**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 3**

**CHAPTER 6**

**The Seven Elements Are All-Pervasive**

L3 Finally he shows that the nature of the seven elements is all pervasive.
M1 Ananda, in turn, has doubts about the non existence of the other two teachings.

**Sutra: Ananda said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, the Thus Come One has often spoken of the mixture and union of causes and conditions, saying that the transformations of everything in the world are created from the mixing and uniting of the four elements.

Commentary:Ananda** again **said to the Buddha**: **World Honored One, the Thus Come One has often spoken** - Thus Come One, you’re always talking about the dharma **of the mixture and union** and the dharma **of causes and conditions.** You say that **the transformations of everything in the world –** “the world” again refers to the sentient world and the material world - all kinds of different circumstances and change **are created from the mixing and uniting of the four elements.**What are the four elements? They are earth, water, fire, and wind. People’s bodies are a combination of the four elements. How is it that the body is composed of the four elements? The places in our bodies which are hard and solid belong to the element earth. The warmth in our bodies belongs to the element fire. Saliva, tears, and mucus belong to the element water. Our breath belongs to the element wind. While we are alive, our body is under our control, but after we die the four elements disperse. The warmth in our bodies returns to the element fire. The moisture returns to the element water. The solids return to the element earth. Our breath returns to the element wind.

People who do not understand about the body want to help it in all that it does. What they don’t know is that in this way the true nature becomes a slave to a false form. Every day one is upside- down, toiling and desperately rushing back and forth. Ultimately, what’s it all for? Ultimately, what meaning is there in it? You ask people this and they are like Ananda - mouth agape and speechless. They can’t come up with a reason. Because people do not understand about the body, they spend all their energy on a dead thing. They don’t apply their effort to a living thing. What “dead thing” is being referred to? Although we are still alive, our bodies may be considered already dead. What living thing is being referred to? Although we are not aware that it is alive, our spirit is young and full of life - it is our originally existent Buddha nature.

But people don’t know that they should investigate their own Buddha nature, and they apply effort to their bodies instead. From morning till night they help the body get good things to eat. They are controlled by their body. They help the body get fine clothes to wear. Just what is this body, anyway? I will tell all of you, and whether you admit it or not is your business. If someone likes to drink wine, then the body becomes a wine sack. If someone likes to eat fine food, then the body becomes a bread basket. If someone likes to wear fine clothing, the body becomes a clothes horse. It isn’t anything to grasp onto. Don’t look upon it as so important. But, you can’t put it down; you can’t see through it. Though you can’t see through it, and though you can’t put it down, when you die and the four elements disperse, you will have to see through what you couldn’t see through. Time waits for no one. You can never say to time, “Wait a minute for me. Wait a bit.” It will not wait.

**Sutra: “Why does the Thus Come One reject causes and conditions and spontaneity as well? I do not know how to understand your meaning now.

Commentary:**“Buddha, you’ve said that everything in the world comes forth from and is created from the causes and conditions of the mixing and uniting of the four elements. Why is it now that you say that causes and conditions and spontaneity are all incorrect?” Ananda’s attachments are quite strong. In the past he has heard the Buddha explain the principle of causes and conditions. Basically that was a provisional teaching, a provisional, clever expedient; it was not true and actual. Now the Buddha explains the true and actual dharma door, and Ananda does not believe it. He firmly believes in the expedient dharma door that the Buddha explained in the past, and in turn he doubts the true and actual dharma door. So he asks, “**Why does the Thus Come One reject causes and conditions and spontaneity as well?** Buddha, you have criticized causes and conditions and spontaneity and pronounced them incorrect. Isn’t that contradicting yourself? You are destroying the very principles which you yourself established. You are refuting your own thesis. **I do not know how to understand your meaning now.** I don’t see what principle this is now. What dharma door does it belong to? I don’t understand.”

**Sutra:“Please be so compassionate as to instruct us living beings in the final meaning of the Middle Way: in the dharmas which are not idle theories.”

Commentary: Please be so compassionate -** I now only hope that the Buddha will sympathize with us, bring forth compassion towards us living beings - **as to instruct us living beings in the final meaning of the Middle Way,** in the dharma door which does not joke around. We want an explanation of the truth, of **the dharmas which are not idle theories.**What is meant by “idle theories?” All the dharma doors of the provisional vehicle and of the teachings of the externalist sects are called “idle theories.” The present explanation of the real vehicle, the explanation of the true and actual dharma door, is called the final meaning of the Middle Way. The Middle Way does not fall into emptiness, nor does it fall into existence. The spontaneity taught by externalist sects falls into emptiness. Causes and conditions belong to existence. Now it is neither emptiness nor existence that is being explained; it is the final meaning of the Middle Way, a dharma door which is not an idle theory.

M2 The Buddha proceeds to explain thoroughly.
N1 He scolds him for his confusion and promises to explain.

**Sutra:The World Honored One then told Ananda, “You have renounced the small vehicle dharmas of the sound-hearers and those enlightened to conditions and have resolved to diligently seek unsurpassed Bodhi. Because of that, I will now explain the foremost truth to you.

Commentary:The World Honored One**, the Buddha, **then told Ananda, “You have renounced the small vehicle dharmas of the sound-hearers and those enlightened to conditions.** You have already decided to renounce the dharma doors of the two vehicles of the sound-hearer and those enlightened to conditions, the dharmas of the agamas, **and have resolved to diligently seek unsurpassed Bodhi.** You now diligently seek the Unsurpassed Way to enlightenment, the dharma of the Bodhisattva. **Because of that, I will now explain the foremost truth to you.** I will explain the dharma door of the real appearance to you.” The foremost truth is the real appearance.

There are three kinds of real appearances:

1. the real appearance which is without an appearance;
2. the real appearance which is not without an appearance;
3. the real appearance which is without an appearance and yet not without an appearance.

Although they are said to be three kinds, they are one kind: the real appearance. The real appearance has no appearance, and yet there is nothing which does not appear. Within this is the principle of true emptiness and wonderful existence.

If one explains it to the ultimate point, there basically isn’t anything at all. Yet, within that nothing at all there is everything. So, nothing at all is true emptiness, and the existence of everything is wonderful existence.

The principle now being explained will lead to an explanation of the seven elements - earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, perception, and consciousness - as pervading the dharma-realm. The five skandhas, the six entrances, the twelve places, the eighteen realms discussed before explained the wonderful true suchness nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One, but it was not said that they pervaded the dharma-realm.

**Sutra:“Why do you still bind yourself up in the idle theories and false thoughts current among people of the world?

Commentary:** The Buddha said to Ananda, “You have just decided to renounce the dharma doors of the small vehicle, to bring forth the resolve for the great vehicle - the Bodhisattva vehicle - and to seek unsurpassed Bodhi. Therefore, I will instruct you in the principle of the real appearance.” **Why -** the tone here is one of accusation - **do you still bind yourself up in the idle theories**, the worldly explanation of doctrines which are not true, **and false thoughts current among people of the world?** It’s just as if you took a rope and tied yourself up with it. You cannot get free. You cannot be liberated. Why do you want to be like that? What I am explaining to you is the foremost truth. Why is it you still don’t understand?

**Sutra: “Although you are very learned, you are like someone who can discuss medicines but cannot distinguish a real medicine when it is placed before you. The Thus Come One says that you are truly pitiful.

Commentary: Although you are very learned -** Ananda, although you have a strong memory and have memorized many sutras - **you are like someone who can discuss medicines.** You are learned, but what is it like? You are like someone who can recite the medicine texts and can say which medicines cure which illnesses and which medicines have what effect - like someone who can recite the *Yao Xing Fu*. You, too, have memorized well, but you’re like someone who **cannot distinguish a real medicine when it is placed before you.** When you see the true medicine you don’t recognize it. You cannot tell if it’s the true one. Why can’t you make these distinctions? Because all you do is advocate intellectual talk Chan. You can talk about it very well, but when you investigate the truth, you don’t understand. **The Thus Come One says that you are truly pitiful.

Sutra:“Listen attentively now as I explain this point in detail for you and also for those of the future who cultivate the great vehicle, so that you all can penetrate to the real appearance.”

Ananda was silent and awaited the Buddha’s holy instruction.

Commentary:Listen attentively now.** Don’t be confused any longer. You should pay attention, be alert, and listen **as I explain this point in detail for you.** For your sake, Ananda, I will now distinguish and explain it. I will divide and categorize and explain it for you in great detail, **and also for those of the future.**You and I here are included among “those of the future.” It is now the future that the Buddha then referred to. We now form the assemblies of what was the future then.

**Who cultivate the great vehicle** - we are now cultivating the great vehicle, not the small vehicle, in order to **penetrate to the real appearance,** to understand the principle of the real appearance. As was explained before, real appearance is no appearance. With no appearance, what still exists? Everything exists. “No appearance” means that it cannot have any empty, false appearance. The real appearance is totally real.

**Ananda was silent.** Ananda heard that the Buddha was going to explain the principle of the real appearance, but he didn’t know what was meant. The real appearance was a new term when the Buddha brought it up at that point, and Ananda didn’t understand what it meant. So, he **awaited the Buddha’s holy instruction.** On tip toe, with his eyes glued on the Buddha, he waited for him to speak the dharma.

N2 He gives a general analogy about the nature and its characteristics.

**Sutra: “Ananda, according to what you said, the mixing and uniting of the four elements create the myriad transformations of everything in the world.

Commentary:Ananda, according to what you said,** as you understand it, **the mixing and uniting of the four elements** - earth, water, fire, and wind - combine to **create the myriad transformations of everything in the world.

Sutra: “Ananda, if the nature of those elements does not mix and unite in substance, then they cannot combine with other elements, just as empty space cannot combine with forms.

Commentary: Ananda, if the nature of those elements** - if the nature of the substance of the elements **does not mix and unite in substance** - basically the nature of their substance is not one which unites - **then they cannot combine with other elements.** The elements cannot intermingle and merge with one another, **just as empty space cannot combine with forms.** It is the same as with empty space, which cannot unite with things that have form. If there is a union, then it is not empty space. This contradiction is also evident in the nature of the elements.

**Sutra:“Assuming that they do mix and unite, they are then only in a process of transformation in which they depend on one another for existence from beginning to end. In the course of transformation they are produced and extinguished, being born and then dying, dying and then being born, in birth after birth, in death after death, the way a torch spun in a circle forms an unbroken wheel of flame.

Commentary:Assuming that they do mix and unite -** suppose you want to say that the four elements mix and unite - **they are then only in a process of transformation in which they depend on one another for existence.** They mix with everything and are subject to change. **From beginning to end,** they change and come into being, and **in the course of transformation they are produced and extinguished,** extinguished then produced, again and again unendingly, **being born and then dying, dying and then being born, in birth after birth, in death after death, the way a torch spun in a circle forms an unbroken wheel of flame.** It never stops. Is that the way it is?

**Sutra:“Ananda, the process is like water becoming ice and ice becoming water again.

Commentary:Ananda,** you should know that the true suchness of the self nature accords with conditions yet does not change; it does not change, yet accords with conditions. How is that explained? The true suchness of the self nature, which is also the treasury of the Thus Come One, and also the real appearance, and also our true mind, **is like water becoming ice and ice becoming water again.**It is like water which becomes ice: that is, it accords with conditions, just as water can turn into ice. But the ice can also melt and become water again. I have often explained this principle to you. People’s Buddha-nature is the true nature. Bodhi enlightenment is water; affliction is ice. Your Bodhi is like water, useful to everyone; it cannot harm people. Everyone needs water.

You say, “Dharma master, I don’t agree with the principle you are explaining. Why? Because a lot of water can drown people.”

You are really intelligent. You know that too much water can drown people. But when there isn’t any water, can’t people die of thirst? So water is necessary for everyone. Of course too much of it can harm people. It’s that way with anything: too much is harmful. If you don’t eat, you get hungry, but if you eat day after day without cease, see if your stomach has a place to put it all. Having too much is the same as not having enough. Eating too much is the same as being fiercely hungry.

