**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 4**

**CHAPTER 5**

**Hearing is Not Sound**

I2 Investigation and understanding of the explanation of the two doubts.
J1 Investigation of the explanation of the doubt that the basic nature is severed and extinguished.
K1 Ananda's mistaken understanding of the Buddha's words causes him to ask a misguided question.
L1 He sees cause and fruition as opposites.
 **Sutra:

Ananda said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, as the Buddha has said, 'The resolve for enlightenment on the cause ground which seeks the eternal must be in mutual accord with the ground of fruition.' "

Commentary:**
Ananda has once again given rise to doubts, and so he comes up with another question. Ananda said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, as the Buddha has said, according to the doctrines you discussed in the past, 'The resolve for enlightenment on the cause-ground which seeks the eternal,' on the cause-ground you bring forth the true resolve for enlightenment, which you hope will remain forever and never be destroyed. It must be in mutual accord with the ground of fruition. It must not be in opposition with the principles of fruition."
 **Sutra:

World Honored One, the ground of fruition is Bodhi; nirvana; true suchness; the Buddha-nature; the amala consciousness; the empty treasury of the Thus Come One; the great, perfect mirror-wisdom. But although it is called by these seven names, it is pure and perfect, its substance is durable, like royal vajra, everlasting and indestructible.

Commentary:**

World Honored One, the ground of fruition is Bodhi; nirvana; true suchness; the Buddha-nature; the amalaconsciousness; the empty treasury of the Thus Come One; the great, perfect mirror-wisdom. 'Bodhi" is "the way of enlightenment" (jiao dao). "Nirvana" is said to be "neither produced nor destroyed" (bu sheng bu mie). "True suchness" is actual and not false; a single, non-dual suchness. Suchness is not a 'thing" at all. It is like emptiness. True suchness is just true emptiness. In one truth is all truth. But, if there is the slightest lack of truth, it cannot be called true suchness. The Buddha-nature is inherent in all beings. The amala consciousness is the "consciousness devoid of filth" (wu gou shi). Prior to enlightenment, this consciousness is called the eighth consciousness, the alaya-consciousness. Alaya means "storehouse" (cang shi); the name indicates that it contains everything within it. The amala is the transformation of the eighth consciousness into a pure consciousness.

The "empty treasury of the Thus Come One" is another name, and the "great, perfect mirror-wisdom" is also a name. But although it is called by these seven names, although the ground of fruition has different titles, it is pure and perfect. In its principle, in its noumenal aspect, it is pure and perfect. Its substance is durable: its essence is durable, like royal vajra, everlasting and indestructible. It will never be destroyed.
 **Sutra:

If the seeing and hearing are apart from light and darkness, movement and stillness, and penetration and obstruction and are ultimately devoid of substance, they are then like thoughts apart from sense-objects: they do not exist at all.

Commentary:**
If the seeing and hearing are apart from light and darkness, movement and stillness, and penetration and obstruction and are ultimately devoid of substance, then their essence ceases to be. They are then like thoughts apart from sense-objects: they do not exist at all. The thoughts of the mind don't have substance, either. When separated from the defiling objects which correspond to them, they are entirely non-existent.
 **Sutra:

How can what is ultimately destroyed be a cause by which one cultivates in the hope of obtaining the fruition of the Thus Come One's sevenfold eternal abode?

Commentary:**
The mind-organ is "devoid of a substance when separated from its defiling objects." How can what is ultimately destroyed be a cause by which one cultivates in the hope of obtaining the fruition of the Thus Come One's sevenfold eternal abode? How can it be used in cultivation to obtain the Thus Come One's sevenfold, everlasting fruition of Bodhi, nirvana, true suchness, the Buddha-nature, the amala-consciousness, the empty treasury of the Thus Come One and the great, perfect mirror-wisdom?

L2 Earlier and later explanations differ.
 **Sutra:

World Honored One, when it is apart from light and darkness, the seeing is ultimately empty, just as when there is no sense-object, the essence of thought is extinguished.

