. In a large monastery there are many monks, and if no signal were given, people wouldn’t know it was time to eat. In fact, some might even be sleeping away the morning in their rooms, like certain disciples I have who are fond of sleep. If you didn’t make some signal to wake them up, they would miss lunch. So in large monasteries where hundreds or even thousands of monks lived, the bong was hit when it was time to eat. It was beaten for a long time, and the louder the better. Why? To wake everyone up. And, as soon as people who were asleep heard the “bong,” they leapt up, grabbed their robes and sashes, and hurried off to eat. When monks eat, they wear their formal robes and sashes, and they are very awesome and adorned. They do not talk while they eat. In the dining hall a thousand monks may be gathered together to eat, and not one of them is speaking. Everyone is silent.

When people have left the home life, they must abide by the rule of eating at one sitting. They cannot get up and then come back and sit down and eat more. When the dining hall attendant comes around, he will give you one more of whatever you have not had enough of. He’ll give you as much as you want. If you want a bowlful, he’ll give you a bowlful; if you want half a bowlful, you can indicate how much with your finger or your chopstick, and he’ll give you that much.

In the past, an old cultivator who was a layman, not a left home person, had taken the five precepts and also the precept against talking while eating. But he had violated all five precepts, and there remained only the precept against talking while eating, which he had not violated. So the spirit who protected that precept still accompanied him, but he wished the layman would violate the precept so he could go, too, and no longer protect him. But the layman never violated the precept. When he ate, he never talked. Finally, the spirit of the precept came to him in a dream and said, “You should talk when you eat. Since you’ve violated all the other precepts, why don’t you violate the precept against talking when you eat? Hurry up and violate it, because I’d like to leave you, too.”

The dream set the layman thinking. “I’ve kept that precept against talking while eating, and it turns out there is a precept spirit who protects me!” After that he found a dharma master with Way-virtue and took the precepts over again. As a result of that, he cultivated and accomplished the Way. Every person has his own particular causes and conditions, and in Buddhism taking the precepts is a very important matter.

It is said that the bong, which is hit when it is time to eat, was originally an evil man who became a fish in the sea. A tree grew out of the fish’s body, and the fish made a practice of using the tree to bash in ships and wreck them. When a ship was wrecked the fish would eat the people. Later the fish met up with an arhat who crossed it over, and afterward the tree was used to make a bong shaped like a fish. And that is why the bong is beaten when it is time to eat. It represents helping to wipe out that fish’s karmic offenses, so the fish could be reborn as a human. There’s no foundation in this, it’s only a legend, and I’m just passing it along to you.

**The sounds of the bell and the drum follow one another in succession.** Maybe the bell is struck first, or maybe the drum is beaten first. In any case, the sounds follow one another in succession.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

**Sutra: “What do you think? Do these things come into existence because the sound comes to the region of the ear, or because the ear goes to the place of the sound?

Commentary:**In explaining about the ear, the Buddha has more to ask Ananda. He said, **“What do you think** about the sound of the bell and drum? What’s your opinion, Ananda? **Do these things come into existence because the sound comes to the region of the ear?” “**These things” are the sounds of the bell and drum. “Do they come up beside your ear, and then do you hear? **Or because the ear goes to the place of the sound?** Or is it that your ear goes to the place of the sound?” He asks Ananda, and Ananda doesn’t have anything to say in return. Ananda isn’t as brash as he was before, when he had an immediate answer for everything that was asked. Now he doesn’t make a sound. He waits for the Buddha to explain it.

Q3 Discusses each and refutes all possibilities.
R1 The possibility that the sound comes to the region of the ear.

**Sutra:“Again, Ananda, suppose that the sound comes to the region of the ear. Similarly, when I go to beg for food in the city of Shravasti, I am no longer in the Jeta Grove. If the sound definitely goes to the region of Ananda’s ear, then neither Maudgalyayana nor Kashyapa would hear it, and even less the twelve hundred and fifty shramanas who, upon hearing the sound of the bell, come to the dining hall at the same time.

Commentary:**Shakyamuni Buddha said: **Again, Ananda, suppose that the sound comes to the region of the ear. Similarly, when I go to beg for food in the city of Shravasti, I am no longer in the Jeta Grove.** The Buddha is referring here to himself. “Shravasti” is Sanskrit; does anyone remember what it means? I explained this at the very beginning of the sutra, when I discussed the six realizations. You all have forgotten? Well, I can’t remember it either. So we’ll all just forget it, right? I never explained it, and you never heard it. No speaking and no hearing is true Prajna. The city of Shravasti had an abundance of the five desires and of wealth and riches, and the people had the virtues of learning and liberation. So it is called “abundance and virtue.” You should remember this. In Chinese, the Sanskrit shravasti may appear as she wei guo, or shi luo fa cheng. If you can’t remember even that, this little bit, then when someone asks you to explain the six realizations, and when the fifth realization, place, is Shravasti, all you’ll be able to say is “I don’t know,” if someone asks you what Shravasti means. How much face will you lose then? You who are propagating the dharma will suddenly find yourself stumped by a question. If someone should ask you some strange question, it is all right not to answer. But, if the question deals with something you should know about in the Buddhist sutras, and you can’t come up with the answer, it will be very embarrassing.