So, water can turn into ice. I often say that if you were to pour a bowl of water over someone’s head, he wouldn’t feel any pain. But, if you hit someone over the head with a piece of ice, you certainly could kill him. A piece of ice can kill someone. A bowlful of water cannot kill anyone. Ice and water are actually the same thing, but in the form of ice it can kill people, and in the form of water it cannot. Because of this, affliction is compared to ice; Bodhi is compared to water. The Buddha’s sutras say, “Affliction is just Bodhi.” The ice is just water. There is no ice in addition to the water, and no water in addition to the ice. The ice is in the water, and the water is in the ice. Thus, the sutra says, “Ice becoming water again.” But in order to turn your ice into water, you have to develop a certain amount of skill. What is required? You have to use yang light to illumine it. And then the ice can turn into water. This refers to our daily practice of sitting in meditation and investigating Chan. That illumines our afflictions so that they turn into water.

There is another bit of important principle I would like to explain to you now. This dharma assembly we have convened is a subtle and wonderful one. In what way? I explain the sutras in Chinese, and my Chinese is translated into English. So we explain the Buddhadharma in two languages. But when you are listening to the sutra, regardless of whether you understand the language you are hearing it in, you should pay close attention.

First, everyone who listens to sutras should thank Shakyamuni Buddha. Why? Because several thousand years ago Shakyamuni Buddha spoke this wonderful dharma, preparing a bright lamp in the dark night, for the sake of us living beings in suffering and difficulty. He spoke the dharma in order to cause us to be able to leave suffering and obtain bliss, to be apart from the afflictions of this world, and to come to understand the Way and bring forth bliss. He spoke the dharma to cause us people with a lot of afflictions to be free of afflictions and to turn our ice into water, so that we can return to the source to go back to our origin. And so we should be thankful to Shakyamuni Buddha.

Second, we should thank the Venerable Ananda. Why? Because if the Venerable Ananda had pretended to be intelligent back then and had said, “Buddha, you don’t have to explain it. I understand. Whatever you are going to say, I already understand,” then the Buddha would not have spoken the dharma; he wouldn’t have spoken the Shurangama Sutra. It is not easy for us to understand these principles, either. So we should thank the Venerable Ananda for having requested the dharma beforehand on our behalf. He asked Shakyamuni Buddha to speak the dharma for us.

I have something else to tell you that’s not very important. What is it? You should also thank the dharma master who is lecturing the sutra. That’s me. Don’t neglect that! I say it’s not too important, but you shouldn’t look upon it too lightly, either. Basically, I am a dharma master who only half understands; I don’t explain the sutras well. You say, “Oh, basically you can’t explain the sutras well, yet you have come here to explain them to us who don’t understand the Buddhadharma. No wonder we don’t understand what we’re hearing. Basically you only half understand it yourself.”

But if you can understand half of the Buddhadharma that’s actually not bad. Why? Because the Buddhadharma is as deep as the sea. You may want to understand it completely, but that’s not at all an easy thing to do. I have studied the Buddhadharma for several decades - thirty or forty years - and yet I feel that I have not finished drinking a single drop of the great sea, because the Buddhadharma is so deep, so wonderful. That’s why I said I was a dharma master who only half understands. But you should say that you now understand completely, because you are like the green extracted from the blue, which is to say, there are top ranking students but no top ranking teachers. “My master only half understands, but I, his disciple, have studied very well.” That’s the way you should talk.

Lastly, you should thank the translator of the sutra. No matter who is doing the translating, you should pay close attention and listen especially respectfully. You should be particularly attentive to every word and every sentence. Because I explain the sutras in Chinese and most of you don’t understand it, it is necessary for you to rely on the merit and virtue of the translation in order to hear the principles of the Shurangama Sutra. So you should be thankful to the translator; be very careful not to slight him or her.

Why do I say this today? Because in the summaries I had you write I saw that someone had written, “I listen to the sutra here and I don’t understand what the dharma master is explaining, and the translation isn’t very good, so I’m not going to study here any more.” The person who wrote this is basically a very intelligent person, but unfortunately she tends to outwit herself a bit. Why do I say that? Because she hasn’t any patience. When you listen to sutras, you should be patient whether you understand or not. When you remain in the dharma assembly, you become permeated with the dharma, just like the incense permeates the air, and eventually the light of your wisdom will shine forth. The people who have become enlightened while listening to sutras are many indeed. You shouldn’t look lightly upon listening to sutras.

When I was in Hong Kong, there was an elder laywoman who couldn’t listen to the sutras at all. She was deaf. But every time there was a sutra lecture she had to come and listen. She climbed over three hundred steps to the temple, although she was over seventy, and she came by herself. When the sutra lecture was over, after nine o’clock at night, she would go back down all by herself; and when she got to the bottom she would have to take a bus. She was deaf, so how could she listen? It was strange, but after she had listened to the sutras for a little over a month, she suddenly could hear. The deaf woman listened and was no longer deaf.

You hear this and think it quite profound, but actually it isn’t the least bit unusual. It was simply that she was sincere. “Even if I can’t hear, I’m going to listen,” she told herself, and as a result she could hear. So, if a seventy year old woman could have that kind of response, then if each of you is sincere, regardless of whether you understand or not, you will understand. Don’t be afraid of not understanding right away.

All you have to do is to be sincere and a day will come when you do understand. If you aren’t sincere, you may say, “I’ve been listening and listening and I don’t understand, so I’m going to become one of the five thousand who retreat.” If you do retreat, it’s because your virtuous conduct is not sufficient.

In general, to be close to a dharma assembly, you have to have virtue in the Way. People without Way virtue can’t sit still in a dharma assembly. They sit and then stand and then sit again, and they’re nervous, and they want to go. Why? Because their karmic obstacle ghost is pulling at them. The ghost says, “You can’t stay here. We’re good friends. Let’s go off together and create offenses.”

So you should be attentive to these four points when listening to sutras. In fact, you should not only thank the person who is doing the translating, you should be compatible with all your fellow students who are studying the sutra with you. Everyone should be happy. This is an important principle in listening to sutras, and you should not neglect it. N3 He gives a detailed account about the nature and its characteristics.
O1 The element earth.
P1 He reveals its nature and divides it.

**Sutra: “Consider the nature of earth: its coarse particles make up the great earth. Its fine particles make up motes of dust, down to and including motes of dust bordering upon emptiness.

Commentary: Consider the nature of earth.** Now I will explain the element earth to you, Ananda; you should be particularly attentive. Don’t be like you were before when you neglected samadhi power and concentrated on being learned. Now I am explaining for you the basic doctrines of samadhi power.

Take a look at the nature of earth: **its coarse particles make up the great earth.** “Coarse” means that, for the most part, the earth consists of accumulations of dust bound together. **Its fine particles make up motes of dust.** The smallest parts are motes of dust, **down to and including motes of dust bordering upon emptiness.**"Motes of dust bordering upon emptiness” are the smallest particles, invisible to the ordinary eye. They are neighbors of emptiness; they are more or less empty space, which isn’t anything at all. You say, “When the sun shines through a crack we can see fine motes of dust dancing in empty space.” That’s something you can still see. A mote of dust bordering upon emptiness cannot be seen with the ordinary eye.

**Sutra:“If one divides those fine motes of dust, their appearance is at the boundaries of form. Then divide those into seven parts.

Commentary: If one divides those fine motes of dust, their appearance is at the boundaries of form.** Motes of dust bordering on emptiness are the very finest, the most minute among things which have form. Nothing is smaller than they are. Still, they have an appearance of form which can be perceived. **Then divide those into seven parts.** If you divide these finest of fine motes of dust which border upon emptiness into seven parts, so that they border even more upon emptiness, these divided motes are actually emptiness itself. Basically there is no appearance of form. This is an explanation of the nature of earth.

P2 He explains the division in detail.

**Sutra:“Ananda, if this mote of dust bordering upon emptiness is divided and becomes emptiness, it should be that emptiness can give rise to form.

Commentary:Ananda, if this mote of dust bordering upon emptiness is divided and becomes emptiness -** although motes of dust bordering on emptiness are very small, they still have a visible shape. There is still something there. But, if the motes of dust bordering upon emptiness are divided into seven parts, they are truly and actually emptiness itself. Therefore, **it should be that emptiness can give rise to form.** Form can become emptiness, and emptiness contains form within it.

**Sutra: “Just now you asked if mixing and uniting doesn’t bring about the transformations of everything in the world.

Commentary: Just now you asked -** Ananda has just now asked - **if mixing and uniting doesn’t bring about the transformations of everything in the world.** Isn’t that why there are all these changing and transforming appearances?

**Sutra:“You should carefully consider how much emptiness mixes and unites to make a single mote of dust bordering upon emptiness, since it makes no sense to say that dust bordering on emptiness is composed of dust bordering on emptiness.

Commentary:You should carefully consider** - take a look at this - **how much emptiness mixes and unites to make a single mote of dust bordering upon emptiness.** When you divide a mote of dust bordering upon emptiness, it becomes emptiness. But, to proceed in the opposite direction, how much emptiness must you mix and unite to make a mote of dust bordering upon emptiness? **Since it makes no sense to say that dust bordering on emptiness is composed of dust bordering on emptiness.** You should not say that motes of dust bordering upon emptiness combine to make motes of dust bordering upon emptiness. It is emptiness which must unite to make motes of dust bordering upon emptiness. But how much emptiness would you say is needed? Would you use seven parts, since one mote of dust bordering upon emptiness divided into seven parts becomes emptiness? How much emptiness?

This is what he asked Ananda.

**Sutra:**

**“Moreover, since motes of dust bordering upon emptiness can be reduced to emptiness, of how many motes of such form as this must emptiness be composed?

Commentary: Moreover, since motes of dust bordering upon emptiness can be reduced to emptiness** - since when they are divided they become united with emptiness - **of how many motes of such form as this must emptiness be composed?** How many particles of dust make up the entirety of empty space? How many motes of dust bordering upon emptiness are united into emptiness? That would not be a small number! Here the word “form” is used to represent the element earth.

**Sutra: “When these motes of form mass together, a mass of form does not make emptiness; when emptiness is massed together, a mass of emptiness does not make form. Besides, although form can be divided, how can emptiness be massed together?

Commentary: When these motes of form mass together, a mass of form does not make emptiness.** You have been postulating that particles of form unite with particles of form in order to make emptiness; but actually, a union of particles of form cannot make emptiness. Didn’t the Buddha just say, “It makes no sense to say that dust bordering on emptiness is composed of dust bordering on emptiness?” Now he says that motes bordering upon emptiness cannot unite with motes bordering upon emptiness to create emptiness. The motes of dust bordering on emptiness have already become emptiness; how can there still be motes bordering upon emptiness to unite with each other? **When emptiness is massed together** - suppose you say that you can combine emptiness to get motes of dust bordering upon emptiness - **a mass of emptiness does not make form.** Since it is empty, how can it also have a shape, a form, and an appearance? **Besides, although form can be divided** - when you have the appearance of form you can divide it up into minute particles - **how can emptiness be massed together?** Since emptiness is empty, what method can there be of making the emptiness come together? How can you unite emptiness with emptiness? It has already become emptiness, is it possible that you can bring the emptiness together further to form a mote of dust bordering upon emptiness?

P3 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

**Sutra: “You simply do not know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of form is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true form. Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm. It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.

Commentary:You simply do not know,** Ananda, **that in the treasury of the Thus Come One** - the treasury of the Thus Come One is the true mind, the real appearance. You don’t know that if you investigate the question of emptiness and the motes of dust bordering upon emptiness to its primary source, you still won’t be able to resolve it. But the principle is found in the treasury of the Thus Come One: **The nature of form is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true form.** At its ultimate point, the appearance of form is true emptiness; and at its ultimate point, the nature of emptiness has true form. Basically, it is not defiled, not pure, not produced, not extinguished, and it neither increases nor diminishes. Basically, it is unmoving. In its basic nature, **pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm** with nothing in excess and nothing deficient.