Commentary:**

World Honored One, when it is apart from light and darkness, if it were to be separated from light and dark, the seeing is ultimately empty, just as when there is no sense-object, the essence of thought is extinguished. Thoughts cannot arise.
 **Sutra:

I go back and forth in circles, minutely searching, and basically there is no such thing as my mind or its objects. Just what should be used to seek the Unsurpassed Enlightenment?

Commentary:**

I go back and forth, researching and investigating, in circles. I go through the process again and again, minutely searching, and basically there is no such thing as my mind or its objects. My mind doesn't exist. None of it exists. Just what should be used to seek the Unsurpassed Enlightenment, to accomplish the enlightenment on the ground of fruition? I search everywhere, and there isn't any mind. I can't use the mind subject to production and extinction. And I can't find the true mind. So, how do I set up a mind on the cause-ground to seek the enlightenment on the ground of fruition?
 **Sutra:

The Thus Come One previously said it was a tranquil essence, perfect and eternal. His present contradiction defies belief and is a resort to idle theorizing. How can the Thus Come One's words be true and actual?

Commentary:**
The Thus Come One previously said it was a tranquil essence, perfect and eternal. He discussed the tranquil, perfect, eternal essence of seeing. His present contradiction defies belief and is a resort to idle theorizing. But the dharma the Buddha speaks is not idle theory. Yet, how can the Thus Come One's words be true and actual? The doctrine the Buddha has explained contradicts itself. First the Buddha said, "Don't use the mind subject to production and extinction," and later he said it is just that mind which you use in cultivation. I, Ananda, cannot find the mind in question, and the more I hear, the less I understand. How can the Buddha still be speaking the truth? The Buddha should be speaking the truth: true words, actual words, not false words. Why is it that what the Buddha says contradicts itself?

L3 He again seeks instruction.
 **Sutra:

I only hope the Buddha will let fall his great compassion and will instruct us who do not understand and who are holding on tightly.

Commentary:**
Now I only hope the World Honored One, the Buddha will let fall his great compassion and will instruct us who do not understand and who are holding on tightly. We are grasping tightly to the dharmas of the small vehicle and are afraid to let go.

K2 The Tathagata uses an immediate incident to investigate permanence.
L1 He promises to resolve his doubts.
 **Sutra:

The Buddha told Ananda, "You study and learn much, but you have not yet extinguished outflows. In your mind you know only the causes of being upside down. But when the true inversion manifests, you really cannot recognize it yet."

Commentary:**

After hearing what Ananda has just said, the Buddha doesn't know whether to laugh or cry. The Buddha told Ananda, "You study and learn much, you are erudite and have a strong memory, but you have not yet extinguished outflows. You still haven't obtained the extinction of outflows. In your mind you know only the causes of being upside down. But when the true inversion manifests, you really cannot recognize it yet. Just as it was said above, you know only how to write prescriptions. If the medicine were before you, you would not recognize it. So I say now that you are well versed in the reasons for being upside down, but when you confront a genuinely upside-down situation, you don't recognize it. You don't know what is upside down."
 **Sutra:

In order to strengthen your sincerity and faith, I will try to make use of an ordinary happening to dispel your doubts.

Commentary:**

In order to strengthen your sincerity and faith. I'm afraid you are not sincere enough, and so if I told you outright, you wouldn't believe me. You don't have enough faith. You're not sufficiently humble. I will try to make use of an ordinary happening to dispel your doubts. I'll try using a common situation to explain this principle for you. I'll get rid of your doubts this way.

L2 He strikes a bell to investigate permanence.
M1 Two questions and answers.
 **Sutra:

Then the Thus Come One instructed Rahula to strike a bell once, and he asked Ananda, "Did you hear that?" Ananda and the members of the great assembly all said, "We heard it."