”When I go to the city of Shravasti to beg for food,” the Buddha said, “I’m no longer here in the Jeta Grove.” This is an example of the fact that something can’t be in two places at once. Thus, **if the sound definitely goes to the region of Ananda’s ear, then neither Maudgalyayana nor Kashyapa would hear it.** (The ear’s going out to the sound is yet another possibility which will be discussed later.) “If the sound comes up beside your ear, Ananda, then Maudgalyayana, who was first in spiritual penetrations, and Kashyapa would not hear it. Why? Because the sound has come to your ear.” The Buddha is really not speaking with any principle. Sound is basically all pervasive. Everyone can hear it, and yet he explains it in this way. He is deliberately trying to befuddle Ananda. He is not speaking reasonably to Ananda, just to see how Ananda will answer. **Even less the twelve hundred and fifty shramanas who, upon hearing the sound of the bell, come to the dining hall at the same time.** How much the less the twelve hundred and fifty bhikshus, who as soon as they hear the bell, all hurry in together to eat.

R2 The possibility of the ear going to the region of sound.

**Sutra:“Again, suppose that the ear goes to the region of the sound. Similarly, when I return to the Jeta Grove, I am no longer in the city of Shravasti. When you hear the sound of the drum, your ear will already have gone to the place where the drum is being beaten. Thus, when the bell peals, you will not hear the sound - even the less that of the elephants, horses, cows, sheep, and all the other various sounds around you.

Commentary:**It was explained above that there is no principle in saying that the sound comes up beside your ear. If it were to come up beside your ear, other people would not hear it; and yet, in fact, the others can also hear the sounds of the drum and the bell. This proves that the sound of the bell and drum do not come to the region of your ear. **Again, suppose that the ear goes to the region of the sound.** Perhaps you say that your ears go to where the sound is in order to listen to it.

**Similarly, when I return to the Jeta Grove, I am no longer in the city of Shravasti.** Will you accept that doctrine, Ananda? Would you say I have spoken correctly here? You cannot argue with that principle. Therefore, **when you hear the sound of the drum, your ear will already have gone to the place where the drum is being beaten. Thus, when the bell peals -** then when the bell is sounded - **you will not hear the sound**. Your ear has already gone, so when there is another sound, you won’t hear it, because what will there be to hear it? It’s the same as when I return from the city of Shravasti; at that time I am no longer in the city. So you say your ear has gone; and yet, in fact, you still can hear. When the bell’s sound rings out, you hear it as well as the drum. How can this be? **Even the less that of the elephants, horses, cows, sheep, and all the other various sounds around you.** Nor only is it the case that you can hear the sound of the drum and the sound of the bell, but there are the sounds of elephants, horses, cows, sheep - all kinds of sounds that you can hear. Ultimately, has your ear gone out or not? Has your ear really gone to the place of the sound? If so, how is it that you have enough ears to go to the places of all those other sounds? You only have two ears: how can you have so many ears?

R3 The possibility of there being no coming and no going.

**Sutra: “If there is no coming or going, there will be no hearing, either.

Commentary:** “If you say that the ear does not go to the place of the sound, and the sound does not come to the place of the ear - **if there is no coming or going -** then what do you hear? **There will be no hearing, either.** You wouldn’t hear anything.” What is this doctrine all about? It demonstrates that the wonderful nature of true suchness of the Thus Come One’s treasury is neither produced nor extinguished. It pervades everywhere and everything. It is not like a person, who when he is at one particular place is there, and when he leaves he is no longer there. Rather, it has neither production nor extinction. This demonstrates that the root-nature is true and that false thinking is false.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

**Sutra:“Therefore, you should know that neither hearing nor sound has a location, and thus the two places of hearing and sound are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:Therefore** - because of the principle I have just explained - **you should know** - Ananda, you ought to know - **that neither hearing nor sound has a location.** There is nowhere that the defiling sound objects and your awareness of hearing reside. They haven’t any home. They are probably more or less like beggars - they don’t even have a place to live. **And thus the two places of hearing and sound are empty and false.** Both places are an empty falseness. **Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They are not produced from causes and conditions, and they are not produced out of spontaneity. They are a representation from within the wonderful nature of true suchness of the treasury of the Thus Come One. So don’t use the distinction making mind to indulge in making distinctions among these kinds of defiling objects. P3 The place of the nose and smells.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ and object.

**Sutra:“Moreover, Ananda, you smell the chandana in this censer. When one particle of this incense is lit, it can be smelled simultaneously through forty li around the city of Shravasti.

Commentary:** Now the two places of fragrance and the nose with its awareness of smells will be discussed. **Moreover, Ananda, you smell the chandana in this censer.** You sniff the burning incense burning. **When one particle of this incense is lit.** In Chinese the measure, one particle (zhu ) is one twenty fourth of a liang, and sixteen liang make one jin, about one and a third pounds. So, one particle would be a very small piece of the incense. Chandana incense, also called “ox head chandana,” is said to come from Uttarakuru the northern continent. When you light a very small piece of this incense its fragrance almost immediately pervades a radius of forty li - about thirteen miles. We are not speaking here of the smoke, which rises to the heavens, but of the fragrance which accompanies it. What is more, any pestilence or contagious disease is wiped out when this incense perfumes the atmosphere. The germs all disappear.

**When one particle of this incense is lit, it can be smelled simultaneously through forty li around the city of Shravasti.**Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

**Sutra: “What do you think? Is this fragrance produced from the chandana wood? Is it produced in your nose, or does it arise within emptiness?

Commentary:What do you think?** Ananda, what is the case here, in your opinion? **Is this fragrance produced from the chandana wood?** Does the chandana fragrance arise from the chandana wood? **Is it produced in your nose?** Or does it come from the organ of your nose? **Or does it arise within emptiness?** Or is it produced in emptiness?