“The nature of form is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true form.” This kind of wonderful function **accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.** It responds to their capacity: the extent of the wonder which each living being is capable of is revealed.

P4 He rejects the two theories for being mere conjectures.

**Sutra:

"It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.

Commentary: It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma.** It accords with living beings’ minds and appears in accordance with the karma of each living being, in the amount that each is capable of knowing. The nature of form is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true form. Pure in its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm. This wonderful function follows the karmic responses of each living being and gives rise to the kind of retribution that each should receive.

**People in the world are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions.** Who are they? They are people who cultivate according to externalist sects and provisional vehicles and ordinary people. They are confused about the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One, which is pure at its origin and pervades the dharma-realm. They do not recognize it. They believe it is based on causes and conditions. This is the attachment of adherents of the small vehicle: the dharma of causes and conditions. **Or** they assign it **to spontaneity.** Adherents of externalist sects are attached to the nature of spontaneity. How is it that they get cheated in this way? **These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind** - it is the distinction making conscious mind of adherents of the small vehicle, of externalist sects, and of ordinary people, making distinctions and calculations. They make calculations with considerations and distinctions. They speculate about things which have not yet happened, speculations which **are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.** The false thinking, distinctions, and calculations of the conscious mind - whether you talk about causes and conditions or spontaneity - are all just words. None of it is real. There isn’t any true and actual principle which can be spoken.

O2 The element fire.
P1 He reveals its nature and searches for it.

**Sutra:“Ananda, fire, which has no nature of its own, depends upon various causes and conditions for its existence. Consider a family in the city that has not yet eaten. When they wish to prepare food, they hold up a speculum to the sun, seeking fire.

Commentary:Ananda, fire, which has no nature of its own, depends upon various causes and conditions for its existence.** The nature of fire has no substance of its own. There must be causes and conditions before it can arise. “Nature of its own” here refers not to a person but to the substance of fire. This passage of text should not be read, “I am devoid of fire,” which is to say, “I haven’t any temper.” If you didn’t have any fire in your nature, you would be a Bodhisattva.

Fire **depends upon various causes and conditions for its existence.** It has no nature of its own. It is inherent in all conditions. When the causes and conditions for fire are present, fire will appear. If the causes and conditions are not there, there will be no fire. Where is the nature of fire? The nature of fire pervades all places. Although it has no substance of its own, there is not a single place which is devoid of fire.

**Consider a family in the city that has not yet eaten.** Ananda, take a look at a family, in the city of Shravasti, that has not yet eaten. **When they wish to prepare food,** they go to the kitchen to make rice and vegetables. At this time, the sun is still shining; otherwise, fire could not come forth. **They hold up a speculum to the sun, seeking fire.** A speculum is a “fire mirror,” made out of metal. Facing the sun, they hold the speculum in one hand, and in the other they hold a piece of moxa for tinder. The sun strikes the speculum, and the reflected light heats the tinder until it catches fire. This ancient method of seeking fire from the sun was used before there were matches. Further on in the text the Buddha asks whether the fire comes from the sun, from the speculum, or from the moxa tinder.

P2 He explains the search in detail.

**Sutra: “Ananda, let us look into your suggestion that the fire comes forth from mixing and uniting. By way of example, you and I and the twelve hundred and fifty bhikshus unite together to form a community. However, a careful analysis of the community reveals that every member composing it has his own body, birthplace, clan, and name. For instance, Shariputra is a brahman, Uruvilva is of the Kashyapa clan, and you, Ananda, come from the Gautama family.

Commentary:Ananda, let us look into your suggestion that the fire comes forth from mixing and uniting.** If there is a mixing and uniting, it certainly has to be apparent in some way. A lot of things coming together is called a mixing and uniting. What is it like? **By way of example, you and I and the twelve hundred and fifty bhikshus unite together to form a community.** It is like our assembly here, Ananda. You and I and the twelve hundred and fifty bhikshus have now come together to form one assembly, but that one assembly is not a single thing. **However, a careful analysis of the community reveals that every member composing it has his own body.** This group has come together as an assembly and this is called mixing and uniting. Suppose you ask about and investigate each person’s origin. It is said to be a single assembly, but each person nonetheless has his own body. Not only that, but **each has his own body, birthplace, clan, and name.** Those born into the Smith family are called Smith; those born into the Lee family are called Lee.

**For instance, Shariputra.** I have already discussed Shariputra. His mother’s eyes were as beautiful as those of the egret (white pelican). The egret is *shari* in Sanskrit, and *putra* means “son.” So his name means the “son of Shari.” He was **a brahman.** The brahman caste is the highest of India’s four classes. “Brahman” is a Sanskrit word which is explained as meaning “pure lineage,” pure seed. But, actually, the human seed is not pure, it is the brahman’s nature which is pure. “Brahman” also is explained as meaning “pure purpose.” They say that their patriarch came from the Brahma Heaven, and so they say they are of a pure lineage.

**Uruvilva is of the Kashyapa clan.** Uruvilva means “papaya grove.” He cultivated the Way beside a papaya grove, and so he called himself by that name. The name Kashyapa means “turtle clan.” They were so named because in the past their ancestors found a turtle with a map on its back.

**And you, Ananda, come from the Gautama family.** The name “Ananda” means “blissful.” He and Shakyamuni Buddha were both of the Gautama family. Later the Buddha changed to the Shakya clan. “Gautama” means “sugar cane.” It’s not known if his ancestors planted sugar cane, or if they liked to eat sugar cane, or just what the reason was that they took the name Gautama for their clan.

This passage notes that every person has his own ancestry and personal name. Although they come together as a single assembly, each person is still different. Each has his own name, his own appearance, and his own body. Shakyamuni Buddha points that out as a preface to his explanation of the element fire, which is mixed and united, but which has differences within it.

**Sutra:“Ananda, suppose fire existed because of mixing and uniting. When the hand holds up the speculum to the sun to seek fire, does the fire come out of the speculum? Does it come out of the moxa tinder? Or does it come from the sun?

Commentary:"Ananda, suppose fire existed because of mixing and uniting.** That is, when causes and conditions came together - when the hand held the speculum and there was sunlight and moxa tinder - these three kinds of causes and conditions mix and unite, and then there would be fire.

**When the hand holds up the speculum to the sun to seek fire** - when the person seeking fire holds up the speculum in his hand - **does the fire come out of the speculum?** Would you say that the fire came out of the speculum? **Does it come out of the moxa tinder?** Does the tinder produce the fire? **Or does it come from the sun?** Does the fire come from the sun? Tell me where it comes from.” This is also a case of mixing and uniting: there is the speculum, the sun, and the tinder of moxa, which catches fire very easily.

In this case of mixing and uniting, where would you say the fire ultimately came from? Suppose you say it is the sun which alone brings forth fire; in that case the sun would be able to burn up the entire world. So it won’t work to say it came from the sun. Suppose you say it comes from the speculum; yet, when the speculum is held in someone’s hand, it isn’t even the least bit warm. Fire is something warm, but the speculum isn’t even warm. So it is illogical to say it comes from the speculum. Suppose you say it comes from the moxa tinder. In the absence of the mirror and the sun, why doesn’t it emit fire? So this is a case of mixing and uniting, but there are still distinctions within it.

**Sutra:
"Suppose, Ananda, that it came from the sun. Not only would it burn the moxa tinder in your hand, but as it came across the groves of trees, it should burn them up as well.

Commentary: Suppose, Ananda, that it came from the sun -** suppose you say the fire comes from the sun - **not only would it burn the moxa tinder in your hand** - the fire of the sun can burn up the moxa tinder in your hand - **but as it came across the groves of trees, it should burn them up as well.** The sun is far away; and its heat passes over a lot of groves of trees. If the fire were to come from the sun, the trees would also be burned up. If the sun can burn the moxa tinder, why can’t it burn the trees and grasses? And yet they do not burn up.

**Sutra: "Suppose that it came from the speculum. Since it came out from within the speculum to ignite the moxa tinder, why doesn’t the speculum melt? Yet your hand that holds it feels no heat; how, then, could the speculum melt?

Commentary:Suppose that it came from the speculum. Since it came out from within the speculum to ignite the moxa tinder -** suppose you say that the fire comes out of the speculum spontaneously to ignite the tinder, but if the fire is within the speculum, **why doesn’t the speculum melt?** According to the Chinese explanation of the five elements, fire overcomes metal. It will melt metals, such as gold, silver, copper, iron. If the fire came from the mirror, the mirror would melt. However, **your hand that holds it feels no heat; how, then, could the speculum melt?** The mirror itself isn’t even warm. How could it melt?

**Sutra:

"Suppose that the fire came from the moxa tinder. Then why is fire generated only when the bright mirror comes into contact with the dazzling light?

Commentary:** Suppose you say the fire is produced from the tinder. **Suppose that the fire came from the moxa tinder. Then why is fire generated only when the bright mirror comes into contact with the dazzling light?** The light of the sun and the light from the speculum shine on the tinder and then there is fire. If the fire were to come from the moxa tinder, then the tinder should produce fire by itself. It shouldn’t be necessary to wait for the sunlight and the speculum to start the fire. So it is not reasonable for you to say that the fire comes from the tinder, either.

**Sutra:“Furthermore, on closer examination you will find the speculum held in hands, the sun high up in the sky, and moxa grown from the ground. Where does the fire come from? How can it travel some distance to reach here?

Commentary:**
"**Furthermore, on closer examination -** you should look into this in greater detail - **you will find the speculum held in hands, the sun high up in the sky, and moxa grown from the ground. Where does the fire come from? How can it travel some distance to reach here?** The three - speculum, sunlight, and tinder - come from different places. Where, ultimately, does the fire come from? Where is the home that it leaves to come here?” the Buddha asks Ananda. It can’t reasonably be said to originate in the hand, the sky, or the earth, the three places mentioned above.

**Sutra: “The sun and the speculum cannot mix and unite, since they are far apart from each other. Nor can it be that the fire exists spontaneously, without an origin.

Commentary:The sun and the speculum cannot mix and unite, since they are far apart from each other.** The sunlight and the speculum are very, very far removed from each other. You cannot say they mix and you cannot say they unite. Why? They do not come together; how could they mix and unite? Now the twelve hundred and fifty great bhikshus are here together, but how can you say the sun and the speculum are together? They are very far apart. “Furthermore, upon closer examination you will find the mirror held in the hands, the sun high in the sky, and the moxa grown in the ground. Where does fire come from? How can it travel some distance to reach here?”

**Nor can it be that the fire exists spontaneously, without an origin.** But it should not be that the fire doesn’t come from anywhere at all but simply exists of itself.

P3 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

**Sutra:

"You simply do not know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of fire is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true fire. Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm. It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.

Commentary:**Ananda, **you simply do not know** that the principles explained above are all contained **in the treasury of the Thus Come One.** Where have you gone to look for them? **The nature of fire is true emptiness.** The property of fire by nature has true emptiness within it. **And the nature of emptiness is true fire.** Within the property of emptiness is true fire. **Pure at its origin -** it is fundamentally pure - **it pervades the dharma-realm.** This element of fire pervades the dharma-realm. It is everywhere. **It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.

Sutra:“Ananda, you should know that fire is generated in the place where a speculum is held up to the sunlight, and fire will be generated everywhere if specula are held up to the sunlight throughout the dharma-realm. Since fire can come forth throughout the whole world, can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?

Commentary: Ananda, you should know that fire is generated in the place where a speculum is held up to the sunlight, and fire will be generated everywhere if specula are held up to the sunlight throughout the dharma-realm.** If everyone in the world held up a speculum to the sun, fire would arise everywhere. **Since fire can come forth throughout the whole world, can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?** Where would you say the fire is? Where does it come from? Therefore, what we call the element fire pervades the dharma-realm.