Commentary:**
It has already been said that the nature of hearing is neither produced nor extinguished, but Ananda has misunderstood the principle the Buddha has been explaining and given rise to more doubts. So now the Buddha investigates the nature of hearing with the sound of the bell that has been struck. Then the Thus Come One instructed Rahula to strike a bell once. Rahula is the Buddha's only son. His name means "obstacle" (fu zhang), because he remained in his mother's womb for six years before he was born. This is not terribly unusual. In China there are many such cases. One famous case was that of Lao Lai Zi, who had white hair and eye brows and could talk from the moment of birth. He was born old, but he, nevertheless, still acted like a child and was rambunctious. There was also Lao Zi, of course, who is said to have stayed in his mother's womb for eighty-one years. His surname was Li and he was nicknamed Lao Zi or Lao Dan. Compared to these two strange incidents, Rahula's dwelling in his mother's womb for six years is not so spectacular. Since he was the Buddha's son, Rahula was very obedient, so the Buddha said, "Go ring the bell." Then he asked Ananda, "Did you hear that?" Ananda and the members of the great assembly all said, "We heard it."
 **Sutra:

The bell ceased to sound, and the Buddha again asked, "Do you hear it now?"

Ananda and the members of the great assembly all said, "We do not hear it."

Commentary:**
The bell ceased to sound. The sound of the bell faded away.There was no sound. The Buddha again asked, "Do you hear it now?" The Buddha asked Ananda, "Well, do you hear it not, or don't you?"

Ananda and the members of the great assembly all said, "We do not hear it. We don?t hear it at all now."
 **Sutra:

Then Rahula struck the bell once again. The Buddha again asked, "Do you hear it now?"

Ananda and the great assembly again said, "We hear it.'

Commentary:**
Once the sound of the bell had ceased and the Buddha had asked his question, Rahula figured out what to do next; he was very intelligent. Rahula was foremost in secret practices. People never realized that he was cultivating. No one knew that every day he was developing his skill. What did he do? He could enter samadhi at any time, in any place. When he went to the bathroom, he could enter samadhi. When it was time to eat, he would eat, but he was also in samadhi. His mind was not on the food. But no one ever caught on, and so he was said to be foremost in secret practices. Let's take reciting the Shurangama Mantra as an example. No one saw him recite the Mantra, and yet he could do it by heart. No one ever noticed him studying it or practicing it, but he could recite from memory. Since Rahula was foremost in secret practices, he was very intelligent and perceptive of the Buddha's intent, and so after the sound of the bell had ceased for a time, Rahula struck the bell once again. The Buddha again asked Ananda, "Do you hear it now? Well, do you hear it now?" the Buddha pressed Ananda. Ananda and the great assembly again said, "We hear it, We hear it," they exclaimed. The bell just rang.

This situation, the bell being rung and their then being asked if they had heard it, is the ordinary happening the Buddha mentioned. Wouldn't you say that anyone could understand this process of striking the bell and then asking if it was heard? Since Ananda had failed to understand the doctrines explained earlier, the Buddha now uses this very simple example to illustrate them.
 **Sutra:

The Buddha asked Ananda, "What do you hear and what do you not hear?"

Ananda and the members of the great assembly all said to the Buddha, "When the bell is rung, we hear it. Once the sound of the bell ceases, so that even its echo fades away, we do not hear it."

Commentary:**
The Buddha asked Ananda, "What do you hear and what do you not hear? I want to hear what you have to say."

Ananda and the members of the great assembly all said to the Buddha, "When the bell is rung, we hear it. When the bell is struck, we all hear the bell's sound. Once the sound of the bell ceases, a while after the bell is struck its sound disappears so that even its echo fades away. Both the sound and the echo are gone. Then, we do not hear it." That's what we mean by "not hearing." So the problem that Ananda and the great assembly are having is to be found in their "not hearing." They think that when there is no sound there is no hearing. Actually, though, when there is no sound, what perceives that there is no hearing? That which knows there is no hearing is hearing itself. If you were really without hearing, then you basically would not know whether you were hearing or not. That's the important point.
 **Sutra:

The Thus Come One again instructed Rahula to strike the bell, and he asked Ananda, "Is there sound now?"

Ananda and the members of the great assembly all said, "There is a sound."

Commentary:**
The Buddha, the Thus Come One again instructed Rahula to strike the bell, and he asked Ananda, "Is there sound now?" Ananda and the members of the great assembly all said, "There is a sound."
 **Sutra:

After a short time the sound ceased, and the Buddha again asked, "Is there a sound now?"

Ananda and the great assembly answered, "There is no sound."