Q3 Discusses each and refutes all possibilities.
R1 Refutes the possibility that it comes from the nose.

**Sutra: “Again, Ananda, suppose this fragrance is produced from your nose. What is said to be produced from the nose should come forth from the nose. Your nose is not chandana, so how can the nose have the fragrance of chandana? When you say you smell fragrance, it should enter your nose. For the nose to emit fragrance is not the meaning of smelling.

Commentary:Again, Ananda, suppose this fragrance is produced from your nose.** You say it is produced from the organ of your nose. **What is said to be produced from the nose should come forth from the nose.** If it is the case that it is produced from the organ of the nose, the fragrance should come out of your nose. **Your nose is not chandana.** But the organ of your nose is certainly not chandana wood. **So how can the nose have the fragrance of chandana?** There’s no such principle. **When you say you smell fragrance, it should enter your nose.** If you say you smell fragrance, it is smelled by your smelling nature, and it should enter your nostrils. **For the nose to emit fragrance is not the meaning of smelling.** If you say the fragrance comes out of your nostrils, then it is not right to say you can still smell the fragrance, because your nostrils can only smell what enters them. It cannot be that the fragrance is emitted by your nostrils.

Now, basically, everyone knows that the fragrance arises from the chandana wood. When the incense is lit, smoke rises into the air. However, the fragrance is certainly not the incense smoke, for as soon as the incense is lit, the fragrance can be smelled within a radius of forty li of where the incense was lit. The incense smoke, on the other hand, simply rises up into emptiness.

Why does the Buddha question Ananda in this way, asking him whether the fragrance of chandana comes from the nostrils or from the chandana incense? Everyone realizes without its being explained that if the chandana incense is not lit, there isn’t any fragrance, which proves that the fragrance comes from the incense. The Buddha is deliberately questioning Ananda in this way to see how he will answer. However, although the fragrance comes from the chandana, the nature of smelling comes from the Thus Come One’s treasury. So the meaning does not lie in the fragrance, but in the nature of smelling. The nature of smelling is all pervading and is neither produced nor extinguished. That is the important point.

R2 Refutes the possibility that it comes from emptiness.

**Sutra: “Suppose it is produced from within emptiness. The nature of emptiness is everlasting and unchanging, and so the fragrance should be eternally present. What need should there be to rely on burning the dry wood in the censer?

Commentary:
Suppose it is produced from within emptiness. The nature of emptiness is everlasting and unchanging.** If you say the fragrance comes forth from emptiness, **the fragrance should be eternally present.** The fragrance should always be there. It couldn’t disappear. It would not be necessary to wait until the chandana incense wood is burned in order for there to be the fragrance of chandana. It should also be there at ordinary times. **What need should there be to rely on burning the dry wood in the censer?** “Rely on” means that one must burn the incense in order for the fragrance to come into being. This passage proves that the fragrance is not produced from emptiness.

R3 Refutes the possibility that it comes from the smell.

**Sutra:“Suppose it is produced from the wood. Now, the nature of this incense is such that it gives off smoke when it is burned. If the nose smells it, it should be filled with smoke. The smoke rises into the air, and before it has reached the distance, how is it that the fragrance is already being smelled at a distance of forty li?

Commentary:Suppose it is produced from the wood. Now, the nature of this incense is such that it gives off smoke when it is burned.** When it is lit, it turns into smoke. **If the nose smells it, it should be filled with smoke.** When the organ of the nose smells it, there should be some smoke there. But, this fragrance is not due to the smoke. **The smoke rises into the air,** but the fragrance pervades all places. There is fragrance even where there is no smoke. **And before it has reached the distance, how is it that the fragrance is already being smelled at a distance of forty li?** The smoke has not yet traveled the forty li, but the fragrance has already reached that distance, and everywhere within that area the fragrance can be smelled. “Where would you say it comes from?” the Buddha asks Ananda.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

**Sutra:“Therefore, you should know that neither the fragrance, nor the nose’s smelling has a location, and so the two places of smelling and fragrance are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:Therefore, you should know that neither the fragrance, nor the nose’s smelling has a location.** Because of what has been explained, you should know that both the fragrance and the awareness of smelling have no location. They haven’t any fixed place. **And so the two places of smelling and fragrance -** the awareness of smelling in the nose and the fragrance - **are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They are all representations which flow forth from the wonderful nature of true suchness within the nature of the Thus Come One’s treasury. P4 The place of the tongue and tastes.
Q1 Sets the scene to discuss organ and object.

**Sutra:“Ananda, twice every day you take up your bowl along with the rest of the assembly, and among what you receive may be things of supreme flavor, such as curds, buttermilk, and clarified butter.

Commentary:**From whole milk comes buttermilk; from buttermilk comes curds, and from curds comes butter. Butter can be further refined into clarified butter, or ghee.

The first period of the Buddha’s teaching of dharma is called the Avatamsaka period. The Avatamsaka period is likened to the time when the sun is first rising, for when the sun first rises it first The Twelve Places 75 illumines the high mountains. The high mountains represent the great Bodhisattvas. The [*Avatamsaka Sutra*](http://cttbusa.org/avatamsaka/avatamsaka_contents.asp) teaches and transforms great Bodhisattvas. So, when the Buddha spoke the Avatamsaka, those of the two vehicles, the sound-hearer and those who are enlightened to conditions, “had eyes but did not see.” They could not see the Buddha manifesting the ten thousand foot Nishyanda body. Those of the two vehicles saw Shakyamuni Buddha as usual in the six foot body of an old bhikshu. They “had ears but did not hear the perfect sudden teaching.” They did not hear Shakyamuni Buddha speaking the perfect sudden, wonderful teaching of the Avatamsaka Sutra.