P4 He rejects the two theories for being mere conjectures.

**Sutra:“It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.**

O3 The element water.
P1 He reveals the nature and searches for it.

Sutra:

**"Ananda, water is by nature unstable. It may keep on flowing or come to a stop. Kapila, Chakra, Padma, and Hasta, and other great magicians of Shravasti often hold up instruments to the light of the full moon at midnight to extract from the moon the essence of water to mix with their drugs.

Commentary:Ananda, water is by nature unstable.** Earth and fire have been discussed; now water will be explained. Each of these is an element, for which the Chinese character is (*da*), which literally means “great.” These elements are said to be “great” because they pervade all places, inexhaustibly.

The nature of water is unstable. It is said,

When the opening is to the east,
the water flows east;
When the opening is to the west,
the water flows west.

If you gouge out the bank of a pool, river, stream, lake, or sea, the water will flow out in whatever direction you make the cut. A body of water has no fixed boundaries, so the text says that water is by nature unstable. **It may keep on flowing or come to a stop.** It stops and goes; it is not constant or uniform. **Kapila, Chakra, Padma, and Hasta, and other great magicians of Shravasti -** the immortal, Kapila, of the City of Abundance and Virtue, was an adherent of the “religion of the yellow haired.” It was explained earlier that Matangi was a follower of a magician of the religion of the yellow haired and that she had learned the “former Brahma Heaven mantra” from him.

Besides these four great magicians, there were many others - too many to be mentioned by name - so the text says, “and other great magicians.” Magicians deal with illusion, with what is false and empty. They **often hold up instruments to the light of the full moon at midnight to extract from the moon the essence of water to mix with their drugs.** They wanted to use the moon essence in their illusory medicines which confused people. These medicines were like the present day LSD, which, although not mixed with essence of the moon, is nonetheless close to the kind of drug being discussed. They caused people to see everything as strange and to think of themselves as having already become enlightened. They caused nervous disorders and caused people to be upside-down and unreliable. On the night of the full moon, the fifteenth day of the month in the lunar calendar, they made use of instruments - a square pan and a crystal ball - to extract the essence of water. When the crystal ball is held in the moonlight on the night of the fifteenth, water will come forth and gather in the pan. The water is then used to mix with the drugs. There probably isn’t much water that comes forth.

P2 He explains the search in detail.

**Sutra: “Does the water come out of the crystal ball? Does it exist of itself in space? Or, does it come from the moon?

Commentary:** The water comes forth on the night of the full moon and collects in the pan. **Does the water come out of the crystal ball? Does it exist of itself in space?** Does the water come from space? **Or, does it come from the moon?** Does it come out of the moonlight?

**Sutra:“Ananda, suppose the water came from the distant moon. Water then should also flow from all the grass and trees when the moonlight passes over them on its way to the crystal ball. If it does flow from them, why wait for it to come out of the crystal ball? If it does not flow from the trees, then it is clear that the water does not descend from the moon.

Commentary:Ananda,** now you should think about it; where does that water come from? **Suppose the water came from the distant moon.** If you say the water comes from the moonlight, that it is the water of the essence of the moon, **water then should also flow from all the grass and trees when the moonlight passes over them on its way to the crystal ball.** The moonlight must come from a long way off to cause the instruments to flow forth water. Above it was stated that when the fire passed over the groves and trees they should burn up. Now the groves and trees should all flow forth. That means water should come out of all of them. Whatever place the moonlight passes over, water should flow forth there. **If it does flow from them, why wait for it to come out of the crystal ball?** If the groves and trees all emit water, there is no reason to wait for there to be a crystal ball in order to get water. **If it does not flow from the trees,** if the groves and trees do not flow forth water, **then it is clear that the water does not descend from the moon.** Then you should understand that the water does not come down from the moon.

**Sutra:“If it came from the crystal balls, then it should flow from the crystal all the time. Why would they have to wait for midnight and the light of the full moon to receive it?

Commentary:If it came from the crystal balls** - if you say the water flows forth from the crystal ball - **then it should flow from the crystal all the time. Why would they have to wait for midnight and the light of the full moon to receive it?** Why wait for the arrival of the fifteenth of the month to seek the water? If it were the crystal ball that emits the water, it should come forth at any time at all. So now it has been proven that the water does not come from the moon, and it does not come from the instruments.

**Sutra: “If it came from space, which is by nature boundless, it would flow everywhere, until everything between earth and sky was submerged. How, then, could there still be travel by water, land, and space?

Commentary:If it came from space, which is by nature boundless** - can you tell where the bounds of space are? Can you find them? Since space has no bounds, the water **would flow everywhere**. If, in fact, the water came from space, the water would have no bounds, either. The nature of space is boundless, and you say that water flows forth from within space, and so water should not have any bounds, either. **Until everything between earth and sky was submerged.** Everything would turn into a great sea, and everyone, from the realm of people up through the heavens, would drown. **How, then, could there still be travel by water, land, and space?** Several thousand years ago the Buddha was already talking about air travel, though there were no airplanes at that time. He knew long ago that there would be air travel and space travel. He says that if everything from the realm of people up to the realm of the gods turned into a great sea, there would only be travel by water; there wouldn’t be any dry land or any space. But this is not the case.

**Sutra:“Furthermore, upon closer examination you will find that the moon moves through the sky, the crystal ball is held in the hand, and the pan for receiving the water is put there by someone; but, where does the water that flows into the pan come from?

Commentary:Furthermore, upon closer examination** - you should look into it in detail - **you will find that the moon moves through the sky.** Now, it is not necessarily the case that the moon travels through the sky, but that is the way the text describes it. In the final analysis, when the moon travels in the sky, how far does it go in a single step? And how far does it have to travel to get where it is going? Pay no attention to this point. **The crystal ball is held in the hand, and the pan for receiving the water is put there by someone.** The pan was placed there by a person. The moon and the crystal ball and the pan all have a definite place. **But, where does the water that flows into the pan come from?** The Buddha has just asked whether the water comes from the crystal ball, from the moon, or from space. Where, then, does it come from? How does the water get to the pan?

**Sutra:“The moon and the crystal balls cannot mix or unite, since they are far apart. Nor can it be that the essence of water exists spontaneously without an origin.

Commentary: The moon and the crystal balls cannot mix or unite, since they are far apart.** You may say that the moon and the crystal ball mix and unite to bring about the water; however, being so far apart, how can they unite? It’s not possible. **Nor can it be that the essence of water exists spontaneously without an origin.** The same principle holds for water as was stated for the element of fire. It cannot be that the water comes from nowhere but suddenly appears of itself in the pan. There is no such principle.

P3 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

**Sutra:“You still do not know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of water is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true water. Pure in its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm. It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.

Commentary:** Ananda, **you still do not know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of water is true emptiness.** The nature, replete with water, is actually true emptiness. **And the nature of emptiness is true water.** The nature, replete with emptiness, has truth within it. “Where do you say it comes from, then? It comes from the treasury of the Thus Come One.” It is found in the true minds of all of us living beings. We are replete not only with water, but also with fire, wind, and earth. They are all complete in our minds. Earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, perception, and consciousness, the seven elements, are all complete in our minds. But, though they all exist there, they are not mixed together, messed up, or murky.

**Pure in its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm.** The nature of water is pure at its origin and pervades the dharma-realm. You should know that within it there is wonderful existence. Within true emptiness there is wonderful existence. If you contemplate these principles, you can come to understand them. In other words, when you yourself have *gong fu -* spiritual skill - when you sit in meditation and gain samadhi power and give rise to genuine wisdom, then you can understand that the principles explained in the sutra are true and not false. But, this principle will not be easy to understand now if you are trying to fathom it with your conscious mind.

**It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.** Whatever the minds of living beings in the nine dharma-realms seek can be given them in accord with their intent. Whatever anyone wants they can have, in whatever amount they need. If you need to drink a glass of water, you are given a glass of water; if you need two glasses of water, you have two to drink. Living beings’ wishes are fulfilled in accord with their needs.

**Sutra:“A crystal ball is held up at a certain place, and there water comes forth. If crystal balls were held up throughout the dharma-realm, then throughout the dharma-realm water would come forth. Since water can come forth throughout the entire world, can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?

Commentary:** Where would you say water comes from? The text tells you here. How is it said to be in the treasury of the Thus Come One? **A crystal ball is held up at a certain place** - one person decides he wants some water and holds up the crystal ball - **and there water comes forth. If crystal balls were held up throughout the dharma-realm -** if to the ends of the earth, everyone held up a crystal ball to seek water - **then throughout the dharma-realm water would come forth.** Water would flow from all the billion worlds. All that is needed is someone seeking water. **Since water can come forth throughout the entire world** - if it is possible for it to be produced everywhere in the world - **can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?** If it is everywhere in the entire world, what place can you say it originally comes from? If it comes from a certain place, it can come to me but can’t go to you. If it goes to you, it can’t come to me. But, if everyone holds up the crystal ball, water will come forth for everyone. That is precisely the nature of water in the treasury of the Thus Come One - not dwelling anywhere, and yet dwelling everywhere. It is absolutely everywhere, but it can also be said that it is absent from every place, because if you don’t have the crystal ball, if you don’t employ the method, then it’s not there. The same is true of the nature of fire.

P4 He rejects the two theories for being mere calculations.

**Sutra: “It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign their origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.**

O4 The element wind.
P1 He reveals its nature and explains how it brushes against someone.

Sutra:

**"Ananda, by nature, the wind has no substance, and its movements and stillness are erratic. You always adjust your robe as you enter the great assembly. When the corner of your samghati brushes the person next to you, there is a slight breeze which stirs against that person’s face.

Commentary:** The Buddha spoke again to Ananda: **Ananda, by nature, the wind has no substance.** Let me tell you about the wind, now. **Its movements and stillness are erratic.** Sometimes it is in motion, sometimes it is still. **You always adjust your robe as you enter the great assembly. When the corner of your** samghati **brushes the person next to you, there is a slight breeze which stirs against that person’s face. “**Samghati” is a Sanskrit word which translates in several ways. It is the “many pieced robe” (*za sui yi*), because it is composed of one hundred eight pieces of cloth made in patterns of four long and one short. This robe is also called “the host’s robe” (*zu yi*) and “the great robe” (*da yi*). It is the robe worn by the dharma speaking host. Of the three robes of a left home person, one is five pieces, one is seven pieces, and this one, the samghati, is the “great robe” with the most pieces. When you walk by someone, the corner of your robe brushes against them, your robe makes a breeze. As you move by, a breath of air passes over the face of that person.

**Sutra:“Does this wind come from the corner of the kashaya, does it arise from emptiness, or is it produced from the face of the person brushed by the wind?

Commentary:Does this wind come from the corner of the kashaya**? Does the breeze that blows across the person’s face come from the corner of the *kashaya*, that is, the *samghati*? **Does it arise from emptiness**? Does the wind come out of empty space? **Or is it produced from the face of the person brushed by the wind?** Does the breeze originate from the other person’s face? “Kashaya” is a Sanskrit word which translates as “mute colored” (*huai se*) and indicates that it is “clothing for getting out of the dust” (*li chen fu*).

P2 He explains its brushing against someone in detail.

**Sutra: “Ananda, if the wind comes from the corner of the kashaya, you are then clad in the wind, and your kashaya should fly my robe remains motionless and hangs straight down. You should look closely at my robe to see whether there is any wind in it. It cannot be that the wind is stored somewhere in the robe, either.