The five periods of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teaching are likened to dairy products. The dharma of the Avatamsaka is like whole milk. Adults can digest whole milk, but infants cannot usually take whole cow’s milk. The period of the Avatamsaka Sutra was devoted exclusively to the teaching and transforming of Bodhisattvas. It was like milk taken directly from the cow.

The second was the agama period. Agama is a Sanskrit word which is interpreted as meaning “incomparable dharma,” which means none of the dharmas of externalist sects can compare to it. It is also called abhidharma, that is, the small vehicle. In the milk analogy, the agama period is likened to the buttermilk which can be made from whole milk. The nature of buttermilk is not so strong, and children can drink it as well. It is easy to digest. In the analogy of the rising sun, the second period is represented by the illumining of the mountain valleys, which means that the lower lands are also shone upon.

The third is the vaipulya period. In the milk analogy, this period is represented by the curds extracted from buttermilk. And in the analogy of the rising sun, the plains are now illuminated.

The fourth period is the prajna period. In the milk analogy, it is represented by the butter which is processed from curds. In the sun analogy it is close to the full light of noon.

The fifth is the dharma-flower/nirvana period. It is represented in the milk analogy by clarified butter. The flavor of the [Dharma Flower Sutra - the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of Wonderful Dharma](http://cttbusa.org/lotus/lotus_contents.asp), sometimes called the Lotus Sutra - is as wonderful as the flavor of clarified butter. In the analogy of the rising sun, the Dharma Flower Sutra is the sun when it is directly overhead. At midday the sun shines on everything, illumining the high mountains, the valleys, and the plain.

The Dharma Flower Sutra is a most important sutra in Buddhism. The Shurangama Sutra is for the opening of wisdom. The Shurangama Sutra points out the path, the way of cultivation. The Lotus Sutra is for accomplishing Buddhahood. Everyone in the Dharma Flower assembly should become a Buddha. As the sutra says, “With one recitation of Namo Buddha, all can accomplish the Buddha Way.” The Dharma Flower Sutra is for opening out the provisional and manifesting the actual. In its doctrine, the empty and false are rejected, and only the actual is spoken. The Shurangama and the Dharma Flower Sutra are extremely important, extremely important in Buddhism. The doctrine of the Dharma Flower Sutra is the most esoteric and wonderful. Great Master Chi Zhe of the Tian Tai school opened enlightenment while reading it.

Soon after he had opened enlightenment, he heard of the existence of the Shurangama Sutra, and he proceeded to face the west every day and bow to the Shurangama Sutra, hoping to be able to read it. But, although he bowed for eighteen years, he never did see it. Wouldn’t you say that was regrettable? The practices which the virtuous patriarchs of China followed in displaying their respect for the Buddhadharma show how extremely reverent they were.

Some people bow to the Dharma Flower Sutra and the Shurangama Sutra. They bow once for every word, bowing all day long from morning to night. Some have become enlightened while bowing to a sutra. Thus, there are all kinds of different methods of cultivation. No matter which method you cultivate all you have to do is to do it single-mindedly. Don’t cultivate on the one hand and strike up false thoughts on the other. For instance, I know there are some people here listening to the sutra who are not really listening. They are thinking, “After a while I’m going to telephone my girlfriend,” or “How am I going to answer that letter I got?” With their attention focused on these kinds of questions, how can they expect to have any response as far as the Buddhadharma is concerned? But, they still haven’t awakened. They don’t say, “Ah, now I am studying the Buddhadharma, and I should put everything down and concentrate my attention on studying the Buddhadharma.” So, in the end they have no idea what I have been explaining. And sometimes, if they become aware of it, they say it is meaningless. That’s the kind of fault they have.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

**Sutra: “What do you think? Are these flavors produced from emptiness, do they come forth from the tongue, or are they produced from the food?

Commentary:**Ananda, what is your opinion about the flavors of these curds, buttermilk, and clarified butter which you say are supreme? **What do you think? Are these flavors produced from emptiness?** Does emptiness bring forth these defiling objects of flavors? **Do they come forth from the tongue?** Are these defiling objects of flavor produced from the organ of your tongue? **Or are they produced from the food?** Or is it that the defiling objects of flavor arise from the things eaten?

Q3 Discusses each and refutes all possibilities.
R1 Refutes the possibility that it comes from the tongue.

**Sutra:“Again, Ananda, suppose that the flavors came from your tongue; now there is only one tongue in your mouth. When that tongue had already become the flavor of curds, then it would not change if it encountered some dark rock candy.

Commentary:Again, Ananda,** what do you say this flavor is produced from? Is it produced from emptiness, is it produced from the tongue, or is it produced from the food? Tell me. **Suppose that the flavors came from your tongue.** You may say the organ of your tongue produces this flavor. Then when you ate something, say curds for example, the tongue would become the flavor of curds. **Now, there is only one tongue in your mouth. When that tongue had already become the flavor of curds, then it would not change if it encountered some dark rock candy.** Dark rock candy is made out of sugar cane, and it is as hard as a rock. It was probably an ancient method for making candy that created it. Your tongue has already changed to the flavor of curds, so when you eat candy it will not be sweet. Why? You only have one tongue, and so it will have only one flavor. You cannot change one tongue into so many flavors.