Commentary:**
"**Ananda,”** the Buddha again called to Ananda, “**if the wind comes from the corner of the kashaya, you are then clad in the wind, and your kashaya should fly about and leave your body.** The robe should separate from your body; in that case it would be that the wind came from the corner of the robe. **I am now speaking dharma in the midst of the assembly, and my robe remains motionless and hangs straight down.”** Here the Buddha refers to himself as “I.” “I am now speaking dharma in the midst of the Assembly, and my robe remains motionless and hangs straight down. Take a look at it. **You should look closely at my robe to see whether there is any wind in it.** You see my robe hanging down; where is the wind? Is there any wind? **It cannot be that the wind is stored somewhere in the robe, either.** You should not say that there is a place in my robe which harbors the wind and holds it there until it is time for it to blow.”
**Sutra:“If it arose from emptiness, why wouldn’t the wind brush against the man even when your robe did not move? Emptiness is constant in nature; thus, the wind should constantly arise. When there was no wind, the emptiness should disappear. You can perceive the disappearance of the wind; but, what would the disappearance of emptiness look like? If it did arise and disappear, it could not be what is called emptiness. Since it is what is called emptiness, how can it generate wind?

Commentary: If it arose from emptiness -** if you say the wind comes out of empty space - **why wouldn’t the wind brush against the man even when your robe did not move?** The wind comes from the emptiness, but when your robe is not moving, there is no wind. Why not? Why don’t you feel the wind blowing? **Emptiness is constant in nature.** Emptiness is unchanging and constant in nature. **Thus, the wind should constantly arise.** If wind arose from emptiness, there should always be a wind, since emptiness is constant and unchanging. It should not be that sometimes there is wind and sometimes not.

**When there was no wind, the emptiness should disappear.** The Buddha just pointed out that if wind is produced in emptiness, there should always be wind. The converse is that if there is a time when there is no wind, the emptiness should disappear. Without wind, the emptiness would be obliterated. **You can perceive the disappearance of the wind; but, what would the disappearance of emptiness look like?** When the wind is not blowing, it is still. People can sense this; they have an awareness of the absence of wind. But, what would the disappearance of emptiness look like? What would it be like if empty space were obliterated? Can empty space disappear? Basically, emptiness has neither form nor appearance; how could it have a disappearance? Basically, emptiness cannot be obliterated. And so the Buddha deliberately asks Ananda this difficult question.

**If it did arise and disappear, it could not be what is called emptiness. Since it is what is called emptiness, how can it generate wind?** If there is production and extinction in it, it is not what is called emptiness; it is what is called form and appearance. For example, wind can move and be still, and that is a kind of arising and disappearing. And so it is considered a kind of form, not emptiness. Emptiness is called emptiness because there is nothing inside it at all; how then could wind arise from it? Is there any trace of the wind coming out of emptiness? Any pathway for it? What is that pathway like? There isn’t any. This is proof that the wind does not come out of emptiness.

**Sutra:“If the wind came from the face of the person by your side, it would blow upon you while you set your robe in order. Why would it blow backwards upon the person from whom it was generated?

Commentary:If the wind came from the face of the person by your side -** if you say that the wind arose from the face which was brushed by the wind - **it would blow upon you.** It makes sense that wind coming from another’s face should blow on you **while you set your robe in order. Why would it blow backwards upon the person from whom it was generated?** How is it that when you straighten your robes it blows on someone else’s face? If the wind were produced from that person’s face, it should blow on you first. Why, then, when you adjust your clothes, does the breeze from the corner of your robe blow first onto the person’s face?

**Sutra:“Upon closer examination, you will find that the robe is set in order by yourself, the face blown by the wind belongs to the person by your side, and the emptiness is tranquil and not involved in movement. Where, then, does the wind come from that blows in this place?

Commentary:**Ananda, **upon closer examination** - you should look into this well - **you will find that the robe is set in order by yourself.** It is you who move the robe. **The face blown by the wind belongs to the person by your side.** It is another person’s face. **And the emptiness is tranquil.** There is no movement in emptiness: it is there as if asleep, sleeping sweetly without any restlessness. Even breath is cut off. One could say it was like a dead person, but a dead person has form and appearance, while emptiness has no form or appearance. It is tranquil and unmoving, **and not involved in movement,** whereas the wind blows back and forth, flowing and moving like water. **Where, then, does the wind come from that blows in this place?** Where does the element wind come from?

**Sutra:“The wind and emptiness cannot mix and unite, since they are different from each other. Nor should it be that the wind spontaneously exists without an origin.

Commentary:The wind and emptiness cannot mix and unite -** they cannot work together; wind is wind and emptiness is emptiness - **since they are different from each other. Nor should it be that the wind spontaneously exists without an origin.** Basically, the wind does not have a substantial nature, but if it did, it should not be that its substance arose from nothing. It cannot be that the wind exists without having come forth from anywhere. Where, then, does it come from? I have told you many times, and yet you still don’t understand? It comes forth from the treasury of the Thus Come One.

P3 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

**Sutra:“You still do not know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of wind is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true wind. Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm. It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.

Commentary:**Ananda, **you still do not know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of wind is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true wind.** The accumulated nature of wind is genuine emptiness, and the accumulated nature of emptiness is the source of the genuine wind. **Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm.** Within it is a pure origin which pervades the dharma-realm.

**It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.** This nature which pervades the dharma-realm accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know. The response and the Way intertwine so that each living being of the nine dharma-realms has its own awareness, its own scope.

**Sutra:“Ananda, in the same way that you, as one person, move your robe slightly, and a small wind arises, so a wind arises in all countries if there is a similar movement throughout the dharma-realm. Since it can be produced throughout the world, how can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?

Commentary:Ananda, in the same way that you, as one person, move your robe slightly, and a small wind arises** - you move your robe and a breeze comes forth - **so a wind arises in all countries if there is a similar movement throughout the dharma-realm.** If all the people throughout the dharma-realm moved their clothing, then in all countries a wind would arise. **Since it can be produced throughout the world,** in all places, by all people, **how can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?** Ultimately, where would you say the wind comes from?

P4 He rejects the two theories for being mere conjectures.

**Sutra:“It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign their origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which bear no real meaning.

Commentary:It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma.** The wind arises as a result of the karmic retribution which manifests for each person. But, the externalist religions of the world, as well as ignorant people and those of the two vehicles, **are so deluded as to assign their origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity.** People without wisdom get confused, doubtful, and they say that the source of the wind is in causes and conditions. People of the provisional vehicle make the same mistake. Adherents of external religions confusedly consider it to be spontaneous in nature - some think that the wind arises spontaneously. This kind of thinking, this kind of guesswork, **these mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind,** are all the function of the discriminations and considerations of the mind-consciousness. It is **nothing but the play of empty words which bear no real meaning.** Things which can only be discussed are not real. Does the text say here that this matter is apart from the manifestation of words and speech? It says that adherents of external religions and those of the provisional vehicle can only talk. And what they talk about is without real meaning. None of it is true; it’s not right. O5 The element emptiness.

P1 He reveals the nature by digging for it.

**Sutra: “Ananda, the nature of emptiness has no shape; it is only apparent because of form. For instance, Shravasti is far from the river, so when the kshatriyas, brahmans, vaishyas, shudras, bharadvajas, chandalas, and so forth, build their homes there, they dig wells seeking water. Where a foot of earth is removed, there is a foot of emptiness; where as many as ten feet of earth are removed, there are ten feet of emptiness. The depth of the emptiness corresponds to the amount of earth removed.

Commentary:Ananda, the nature of emptiness has no shape; it is only apparent because of form.** Having finished explaining the element wind, the Buddha now discusses the element of emptiness.

How can emptiness be an element? Emptiness, too, pervades the dharma-realm. It is like the earth, water, fire, and wind already discussed. He says, “The nature of emptiness has no shape.” If there is a shape, it is not emptiness. Is there any emptiness in places where there are shapes? Yes, there is not less emptiness in places where there are shapes and forms, and not more emptiness in places where there are no shapes or forms.

You say “If we dig a big pit in the ground, the pit will be filled with emptiness. Isn’t that a case of there being more emptiness?”

Before you dug the pit, the emptiness was not less. The emptiness was contained in the earth. It is the same principle as “Ice is water and water is ice.” Although the ice is hard, water is within it. In this case, the earth has been dug up to reveal emptiness, but actually wherever there is a shape there is emptiness within. It’s not that there isn’t any emptiness there. It’s not the case that there is no emptiness just here where there’s a table. There is still emptiness here. Where is the emptiness? It’s within the table. Thus, emptiness pervades all places. It’s everywhere. The text says, “It is only apparent because of form.” Emptiness hasn’t any shape or form; you can’t see it. Only because of the manifestation of shapes and forms can you distinguish places where there is emptiness. If there were no forms, you would be unaware of emptiness.

**For instance, Shravasti is far from the river,** thus the people of that city can’t use the river water. **So when the kshatriyas,** the royal class, the **brahmans**, the priestly class, the **vaishyas -** the vaishyas are the business class - the **shudras**, who are the servant class, the **bharadvajas, chandalas, and so forth** - those of mean and lowly birth. Chandalas are the butchers, the lowliest people in India. In India, the chandalas had to carry flutes and play upon them as they walked on the streets to let people know they were approaching. They had to separate themselves from the other people. When they **build their homes there, they dig wells seeking water. Where a foot of earth is removed, there is a foot of emptiness.** If you take a foot of dirt out of the earth, a foot of emptiness will appear there. **Where as many as ten feet of earth are removed, there are ten feet of emptiness.** The more you dig down in search of water, the more emptiness will appear. **The depth of the emptiness corresponds to the amount of earth removed.** That’s the way it is at the site of a well.

P2 He explains the digging in detail.

**Sutra: “Does this emptiness come out of the dirt, does it exist because of the digging, or does it arise of itself without a cause?

Commentary:**Now I’m asking you, Ananda. When a well is drilled, emptiness is created. What do you say? **Does this emptiness come out of the dirt?** Is it because of the dirt that the emptiness appears? **Does it exist because of the digging?** Is it because the earth is drilled that the emptiness exists? **Or does it arise of itself without a cause?** Is it that the emptiness arises of itself, for no reason at all? Where do you say the emptiness comes from?

**Sutra:“Moreover, Ananda, suppose this emptiness arose of itself without any cause. Why wasn’t it unobstructed before the earth was dug? Quite the contrary, one saw only the great earth; there was no emptiness evident in it.

Commentary:Moreover, Ananda, suppose this emptiness arose of itself without any cause.** Suppose it came about by itself without any reason and without any conditions for it. **Why wasn’t it unobstructed before the earth was dug?** Why wasn’t it free from obstruction? Before the earth was drilled there was an obstruction; something was blocking the emptiness. **Quite the contrary, one saw only the great earth; there was no emptiness evident in it.** There wasn’t a place of emptiness that could be penetrated. It was exactly the opposite of penetrating.

**Sutra:“If emptiness came about because of the removal of the earth, we should have seen it entering the well as the earth was removed. If emptiness was not seen entering the well when the earth was first removed, how can we say that emptiness came about because of the removal of the earth?

Commentary:If emptiness came about because of the removal of the earth** - if emptiness took advantage of the removal of earth to make its appearance - **we should have seen it entering the well as the earth was removed.** You should be able to see how the emptiness goes in. How does emptiness go in? Basically emptiness has no form or appearance; how can it be seen? Emptiness can’t go in; emptiness is not produced and not extinguished. It does not go in or come out. **If emptiness was not seen entering the well when the earth was first removed** - if one does not see any emptiness go in when the earth is removed - **how can we say that emptiness came about because of the removal of the earth?** If you don’t see the emptiness go in when the earth comes out, how can you say that emptiness exists because of the removal of the earth? You can’t explain it that way.

**Sutra:“If there is no going in or coming out, then there is no difference between the earth and emptiness. Why, then, doesn’t emptiness come out of the well along with the earth in the process of digging?