**Sutra: “Suppose it did not change: that would not be what is called knowing tastes. Suppose it did change: the tongue is not many substances, and how could one tongue know so many tastes?

Commentary: Suppose it did not change.** If, when you ate dark rock-candy, it did not change to sweet, **that would not be what is called knowing tastes.** Then your tongue would not be functioning as an organ that recognizes tastes. **Suppose it did change.** Suppose that when you ate curds, for instance, there was the flavor of curds, and when you ate candy the flavor changed to sweet. Now, **the tongue is not many substances.** There is only one tongue-organ. **And how could one tongue know so many tastes?** If flavors came from your one tongue, how could you recognize so many flavors? And yet you can; so this argument doesn’t hold.

R2 Refutes the possibility that it comes from flavor.

**Sutra:“Suppose it were produced from the food. The food does not have consciousness; how could it know tastes? Moreover, if the food itself were to recognize them, that would be the same as someone else eating. Then what connection would that have with what is called your recognition of tastes?

Commentary: Suppose it were produced from the food.** Suppose the flavor arose in the food. **The food does not have consciousness.** Edible things are devoid of awareness. They haven’t any consciousness. **How could it know tastes?** Since food hasn’t any awareness, any consciousness, how could it know tastes? **Moreover, if the food itself were to recognize them -** if it were the edible things that knew their own flavor - **that would be the same as someone else eating.** That would be the same as if it ate its own flavor. **Then what connection would that have with what is called your recognition of tastes?** How could that be called knowing the flavor of what one eats?

R3 Refutes the possibility that it comes from emptiness.

**Sutra:**

**“Suppose it were produced in emptiness. When you eat emptiness, what flavor does it have? Suppose that emptiness had the flavor of salt. Then since your tongue was salty, your face would also be salty, and likewise everyone in the world would be like fish in the sea. Since you would be constantly influenced by salt, you would never know tastelessness. If you did not recognize tastelessness, you would not be aware of the saltiness, either. You would not know anything at all. How could that be what is called taste?

Commentary: Suppose it were produced in emptiness.** Perhaps you want to say that flavors are produced in emptiness. **When you eat emptiness, what flavor does it have?** Taste it. Take a bite of emptiness, and see what it tastes like. **Suppose that emptiness had the flavor of salt.** Say, for example, that emptiness tasted like salt. **Then since your tongue was salty -** since your tongue was turned salty by the salty flavor, **your face would also be salty, and likewise everyone in the world would be like fish in the sea.** If flavor arose in emptiness, it wouldn’t just be your tongue that it imparted its flavor to. If it made your tongue salty, it would also make your face salty. Your body, too, would be salty, and so would everyone else’s. If everyone’s body were salty, then the people of this world would become like fish in the sea. They would all take on the flavor of salt. **Since you would be constantly influenced by salt -** you should realize that if you were constantly soaked and drowned in saltiness, **you would never know tastelessness.** You wouldn’t know what was meant by tastelessness. **If you did not recognize tastelessness, you would not be aware of the saltiness, either.** Why not? If you were not aware of tastelessness, you wouldn’t know about flavors, and since you wouldn’t know flavors, you wouldn’t be aware of salt. **You would not know anything at all.** You basically wouldn’t recognize any flavor at all. **How could that be what is called taste?** Then why would you come up with a name and call it the defiling object of taste?

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

**Sutra: “Therefore, you should know that neither flavors nor the tongue’s tasting has a location; and, so the two places of tasting and flavor are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary: Therefore, you should know that neither flavors nor the tongue’s tasting has a location.** They have no fixed place. **And, so the two places of tasting and flavor are empty and false.** Tasting and flavor - just to speak of these two places - are emptily and falsely produced and emptily and falsely extinguished. **Their origin is not in causes and conditions** - they are not created from causes and conditions, **nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** Nor are they created from spontaneity. They are a representation of the wonderful nature of true suchness of the Thus Come One’s treasury, and nothing more.

P5 The place of the body and touches.
Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ and object.

**Sutra:“Ananda, early every morning you rub your head with your hand.

Commentary:**Buddhist monks are supposed to rub their heads three times every morning, to see if they have any hair. If not, why not? Oh, they are monks. They are people who have left the home life. This practice was adopted because when Shakyamuni Buddha was in the world, the adherents of a lot of externalist sects took refuge with the Buddha. Afterward, the Buddha taught the monks to rub their own heads three times every day in order to help them remember that they were monks. Ananda was very attentive to the teachings, and so he faithfully put this instruction into practice every day at daybreak without fail. **Ananda, early every morning you rub your head with your hand.** You rub your monk’s head with your hand in order to help you remember why you haven’t any hair. It is done to teach people not to forget what they are all about. The Buddha asks Ananda about it in order to begin his explanation of the two places of the body and the defiling objects of touch - the ninth and tenth of the twelve places.

Q2 Questions whether the awareness of touch is dual.

**Sutra:“What do you think? When there is a sensation of the rubbing, where does the ability to make contact lie? Is the ability in the hands or is it in the head?

Commentary:**Where does the sensation of contact lie? Ananda, I’m asking you a question. When you rub your head, a sensation of contact arises. **What do you think? When there is a sensation of the rubbing, where does the ability to make contact lie?** Your hand is aware of the rubbing, and so is your head. Which is the one that is able to do the touching? Which is the one that is touched? **Is the ability in the hands or is it in the head?** Does the ability to make contact lie in the hands or in the head? Speak up.

**Sutra: “If it were in the hands, then the head would have no knowledge of it, and how could that be what is called touch? If it were in the head, then the hands would be useless, and how could that be what is called touch?

Commentary: If it were in the hands, then the head would have no knowledge of it.** If you say the touch lies in the hands, then the head would not know when you rubbed it. **And how could that be what is called touch?** If the head does not know, it cannot be a case of touch. **If it were in the head, then the hands would be useless.** If you say the power of touch lies in your head, then your hands would not be aware of any sensation. **And how could that be what is called touch?** Ananda, you explain it for me.

When the monks rub their heads three times, they recite a very meaningful verse, which I will recite for you.

Guard your mouth, collect your mind,
and do not commit transgressions with your body.
Do not bother any sentient being.
Stay far away from non-beneficial ascetic practices.
One who cultivates like this can save the world.

"Guard your mouth” means do not just say whatever you feel like. “Collect your mind” means keep your thoughts from wandering about. Don’t engage in false thinking. Don’t continually seek advantage from circumstances. “And do not commit transgressions with your body.” Make sure you don’t commit offenses with your body.

When the mouth is guarded, it is free of the four evils: it does not engage in abusive language, in lying, in profanity, or in gossip. With a collected mind, one has no greed, hatred, or stupidity. When no transgressions are committed with the body, one does not engage in killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct. Even thinking of such things is not permissible.

"Do not bother any sentient being.” Don’t cause any person or any living being whatever that you come in contact with to give rise to affliction. Don’t give living beings trouble. Even less should you bother the people you are cultivating with. Sometimes you unintentionally make a mistake and cause someone else to be upset. In such a case you should find an opportunity to explain yourself and not just let the problem escalate.

"Stay far away from non-beneficial ascetic practices.” These are bitter practices which are of no benefit, such as the way some people in India imitate the behavior of cows and dogs, sleep on beds of nails, or roll in ashes to cover their bodies with filth. What meaning is there in such practices? What aid is that in cultivating the Way? The filthier you are, the dirtier your mind is. When the outside gets dirty and you are always thinking about filth, your mind is also filthy. These are what are called “non-beneficial ascetic practices.” Do not engage in them. You should do things which are of benefit to people. Do not do things which are of no benefit to people. Stay far away from non-beneficial ascetic practices.

"One who cultivates like this can save the world.” “Like this” means that you do not bother any sentient being, do not engage in non-beneficial ascetic practices, and do not practice the dharmas of externalist sects.

What is meant by the dharmas of externalist sects?

Shakyamuni Buddha practiced the Middle Way. According to his method of cultivation, he taught his disciples to eat vegetarian food, not to eat meat. Or, if they ate meat, to eat the three kinds of pure meat:

1. What I did not see killed. You did not see the animal being killed.
2. What I did not hear killed. You did not hear the sounds of the slaughter.
3. What was not killed for me. The pig or cow or sheep was not killed especially for me.

According to the Buddha’s teaching, it is permissible to eat these three kinds of pure meat if one’s body is not strong.

Thus, the Buddha taught his disciples to eat vegetarian food, and what do you suppose Devadatta did, with his deviant knowledge and deviant views? He thought, “Huh. You teach your disciples to eat vegetarian food, do you? I teach my disciples not to eat salt. They don’t even eat salt.” This practice also exists in Taoism, and is referred to as superior pure vegetarianism. Actually, it is not in accord with the Middle Way. But, that’s the way Devadatta did it. The Buddha taught his disciples to not eat after noon. In the morning they ate rice gruel and at noon they had a full meal. Every day they ate twice, although the Buddha himself ate only once a day, at noon. He did not eat in the morning, and he did not eat at night. What did Devadatta teach his disciples to do? He taught them to fast for a hundred days. “You eat once a day? I eat once every hundred days. See how much higher I am than you? You eat vegetarian food? I don’t even eat salt. I’m always a bit higher than you.” He constantly wanted to compete with the Buddha. He kept wanting to pit his dharmas against the Buddha’s, and he always said that the Buddha could not compare with him. So Devadatta provoked King Ajatashatru into killing his father and mother and then told Ajatashatru to become the new king, saying that he himself would become the new Buddha, that Shakyamuni Buddha was the old, decrepit Buddha - Devadatta wanted to overthrow the Buddha so he could become the new Buddha. But, in the end he messed things up so badly that he fell alive into the hells. He just took his flesh body right along with him to hell. He was intent upon doing things differently from the Buddha, different from the way it is done in Buddhism. This is how externalist sects are. You could also say that Devadatta was battling to be number one. He wanted to be first. He wanted this and wanted that - and in the end his retribution was to fall into the hells! So it is useless to cultivate non-beneficial ascetic practices.

The ancients said about eating meat:

The pots of stew simmered
during hundreds of thousands of years,
Have brewed oceans of deep resentment
into hatred that’s hard to contain.
If you want to know the reason
for the disaster of weapons and troops,
Try listening at the door of a slaughterhouse
to the haunting midnight cries.

"The pots of stew simmered during hundreds of thousands of years,” refers to the meat broths and meat soups which people have been cooking day in and day out for hundreds of millennia.