Commentary:If there is no going in or coming out** - if you want to say that the emptiness neither goes in or comes out. The Buddha suspects that Ananda has another argument: “Emptiness is merely emptiness; it doesn’t go in or come out.” However, if it neither goes in nor comes out, **then there is no difference between the earth and emptiness.** If we accept your theory that emptiness doesn’t go in or come out, then there’s no distinction between emptiness and earth. If there’s no distinction between them, emptiness is just earth and earth is just emptiness. Emptiness and earth are one. Emptiness and earth are non dual. Since they are the same, **why, then, doesn’t emptiness come out of the well along with the earth in the process of digging?** You say that they are the same, so when the earth comes out, why doesn’t the emptiness follow it?

**Sutra:“If emptiness appeared because of the digging, then the digging would bring out emptiness instead of the earth. If emptiness does not come out because of the digging, then the digging yields only earth. Why, then, do we see emptiness appear as the well is dug?

Commentary:**Suppose you say that **emptiness appeared because of the digging** into the earth. If that is reasonable, **then** it follows that **the digging would bring out emptiness instead of the earth.** The drilling should remove the emptiness, not the earth. Why, then, does it remove the earth? **If emptiness does not come out because of the digging -** if you say that it is not because of drilling the well that the emptiness appears - **then the digging yields only earth. Why, then, do we see emptiness appear as the well is dug?** Since what the drilling removes is earth, why do you then see emptiness? How does the emptiness come into being?

**Sutra:“You should consider this even more carefully. Look into it deeply, and you will find that the digging comes from the person’s hand as its means of conveyance, and the earth exists because of a change in the ground. But what causes the emptiness to appear?

Commentary:**The Buddha tells Ananda: **You should consider this even more carefully.** Investigate this. Really **look into it deeply** and in detail. **And you will find that the digging comes from the person’s hand as its means of conveyance.** The drilling is done with a spade. **And the earth exists because of a change in the ground.** That is, the dirt moves out of the earth and the well is made. **But what causes the emptiness to appear?** How does the emptiness come about?

**Sutra:“The digging and the emptiness, one being substantial and the other insubstantial, do not function on the same plane. They do not mix and unite. Nor can it be that emptiness exists spontaneously without an origin.

Commentary:The digging** is **substantial**, **and the emptiness** is **insubstantial.** The drilling is the false, the emptiness is the true. They **do not function on the same plane.** Digging and emptiness don’t function together. **They do not mix and unite.** So in this there is no mixing and there is no uniting. **Nor can it be that emptiness exists spontaneously without an origin.** But, what is emptiness ultimately like? How does it arise? It’s not the case that emptiness gives rise to itself. It’s not that emptiness comes into being without any reason, with no cause at all.

P3 He puts them together and admonishes him to awaken.
**Sutra: “Although the nature of emptiness is completely pervasive, it is basically unmoving. You should know that it and earth, water, fire, and wind are together called the five elements. Their natures are true and perfectly fused, and all are the treasury of the Thus Come One, fundamentally devoid of production and extinction.**

**Commentary:Although the nature of emptiness is completely pervasive, it is basically unmoving. You should know that it and earth, water, fire, and wind are together called the five elements. Their natures are true and perfectly fused.** The nature of emptiness is also true and not false; it is perfect and perfectly fused without obstruction. **All are the treasury of the Thus Come One.** Why is it perfectly fused without obstruction? It comes forth from the treasury of the Thus Come One and is **fundamentally devoid of production and extinction.** So it is neither produced nor destroyed.

**Sutra:"Ananda, your mind is murky and confused, and you do not awaken to the fact that the source of the four elements is none other than the treasury of the Thus Come One. Why do you not take a look at emptiness to see whether it is subject to such relativities as coming and going?

Commentary:Ananda, your mind is murky and confused.** You are so stupid! Your mind is too murky, too lacking in understanding, **and you do not awaken to the fact that the source of the four elements is none other than the treasury of the Thus Come One.** I have explained the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind to you before, but you still don’t understand. You are still mixed up. You don’t understand that the four elements are basically the treasury of the Thus Come One. Therefore, now you should **take a look at emptiness to see whether it is subject to such relativities as coming and going?** Does emptiness ultimately come out or go in? Or is it that it doesn’t come out and doesn’t go in, either? Look it over; consider it carefully.

P4 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

**Sutra:“You do not know at all that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of enlightenment is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true enlightenment. Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm.

Commentary:You do not know at all.** Now it has reached the point that Ananda doesn’t understand at all. **That in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of enlightenment is true emptiness.** The essence of the nature of enlightenment is the nature of the substance of true emptiness. **And the nature of emptiness is true enlightenment.** And the essence of the nature of emptiness is the nature of the substance of genuine, wonderful enlightenment. **Pure at its origin** - this state of being is pure at its source, and **it pervades the dharma-realm.** Thus, emptiness and the four elements mentioned above are all pure at their origin, and they all pervade the dharma realm. Since that is the case, how can they go in or come out?

**Sutra:“It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.

Commentary:It accords with living beings’ minds** throughout the nine dharma-realms, **in response to their capacity to know.** They come to know however much they should know, whether it is a little or a lot, big or small.

**Sutra:“Ananda, if in one place there is a well empty of earth, there will be emptiness filling up that one place. If there are wells empty of earth in the ten directions, there will be emptiness filling them up in the ten directions. Since it fills up the ten directions, is there any fixed location in which emptiness is found?

Commentary:Ananda,** I will now tell you clearly. **If in one place there is a well empty of earth, there will be emptiness filling up that one place** - the emptiness fills up the whole well. **If there are wells empty of earth in the ten directions, there will be emptiness filling them up in the ten directions.** If there were wells everywhere throughout the ten directions, the ten directions would be replete with emptiness. Emptiness everywhere follows the principle explained above. **Since it fills up the ten directions** - since there is emptiness in every place, anywhere there is a well there will be emptiness. **Is there any fixed** direction or **location in which emptiness is found?** Can you still say that there is a place that emptiness comes from and a place it goes to? It doesn’t come or go.

P5 He rejects the two theories for being mere conjectures.

**Sutra: “It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign their origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which bear no real meaning.

Commentary: It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma.** According to the karmic obstacles of living beings, such karmic retributions as these arise. They come about through the wonderful functioning of the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One. But, **ignorant of this fact, people in the world** - adherents of the provisional teaching, ordinary people, and adherents of externalist religions, who lack wisdom - **are so deluded as to assign their origin to causes and conditions.** They are confused about this principle and call it causes and conditions. Adherents of other religions say that it is the principle of spontaneity; they ascribe the arisal of emptiness to **spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind** - it is a case of using the considering, discriminating, conscious mind to distinguish and calculate. They **are nothing but the play of empty words which bear no real meaning.** But, it is merely a principle which lends itself to discussion; it is not a true principle. What they discuss is not proper theory, but idle speculation. O6 The element seeing.
P1 He reveals the nature and explains it by using the mundane “dust.”

**Sutra: “Ananda, the seeing awareness does not perceive by itself. It depends upon form and emptiness for its existence. You are now in the Jeta Grove where you see brightness in the morning and darkness in the evening. Deep in the night you will see brightness when the moon arises and darkness when no moon is visible. The brightness and darkness are discerned by the seeing.

Commentary: Ananda, the seeing awareness does not perceive by itself.** The seeing awareness has no knowing or feeling. There is no awareness in seeing by itself. Seeing is simply seeing. The element of seeing is just the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One. The seeing awareness refers to this seeing essence which is clear, bright, and does not set up subject and object and so it basically is devoid of “perception” and “that which is perceived.”

**It depends upon form and emptiness for its existence.** It is because there is form and emptiness that there is perception. But it’s not that seeing in its basic substance has perception; it is in the presence of form and emptiness that this distinction arises. **You are now in the Jeta Grove** - you, Ananda, are now in the grove of Prince War Victory - **where you see brightness in the morning and darkness in the evening. Deep in the night** - suppose you were there at midnight - **you will see brightness when the moon is visible.** On a night when the moon is not visible, it’s dark. These two, **the brightness and darkness are discerned by the seeing.** How do we know light and dark? The seeing discriminates the light and dark. **It depends upon form and emptiness for its existence.** It is because there is form and emptiness that there is perception. But, it’s not that seeing in its basic substance is perception; it is in the presence of form and emptiness that this distinction arises.

P2 He explains the “dust” in detail.

**Sutra: “Is the seeing identical in substance with brightness, darkness, and emptiness, or are they not the same substance? Are they the same and yet different, or are they not the same and yet not different?

Commentary: Is the seeing identical in substance with brightness, darkness, and emptiness, or are they not the same substance?** Would you say that seeing and emptiness were one identical substance, or not? **Are they the same and yet different, or are they not the same and yet not different?** Perhaps they are identical and yet not identical; perhaps they are not the same and yet not different. Ananda, you explain it. Are seeing and emptiness one or two?

**Sutra:“Ananda, suppose seeing were one with brightness, darkness, and emptiness. It so happens that where there is darkness there is no brightness, and where there is brightness there is no darkness, because the two cancel each other out. If it were one with darkness, it would cease to exist in brightness; if it were one with brightness, it would cease to exist in darkness. Such being the case, how could it perceive both brightness and darkness? If brightness and darkness differ from each other, how can they form a unity with seeing, which transcends production and destruction?

Commentary:**The Buddha again calls out. **Ananda, suppose seeing** - that which can see - **were one with brightness, darkness, and emptiness.** Suppose there were no distinctions between them. But, **it so happens that where there is darkness there is no brightness, and where there is brightness there is no darkness, because the two cancel each other out.** Light is not dark, and dark is not light. How can you say light and dark are the same substance? The natures of the two substances, light and dark, are destructive of each other: when it is dark, there is certainly no light; when there is light, there can’t be any darkness. **If it were one with darkness -** if you say the seeing and the darkness are of one substance, one and the same - **it would cease to exist in brightness.** The seeing which sees darkness would certainly be destroyed. **If it were one with brightness -** if you are determined to say that the seeing and the light are one and the same, of one substance - **it would cease to exist in darkness.** When there is darkness, your seeing should be destroyed. **Such being the case, how could it perceive both brightness and darkness?** If your seeing has disappeared, how can you say you see light and see darkness?

**If brightness and darkness differ from each other** - suppose, instead, that they are of two kinds and not the same - **how can they form a unity with seeing, which transcends production and destruction?** Light and darkness are different, but the seeing is devoid of production and extinction. How can you say emptiness and light are the same substance as the seeing? How can natures which are different from one another be identical with something which is neither produced nor destroyed?

**Sutra:“Suppose that the essence of seeing were not of one substance with brightness and darkness, and that you were separate from light, darkness, and emptiness. Then what shape and appearance would the source of the seeing have, as you distinguish it?

Commentary: Suppose that the essence of seeing were not of one substance with brightness and darkness -** that it is not one with them - **and that you were separate from light, darkness, and emptiness** - you depart from light, darkness, and emptiness. **Then what shape and appearance would the source of the seeing have, as you distinguish it?** What is the seeing like? Does it have an appearance? Is it something you can see?

**Sutra: “In the absence of darkness, brightness, and emptiness, the seeing would be the same as hair on a tortoise or horns on a hare. How could we establish the seeing perception without the presence of the three qualities of brightness, darkness, and emptiness?

Commentary: In the absence of darkness, brightness, and emptiness, the seeing would be the same as hair on a tortoise or horns on a hare.** It would be just that impossible. If you were separate from light, darkness, and emptiness, you would be unable to bring forth your seeing. **How could we establish the seeing perception without the presence of the three qualities of brightness, darkness, and emptiness?** If these three were not the same as your seeing, at what place would you establish your seeing?

**Sutra:“How could we say that the seeing was one with darkness and brightness, since brightness and darkness are opposites? Yet, how can we say that it was different from the three qualities mentioned, since in their absence the seeing perception can never be established?

Commentary:How could we say that the seeing was one with darkness and brightness, since brightness and darkness are opposites?** When there is light there is no darkness, and when there is darkness there is no light. They cannot coexist. You can see the darkness of your own shadow on one side of your body and light on the other side, but even then they cannot combine as one - they are mutually opposed. Since they are mutually opposed, how could you possibly say that they are the same? **Yet, how can we say that it was different from the three qualities mentioned, since in their absence the seeing perception can never be established?** If you were separate from light, darkness, and emptiness, there wouldn’t be any seeing. How could you say it was different, and how could you say it was not different?