The pots, “Have brewed oceans of deep resentment into hatred that’s hard to contain”. Resentment as vast as the sea is contained in those pots of beef stew. Such hate and resentment cannot be smoothed over. “If you want to know the reason for the disaster of weapons and troops.” In the past, only hand weapons were used in battle. It was not like the present, when rockets, bombs, and guns make it possible to strike from long range. Before, soldiers engaged in hand to hand combat. The way it is nowadays is much more vicious. If you want to know why there are wars in the world, “Try listening at the door of a slaughterhouse to the haunting midnight cries.” Go to a slaughterhouse at night - go to a place where cows, pigs, and sheep are killed and listen to the sounds. What do you hear at midnight at a slaughterhouse? Nowadays, slaughterhouses are usually located far away from populated areas, and so the sounds are not easy to hear. But, we can think about it. People have killed so many living creatures! And, as those creatures are reborn as people, they will want to get revenge. That is why day by day the resentment deepens, day by day the resentment grows. There is no way to resolve it. It has reached the point that the cycle doesn’t even wait for those who have killed to die and become animals before the revenge is taken, people have simply taken to killing off their own kind. You kill me, and I kill you. You killed me in a past life, so now I am going to kill you. The disaster of weapons and troops is based on killing, and nothing else. That is why Buddhism explains that we must refrain from killing. Instead, we should liberate life and take the precepts.

If one person refrains from killing, the world has that much less violent energy in it - that much less evil influence. If ten people do not kill, then there are ten spots of auspicious energy in the world. Those spots are devoid of negative influences and contain only positive ones. As with a single person, so with the entire world. If you are murderous and kill living beings, then living beings will not have any good feelings toward you. If you are kind to living beings, then the living beings will be good to you. Thus, there is a definite connection between the human realm and the realm of animals.

Time prohibits me from going into detail about this matter of refraining from killing, liberating life, and protecting the precepts. I could easily speak for three months on that topic alone. In fact, in three years I couldn’t exhaust the subject. But, I won’t say any more now. I’ll continue with the sutra text.

**Sutra:“If each had it, then you, Ananda, would have two bodies.

Commentary:If each had it** - if you propose that both your hand and your head have the ability to make contact, so that there is touch in both places - **then you, Ananda, would have two bodies.** You would have two bodies, because you would have two sensations of touch.

Q3 Questions whether the sensation of touch is singular.

**Sutra: “If there were only one touch in the head and the hand, then the hand and the head would be of one substance. If they were one substance, then no touch would be possible.

Commentary:If there were only one touch in the head and the hand -** you proposed before that there were two powers of touch, one in the head and one in the hand; now you propose that there is only one power to touch - only one contact - not two. But, **then the hand and the head would be of one substance.** They would be one. If they were, there would be no sensation of contact. **If they were one substance, then no touch would be possible.** If there is only one touch in the head and the hand, how can touch be experienced? Do you see how this principle is being explained? - wonderful to the ultimate point.

**Sutra:“If they were two substances, to which would the touch belong? The one which was capable of touch would not be the one that was touched. The one that was touched would not be the one that was capable of touch. Nor should it be that the touch came into being between you and emptiness.

Commentary:If they were two substances, to which would the touch belong?** The Buddha has just shown that a single substance cannot be said to experience touch. “If, then, you propose that the head and hand are two substances, making two kinds of touch, in which one does the touch reside? The actual sensation of touch should lie in one of them. Which one is it? It is clear that one will be capable of touch, and the other will be the thing touched. **The one which was capable of touch would not be the one that was touched. The one that was touched would not be the one that was capable of touch.** You cannot say that they are both capable of initiating the sensation of touch. For instance, I am now touching this table. Basically the table hasn’t any awareness; but my hand is the one that is capable of touch; while the table is the one that is touched. In the case of the hand and the head, though, which would be which? The one that was touched would not be the one capable of touch. The one that was capable of touch would not be the one that was touched. So, then, which would you say touched which? Would the hand touch the head, or would the head touch the hand? Speak up! **Nor should it be that the touch came into being between you and emptiness,** since empty space is basically nothing at all.”

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

**Sutra: “Therefore, you should know that neither the sensation of touch nor the body has a location. And so the two places of the body and touch are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary: Therefore, you should know -** because of the various principles that I have just explained, you ought to know **that neither the sensation of touch nor the body -** neither the existence of a reaction to touch nor the body - **has a location.** The sensation of touch does not have a fixed place. You cannot say for certain what it is like. **And so the two places of the body and touch -** the place of the body and the place of touch - **are empty and false.** They are not actual. Don’t become attached to the objects of touch. Don’t get attached and think, “So and so is the fairest of the fair,” and give rise to greed and attachment. It’s empty and false, so what are you doing getting attached to it?

**Their origin is not in causes and conditions.** The awareness of touch is not produced from causes and conditions, **nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** Nor are they spontaneously produced from within emptiness. They flow forth from the wonderful nature of true suchness of the Thus Come One’s treasury. But, they are empty and false just the same. Don’t become attached to them. You should return to your origin and return to your own treasury of the Thus Come One. Put down those false characteristics, and return to your genuine basic nature.

P6 The place of the mind and dharmas.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ and object.

**Sutra:“Ananda, your mind is always conditioned by three qualities - good, bad, and indeterminate - which produce patterns of dharmas.

Commentary:**Now I will explain the doctrine of how the mind creates conditions for the defiling objects of dharmas. **Ananda, your mind is always conditioned by three qualities.** There are conditions continually in your mind. What is meant here is seizing upon conditions. The most important thing that those who cultivate the Way must avoid is to seize upon conditions. Once the mind begins to seize upon conditions, obstructions are created. The sixth consciousness, the mind consciousness, goes haywire and its whole outlook becomes caught up in seizing upon conditions. Then it is not at all easy to cultivate the Way. No matter how many good deeds you accomplish, they are all phony if you accomplish them with an attitude of seizing upon conditions. It is also phony if you take living beings across - no matter how many - with a mind that seizes upon conditions.