**Sutra: “How could we say that the seeing was not one with emptiness, since no boundary is established between them when they are separated from each other? How could we say that they were not different, since the seeing always remains unchanged, regardless of whether it is perceiving brightness or perceiving darkness?

Commentary: How could we say that the seeing was not one with emptiness, since no boundary is established between them when they are separated from each other?** There’s no boundary. Can you say where the boundaries of seeing are and where the boundaries of emptiness are? There are no boundaries. If they were not the same, there would be boundaries between them. **How could we say that they were not different, since the seeing always remains unchanged, regardless of whether it is perceiving brightness or perceiving darkness?** You see light and you see dark, but the nature of seeing does not change. Why would you say they were not two?

**Sutra: “You should examine this in even greater detail, investigate it minutely, consider and contemplate it carefully. The light comes from the sun and darkness from the absence of the moon; penetration belongs to emptiness, and solidity returns to the earth. From what does the essence of seeing arise?

Commentary:**Ananda, **you should examine this in even greater detail** than before, **investigate it minutely,** with particular attention, **consider and contemplate it carefully. The light comes from the sun -** the appearance of light comes from the sun - **and darkness from the absence of the moon.** At night, when there is no moonlight, it is dark. **Penetration belongs to emptiness, and solidity returns to the earth.** The places where there is no penetration - solid places like walls and the earth - are obstructive in nature and impenetrable. **From what does the essence of seeing arise?** But, look for the essence of your seeing which can see. From where does it come forth? You see if you can find it.

**Sutra:“Seeing has awareness, and emptiness is inanimate: they do not mix and unite. Nor can it be that the essence of seeing arises spontaneously without an origin.

Commentary:Seeing has awareness, and emptiness is inanimate.** There is an awareness to seeing, whereas emptiness is dull, inanimate, and lacks awareness. One has awareness, one lacks it. **They do not mix and unite.** They cannot join together. **Nor can it be that the essence of seeing arises spontaneously without an origin.** But, it cannot be that the essence of seeing comes forth by itself and sees without any causes and conditions. There is no such principle.

P3 He puts them together and admonishes him to awaken.

**Sutra: “If the faculties of seeing, hearing, and knowing are by nature all pervasive and unmoving, you should know that the stable, boundless emptiness, together with the unstable elements such as earth, water, fire, and wind, are together known as the six elements. They are, in nature, true and perfectly fused and thus are the treasury of the Thus Come One, fundamentally devoid of production and destruction.

Commentary: If the faculties of seeing, hearing, and knowing are by nature all pervasive and unmoving** - the nature is perfectly fused and pervades the dharma-realm - **you should know that the stable, boundless emptiness, together with the unstable elements such as earth, water, fire, and wind -** earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, and seeing - **are together known as the six elements. They are, in nature, true and perfectly fused and thus are the treasury of the Thus Come One.** They are a manifestation of the nature of the Thus Come One’s treasury. **Fundamentally devoid of production and destruction.

Sutra:“Ananda, your nature is so submerged that you have not realized that your seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing are basically the treasury of the Thus Come One. You should contemplate seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing to see whether they are subject to production and extinction; whether they are identical or different; whether they are not subject to production and extinction; and whether they are not identical and not different.

Commentary:**At this point the Buddha reprimands Ananda again, “**Ananda, your nature is so submerged.** Ananda, your attitude is sunken and submerged. You don’t think about elevating yourself; you only think about lowering yourself.” As it says,

The refined person aims high.
The petty person aims low.

The Buddha scolds him, saying, “Your disposition isn’t at all resolute. You’re really wishy washy. You’re useless; there’s nothing that can be done for you.” When the Buddha says his nature is submerged, it’s just the same as telling him he’s gutless. He’s just like people who are fond of sleep - whenever there’s an opportunity, they go to sleep. That is also an indication of being submerged.

**That you have not realized that your seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing are basically the treasury of the Thus Come One.** You have not become enlightened. Your seeing, hearing, awareness and knowing are all the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One.

Since you still don’t understand, I will now give you an opportunity. **You should contemplate seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing -** take a look - **to see whether they are subject to production and extinction.** Are the essence of seeing, the nature of hearing, and the nature of awareness and knowing produced or extinguished? **Whether they are identical or different; whether they are not subject to production and extinction; and whether they are not identical and not different.** Distinguish this matter in detail.

P4 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

**Sutra: “You still don’t know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of seeing is enlightened brightness; the essence of enlightenment is bright seeing. Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm.

Commentary:You still don’t know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of seeing is enlightened brightness.** It is the brilliance of the substance of enlightenment. **The essence of enlightenment is bright seeing.** The ultimate enlightenment that you obtain is the perception of brilliance. **Pure at its origin -** the fundamental nature is pure, and - **it pervades the dharma-realm.

Sutra:“It accords with living beings’ minds in response to their capacity to know. Consider, for example, the sense organ of seeing. Its seeing pervades the dharma-realm. The same is true of the luster of the wonderful virtue of hearing, smelling, tasting, contact, and knowing. Since they fill emptiness in the ten directions throughout the dharma-realm, how could there be any fixed location in which they are found?

Commentary:**The seeing nature **accords with living beings’ minds in response to their capacity to know. Consider, for example, the sense organ of seeing. Its seeing pervades the dharma-realm. The same is true of the luster of the wonderful virtue of hearing, smelling, tasting, contact, and knowing.** Their function is extremely subtle and wonderful, and their merit and virtue is inconceivable, with a luster like jade, glowing and translucent. **Since they fill emptiness in the ten directions throughout the dharma-realm -** it exists in the ten directions to the bounds of empty space - **how could there be any fixed location** or direction **in which they are found?** What fixed place could it have in addition? It is neither there nor not there. Because it doesn’t have a place, there’s no place that is not its place. It is a pervading substance with vast functioning.

P5 He rejects the two theories for being mere conjectures.

**Sutra: “It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.

Commentary:It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma.** According to living beings’ karma, its function becomes apparent. **Ignorant of this fact, people in the world -** ordinary people, those who study the provisional teaching, and adherents of external paths - **are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions,** or they may confusedly ascribe it to **spontaneity.** This method of thought arises **from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind.** It is **nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.** The principles which they elicit are not actually true; they are not based on the primary truth. Nor are they the principle of real appearance which I am now explaining.

O7 The element consciousness.
P1 He reveals the organ and object.

**Sutra: “Ananda, the nature of consciousness has no source, but is a false manifestation based on the six organs and objects. Now, take a look at the entire holy assembly gathered here. As you glance at each one in turn, everything you see is like what is seen in a mirror, where nothing has any special distinction.

Commentary:**The earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, and seeing already discussed are six elements. Now we add consciousness to make seven elements. What is “consciousness?” It is recognition or lack of it. What is recognized and what is not recognized? Nothing at all is recognized.

"Consciousness” is defined as intelligent comprehension. Intelligence is understanding, and comprehension is discerning.

Why did I say the consciousness doesn’t recognize anything at all? What do you think you recognize? You say, “I recognize Mr. Smith, the third. I recognize Mr. Lee, the fourth. I recognize Mr. Wang, the fifth. Mr. Brown, the sixth.” I say, “So what?” You say, “I recognize them, and they are my friends.” It’s just because you recognize them as your friends that they have dragged you away, and you recognize what is false as true. You recognize a false friend as your true friend. And you have forgotten your true friends. Mr. Smith is the third, Mr. Lee is the fourth, Mr. Wang is the fifth, and Mr. Brown is the sixth. There’s nobody “the seventh,” because basically this consciousness is the elder “seventh.” So, the six elements discussed above and this seventh one, consciousness, are like seven siblings. But you’ve gone outside in recognition of your friends and have forgotten your seven siblings. You don’t recognize the earth, you don’t recognize the water, you don’t recognize fire, you don’t recognize wind. That’s four you don’t recognize; and you don’t recognize emptiness. Nor do you recognize seeing. Not only do you not recognize them, even Ananda didn’t recognize them. So the Buddha, not fearing to take trouble, found them for him one by one. He found his seven siblings. These are your genuine flesh and blood relatives, your genuine companions of this dharma-door. But you don’t recognize them. You just keep hanging on to Smith the third, Lee the fourth, Wang the fifth, Brown the sixth, these possessive friends, and leave your real relatives abandoned at home. And, so I ask you what you recognize. You don’t recognize anything. And what you don’t recognize is all yours. You reject the inherent worth, the scenery of your homeland. But when you get outside, you cast off the root and grasp at the branches. You renounce what is close and seek what is distant. You go outside and get involved with people. Wouldn’t you say this is upside-down? Why do you go outside and get involved with people and don’t recognize your own flesh and blood relatives? Because you take what is false as true. You take a thief as your son. You recognize a thief as your friend and go outside to use your conscious mind to do things.

You say, “What I’m using right now is the conscious mind.” Right. You’re really smart. You’re smarter than I am. I am now lecturing the sutra, and I hadn’t recognized this as the conscious mind. But now that you say that, I understand. So I’ll say some more. In the small vehicle, when you take what is false as true and use the conscious mind, it can be harmful. Now you recognize the false and the true. You have found the seven siblings of your household, and so now, although the conscious mind is false, it has turned into the treasury of the Thus Come One. It appears from within the treasury of the Thus Come One. That is called “turning from appearances and returning to the nature.” In the past you were attached entirely to appearances, but now you understand the self nature. Since you understand the self nature, you should no longer renounce what is near to seek what is far, renounce the roots and grasp at the branches, or recognize a thief as your son. Then there is some hope for you. Then you have some wealth.

I have talked to you about reciting the Shurangama Mantra. If you are able to recite the Shurangama Mantra, you will be one of the world’s wealthiest people for the next seven lives. In fact, right now, if you are able to recite the Shurangama Mantra, you are one of the world’s wealthiest people, because you understand this dharma treasure. And, when you put this dharma treasure in your heart, tell me, who can steal it from you? Whatever kind of robber or thief there might be couldn’t rob you of it. That dharma treasure is in your own self nature. It is deposited in the vault of your Thus Come One treasury. And no one can find a way to go in there and steal it. How wonderful would you say that is? If you understand the Buddhadharma, then right now you are one of the world’s wealthiest people. But for the time being you can’t use your wealth. When you become a Buddha, then it will belong to you. Right now it’s just in trust under your name, but you aren’t of age yet, so for the time being you can’t use it.

**Ananda, the nature of consciousness has no source -** it doesn’t come from anywhere. To put it otherwise, it has no root.

”Well, then, what is it?” you wonder.

It is **a false manifestation based on the six organs and objects.** In order to appear, it borrows the six organs of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and the six objects of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and dharmas - the “seeing division” and the “appearance division.”

**Now, take a look at the entire holy assembly gathered here.** Ananda, look into this thoroughly, now. Contemplate those in this Shurangama dharma assembly who have certified to the fruition of sagehood. **As you glance at each one in turn -** look from one to the next in orderly sequence - **everything you see is like what is seen in a mirror, where nothing has any special distinction.** You look all around, and what you see is just like reflections in a mirror. What special distinctions are there? The text here is discussing the function of the consciousness.

**Sutra: “However, your consciousness will identify them one by one: for example, Manjushri, Purna, Maudgalyayana, Subhuti, and Shariputra.