Ananda, in your mind there are always conditions, **good, bad, and indeterminate.** The “good” refers to all wholesome dharmas. The “evil” refers to unwholesome dharmas. “Indeterminate” refers to that which is neither good nor bad. There exist these three natures **which produce patterns of dharmas.** This refers to the ordinary reaction to the defiling objects of dharmas, not to Buddhadharma. “Patterns” means that fixed patterns emerge among the defiling objects, dharmas.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

**Sutra: “Are these dharmas produced by the mind, or do they have a special place apart from the mind?

Commentary:** Would you say that the dharmas that the mind creates conditions for are produced right there in the mind? **Are these dharmas produced by the mind, or do they have a special place apart from the mind?** The “mind” here is the sixth mind consciousness. “Do they have a place apart from the sixth mind consciousness? Express your views on this. Speak up, Ananda.”

Now, Ananda does not chart the heights and fathom the depths. Ananda doesn’t dare to guess at the state of the Buddha. He doesn’t answer the Buddha’s question, so the Buddha calls to him again to make sure that he is paying attention. If Ananda were dozing off, the Buddha would be speaking in vain. So, he calls out to jar Ananda out of his dreams.

Q3 Cites dharmas to debate their falseness.
R1 Refutes that they are produced because of the mind.

**Sutra: “Ananda, if they were the mind, the dharmas would not be its defiling objects. Since they would not be conditions of the mind, how could you say that they had a location?

Commentary:Ananda, if they were the mind -** if you propose that dharmas are simply produced from the mind, that they are the sixth mind consciousness - then **the dharmas would not be its defiling objects.** Then the dharmas your mind gives rise to would not be the defiling objects of the mind.

**Since they would not be conditions of the mind -** what your mind seizes upon are the states of defiling objects. However, according to your argument these dharmas are not defiling objects; in that case, your mind would not be able to seize upon them. Then, **how could you say that they had a location?** Since there would be no conditions for them in the mind, how could they have a location? So, the dharmas the mind seizes upon have no location.

R2 Refutes that they exist apart from the mind.

**Sutra: "Suppose they were to have a special place apart from the mind: then would the dharmas themselves be able to know?

Commentary: Suppose they were to have a special place apart from the mind.** They would be in another place. But, if they were in another place, **then would the dharmas themselves be able to know?** Is the nature of the dharmas such that they know they are dharmas? Speak up!

**Sutra:“If they were to have a sense of knowing, they would be called a mind. If they were something other than you, they would be someone else’s mind, since they are not defiling objects. If they were the same as you, they would be your own mind. But, how could your mind stand apart from you?

Commentary:If they were to have a sense of knowing, they would be called a mind.** Suppose you say that dharmas know - that they have knowing awareness; but what has knowing awareness is called the mind. **If they were something other than you, they would be someone else’s mind, since they are not defiling objects.** “Something other than you” means that they would be separate from you. They would be apart from you. But, according to your argument, they are not defiling objects, either, because they have knowing awareness. If they were apart from you and had knowing awareness, **they would be someone else’s mind. If they were the same as you, they would be your own mind** - perhaps you insist that what is apart from you and yet has knowing awareness is actually your mind. **But, how could your mind stand apart from you?** If you explain it by saying that they are not someone else’s mind but are actually your own, why aren’t they one with you? If they have knowledge, then they are the mind; but, how can your mind and you be two different things?

**Sutra:“Suppose they were to have no sense of knowing; yet these defiling objects are not forms, sounds, smells, or tastes; they are neither cold nor warmth, nor the characteristic of emptiness. Where would they be located?

Commentary:Suppose they were to have no sense of knowing.** If you agree with the principle I have just explained, you will say they do not know. **Yet these defiling objects are not forms, sounds, smells, or tastes.** They differ from the realms of the five defiling objects discussed above - form, sounds, smells, tastes, and objects of touch. What the Buddha is discussing now are the dharmas - defiling objects which haven’t any form, nor any sound, nor any smell, nor any taste. **They are neither cold nor warmth.** Nor do they have the awareness of touch which knows separation, unity, cold and warmth. **Nor the characteristic of emptiness.** Nor do they have the characteristic of emptiness. **Where would they be located?** Then, where would you say the dharmas reside? This is what the Buddha asks Ananda, but now Ananda does not dare answer.

**Sutra:“We have established that they are represented in neither form nor emptiness; nor is it likely that they exist somewhere in the human realm beyond emptiness, for if they did, the mind could not be aware of them. Whence, then, would they arise?

Commentary:We have established that they are represented in neither form nor emptiness.** In the two kinds of defiling objects of form and emptiness, there is no representation of them. **Nor is it likely that they exist somewhere in the human realm beyond emptiness.** It cannot be that the dharmas exist somewhere beyond emptiness. **For if they did, the mind could not be aware of them.** Since the mind is not the dharmas which it creates conditions for, **whence, then, would they arise?** Where are dharmas established? Who establishes them?

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

**Sutra:“Therefore, you should know that neither dharmas nor the mind has a location. And, so the two places of mind and dharmas are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:Therefore** because of this, Ananda - **you should know that neither dharmas nor the mind has a location.** These two have no place that can be found, either. **And, so the two places of mind and dharmas are empty and false.** In the doctrine of the mind conditioning dharmas, both places are empty and false. **Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They are an illusory falseness which arises from within the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One.