Commentary:However,** Ananda, **your consciousness will identify them one by one.** Take a look at the multitude in this dharma assembly, and sequentially identify them. **For example, Manjushri,** the Bodhisattva Wonderfully Auspicious; **Purna -** this is Purnamaitreyaniputra, whose name means “son of completeness and compassion.” This is **Maudgalyayana**, whose name means “descendent of a family of bean gatherers.” This is **Subhuti**, whose name means “born into emptiness.” Why is Subhuti called “born into emptiness”? Because when he was born, all the treasures in the storehouses disappeared. That doesn’t mean they were stolen by thieves. All the storehouses were very secure and locked tightly; but, the treasures inside were gone. So he was called “born into emptiness.” After seven days had passed, all the treasures reappeared. So he is also called “good appearance.” His father went to a diviner to have his son’s horoscope read, and the reading was “both good and lucky.” So he was also called “auspicious and good.” Those were his three names.

This is **Shariputra**. Who was Shariputra? He was the one who out debated his uncle while he was still in his mother’s womb. His uncle was frightened by the thought of what his nephew would be like after he was born, and he felt that he would really lose face if he was defeated in debate by his nephew. So he went around India to study all kinds of theories, and he came back to debate with his nephew. But his nephew had already left the home life under the Buddha. The uncle wanted to steal his nephew back, so he challenged the Buddha to a debate. Who would have guessed that he’d be defeated without winning a single round? He was beaten at his own game.

P2 Explains the organ and object.

**Sutra: “Does the discerning faculty of the conscious mind come from seeing, from forms, or from emptiness, or does it arise suddenly without a cause?

Commentary: Does the discerning faculty of the conscious mind.** The consciousness has a comprehending nature; it comprehends and discriminates all appearances. But from where does the basic substance of consciousness arise? Where does it come from? What is the mother of consciousness? Does it **come from seeing**? Is seeing the mother of consciousness? Is the ability to see the mother of consciousness? Does it arise **from forms**? Are things with form and appearance the mother of consciousness? Does it arise **from emptiness**? Or is empty space the mother of consciousness? Ultimately, what is its mother? **Or does it arise suddenly without a cause?** Or is it born suddenly, without a mother? Are there things in the world which suddenly come into being without a mother? Where does the consciousness come from?

**Sutra: “Ananda, suppose your consciousness came from seeing. If there were no brightness, darkness, form, and emptiness - if these four did not exist you could not see. With seeing non existent, what would be the origin of your consciousness?

Commentary: Ananda, suppose your consciousness came from seeing.** Suppose the nature of the substance of your consciousness was born from seeing. **If there were no brightness, darkness -** if the two appearances of light and darkness did not exist - **form, and emptiness -** if nothing existed that had a nature which is visible, and if there were no emptiness - **if these four did not exist -** if these four causes and conditions did not exist - **you could not see -** your seeing would not exist, either. Without light, darkness, form, or emptiness, you wouldn’t have any seeing.

**With seeing non existent, what would be the origin of your consciousness?** If the mother does not exist, how can the child be born? So, the consciousness does not arise from seeing.

**Sutra:
"If your consciousness arose from form rather than from seeing, it would not see either in brightness or in darkness. In the absence of brightness and darkness, it would not see form or emptiness, either. In the absence of form, where would your consciousness come from?

Commentary:If your consciousness arose from form rather than from seeing.** It has just been established that consciousness is not born from seeing. Perhaps, then, you say that it arises from appearances. **In the absence of brightness and darkness -** if it does not come from seeing, it cannot see light or darkness. Therefore, **it does not see form or emptiness, either.** If it can’t see light or darkness, how can it see form, appearances, or emptiness? **In the absence of form, where would your consciousness come from?** If there are no appearances to be its mother, where does the child called consciousness come from? Tell me.

**Sutra: “If it came from emptiness, it is neither an appearance nor the seeing. Since it does not see, it is unable by itself to discern brightness, darkness, form, or emptiness. Since it is not an appearance, it is in itself devoid of external conditions. Therefore, there is no place for seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing to be established.

Commentary:If it came from emptiness** - you may say that the mother of consciousness is simply emptiness. In that case, **it is neither an appearance nor the seeing.** There isn’t any appearance, and there isn’t any seeing. **Since it does not see, it is unable by itself to discern brightness, darkness, form, or emptiness.** Without any discriminations, it cannot know them at all. **Since it is not an appearance, it is in itself devoid of external conditions.** If there are no appearances, conditions are also extinguished. There are no conditions at all, **therefore, there is no place for seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing to be established.** And since there is no seeing, hearing, awareness, or knowing, the situation is just as already explained: without the mother there’s no way the child can be born.

**Sutra: “Since its location is devoid of these two, the consciousness that arises from emptiness would be the same as non existent. Even if it did exist, it would not be the same as a thing. Even if your consciousness came forth from it, how would it discern anything?

Commentary:Since its location is devoid of these two, the consciousness that arises from emptiness would be the same as non existent.** If you propose that it comes from emptiness, it would be devoid of the ability to see or of an appearance of its own. So if it is from emptiness, it is the same as non existent. It’s incorrect to be on the side of existence, and incorrect to be on the side of emptiness. If you can see it, no consciousness is born from it. If you can’t see it - if you don’t see anything at all, how can there be consciousness? If it were to arise from emptiness, it would not exist, and if it doesn’t exist, how can a consciousness come forth from it? **Even if it did exist, it would not be the same as a thing.** You may say that it exists, that it is produced from something that exists, but it’s not like a physical object. You can’t see it. So what is it? **Even if your consciousness came forth from it -** supposing that your consciousness arises from emptiness - **how would it discern anything?** How would your consciousness make discriminations? Tell me.

**Sutra: “If it suddenly comes forth without a cause, why can’t you discern the moonlight within the sunlight?

Commentary:** You say, “Ah, the consciousness suddenly appears.” **If it suddenly comes forth without a cause,** without any reason at all, **why can’t you discern the moonlight within the sunlight?** Can you see the bright moon when the sun is out? Why can’t the bright moon suddenly appear? Since it can’t, your consciousness can’t perceive the moon in the sunlight. So, it is a mistake for you to say that it can suddenly appear. That’s also incorrect.

The Buddha is being unreasonable. Basically, there’s no such principle, but he establishes it and asks Ananda about it and causes Ananda not to know what’s right.

**Sutra: “You should investigate this even more carefully, discriminate it in detail, and look into it. The seeing belongs to your eyes; the appearances are considered to be the environment; what has an appearance is existent; what is without any appearance is non existent. What, then, are the conditions that cause the consciousness to come into being?

Commentary:**Ananda, now **you should investigate this even more carefully, discriminate it in detail, and look into it.** At the point where the most minute and subtle distinctions can be made, you should investigate it in even more detail and look into it. **The seeing belongs to your eyes.** Seeing originates from your eyes. **The appearances are considered to be the environment.** What has form and appearance is the defiling environment before your eyes. **What is without any appearance is non existent.** What doesn’t have form or appearance is said to be non existent. **What, then, are the conditions that cause the consciousness to come into being?** Where does it come from?

P3 He makes him aware of how to put them together and return them.

**Sutra:“The consciousness moves and the seeing is quiet; they do not mix and unite. Smelling, hearing, awareness, and knowing are the same way. Nor should it be that the condition of consciousness exists spontaneously without an origin.

Commentary:The consciousness moves and the seeing is quiet.** The consciousness makes discriminations, and its nature in its substance is one of animation. The nature of “the seeing is quiet,” it is unmoving. **They do not mix and unite.** So, you say they can combine, but they can’t. **Smelling, hearing, awareness, and knowing are the same way.** The nature of smelling, the awareness of hearing, and the nature that knows and is aware are the same: they do not mix and unite. **Nor should it be that the condition of consciousness exists spontaneously without an origin.** Although the state of consciousness does not mix and unite, it should not be that the conditions of consciousness come forth without an origin. The same principle applies again: without a mother, how can the child be born?

**Sutra:"If this conscious mind does not come from anywhere, you should know that the same is true of the mind, which makes distinctions, and the seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing, which are all complete and tranquil. Their nature is without an origin. They and emptiness, earth, water, fire, and wind are together called the seven elements. Their true natures are perfectly fused, and all are the treasury of the Thus Come One, fundamentally devoid of production and extinction.

Commentary: If this conscious mind -** if the conscious mind which makes distinctions - **does not come from anywhere -** if there is basically nowhere that it comes from - **you should know that the same is true of the mind, which makes distinctions, and the seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing** - the awareness of seeing, the awareness of hearing, the awareness of smelling, the awareness of tasting, and the awareness of knowing - **are all complete and tranquil.** All are perfect, still, and very pure. **Their nature is without an origin.** There is nowhere that their nature comes from and nowhere that it is going to. **They and emptiness, earth, water, fire, and wind are together called the seven elements. Their true natures are perfectly fused,** and boundless. **And all are the treasury of the Thus Come One.** They arise from the treasury of the Thus Come One, and are **fundamentally devoid of production and extinction.** That’s why they are not born or destroyed.

**Sutra:“Ananda, your mind is coarse and shallow, and so you do not realize that the seeing and hearing are the treasury of the Thus Come One, and you do not discover that knowing is the same way. You should contemplate these six locations of consciousness: are they the same or different? Are they empty or existent? Are they neither the same nor different? Are they neither empty nor existent?

Commentary:Ananda, your mind is coarse and shallow.** The Buddha admonishes Ananda again. “Your thoughts are too coarse, too superficial.” Coarse means “not subtle,” heedless. It means he doesn’t stop and think or look into things. He doesn’t investigate things. He’s too impulsive and reckless and slapdash when he does things. The word “shallow” refers to his mind - the mind which is the opposite of his deep mind. Later Ananda says, “I offer this deep thought to those who are as countless as the motes of dust of the Buddhalands, to repay the kindness shown me by the Buddha.” But, now his mind is shallow; it’s not his deep mind. It means he is not paying close attention to what is going on.

**And so you do not realize that the seeing and hearing -** and smelling, tasting, awareness, and knowing, their nature and capabilities - **are the treasury of the Thus Come One.** You don’t understand the principles the Buddha explained about earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, and seeing. **And you do not discover that knowing is the same way,** also part of the Thus Come One’s treasury. You don’t comprehend that they are all functions of the treasury of the Thus Come One.

**You should contemplate these six locations of consciousness.** The six places of the conscious mind are earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, and seeing. Are these six aspects of the conscious mind **the same or different? Are they empty or existent? Are they neither the same nor different?** Are they not the same and yet not different? **Are they neither empty nor existent?** Or are they not empty and yet not existent? What would you say these six consciousnesses are like?

P4 He concludes by showing the function of the nature.

**Sutra: “You basically do not know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of consciousness is bright and knowing. Enlightened brightness is the true consciousness. The wonderful enlightenment is tranquil and pervades the dharma-realm.

Commentary:** Ananda, **you basically do not know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of consciousness is bright and knowing.** The consciousness of the nature is bright light; it is enlightened. **Enlightened brightness is the true consciousness.** This enlightenment and light is the genuine consciousness. **The wonderful enlightenment is tranquil.** The inconceivable substance of enlightenment is tranquil and pure and **pervades the dharma-realm.

Sutra:“It encompasses the emptiness of the ten directions and issues forth in it. How can it have a location?

Commentary:** The consciousness **encompasses the emptiness of the ten directions and issues forth in it.** “Encompasses” means it contains the emptiness; “issues forth” means it flows forth in emptiness. Containing and flowing forth in the emptiness of the ten directions, the consciousness is everywhere. **How can it have a location?** How can it be in a certain direction or have a certain location?

P5 He rejects both as being mere conjectures.

**Sutra:“It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning..

Commentary:It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma.** In accordance with the karmic response of living beings, these various retributions arise. **Ignorant of this fact, people in the world -** adherents to external paths, of the provisional vehicles, and of the small vehicles, and ordinary people, those who have no wisdom - **are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions.** They wonder if this doctrine is part of the doctrine of causes and conditions. They are confused and doubtful and don’t recognize it clearly. Or, they ascribe it **to spontaneity,** the doctrine discussed by adherents of the naturalism of some external ways.

**These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind -** this is entirely the conscious mind making discriminations and calculations - functioning on that level - **are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.**