Commentary:**
After a short time, after just a bit, the sound ceased, the bell stopped ringing, and the Buddha again asked Ananda, "Is there a sound now? Do you still hear a sound, or don?t you?" Ananda and the great assembly answered, "There is no sound."
 **Sutra:

After a moment, Rahula again struck the bell, and the Buddha again asked, "Is there sound now?"

Ananda and the great assembly said together, "There is sound."

Commentary:**
After a moment, that is, in a little while, Rahula again struck the bell, and the Buddha again asked, "Is there sound now? What about it, is there any sound, or isn't there?" Ananda and the great assembly said together, "There is sound."
 **Sutra:

The Buddha asked Ananda, "What is meant by 'sound,' and what is meant by 'no sound?' "

Ananda and the great assembly told the Buddha, "When the bell is struck there is sound. Once the sound ceases and even the echo fades away, there is said to be no sound."

Commentary:**
The Buddha asked Ananda, "What is meant by 'sound?' Explain to me the difference between there being a sound and there not being any sound." Ananda and the great assembly told the Buddha, "When the bell is struck there is sound. That's what we mean by sound. Once the sound ceases and even the echo fades away, after the bell has been struck then the sound dies away, there is said to be no sound."

M2 He scolds them for their confusion.

**Sutra:

The Buddha said to Ananda and the great assembly, "Why are you inconsistent in what you say?"

The great assembly and Ananda then asked the Buddha, "In what way have we been inconsistent?"

The Buddha said, "When I asked if you were hearing, you said that you were hearing. Then, when I asked you if there was sound, you said there was sound. I cannot ascertain from your answers if it is hearing or if it is sound. How can you not say this
is inconsistent?"

Commentary:**
The Buddha said to Ananda and the great assembly, "Why are you inconsistent in what you say? Why do you contradict yourselves? What you say isn't even reasonable." The great assembly and Ananda then asked the Buddha, "In what way have we been inconsistent? How are we being unreasonable in what we say?"

The Buddha said, "When I asked if you were hearing, you said that you were hearing. Then, when I asked you if there was sound, you said there was sound. I said, 'Do you hear, or not?' and you said, 'I hear.' Then I asked, 'Is there sound, or not?' and you said, 'There is sound.' I cannot ascertain from your answers if it is hearing or if it is sound. You say it is both hearing and sound, which one is it ultimately? Your answers don't specify. How can you not say this is inconsistent?"

M3 His refutation reveals the proper meaning.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, when the sound is gone without an echo, you say there is no hearing. If there were really no hearing, the hearing nature would be extinguished. It would be just like dead wood. If then the bell were sounded again, how would you know?

Commentary:**

"Ananda," the Buddha says, "You are not distinguishing clearly between sound and hearing, and this is the point which you do not understand; this is the place where you are really upside down. Why can't you even tell the difference between hearing and sound? Ananda, when the sound is gone without an echo, you say there is no hearing. If there were really no hearing, the hearingnature would be extinguished. It would be the end of the hearingnature. There should be no longer any capacity for hearing. And yet when there is another sound, the hearing is still there; it isn't gone after all. If there really were no hearing-nature, it would be just like dead wood. If then the bell were sounded again, how would you know?"

This is the important point. Although the sound ceases, the hearing-nature has not been cut off. It is still in operation, because the hearing-nature is not subject to production or extinction. The sound is subject to production and extinction, but the nature of hearing is not. There is hearing whether or not there is sound. So when the sound ceased and he answered that there was no hearing, it was a mistake. That's the place where he misunderstood. That's where he is upside down.
 **Sutra:

What you know to be there or not there is the defiling object of sound. But could the hearing nature be there or not be there depending on your perception of its being there or not? If the hearing could really not be there, what would perceive that it was not?

Commentary:**
What you know to be there or not there is the defiling object of sound. Of course, what you notice being there or not being there belongs to sound. But could the hearing nature be there or not be there? Is that the way the hearing-nature is? Is it that it exists when there is sound and doesn't exist when there is no sound? When there is sound, there is hearing; when there is no sound, there is still hearing. The nature of hearing is neither produced nor extinguished.

Sound is subject to production and extinction; when there is a certain vibration, there is sound, and when that vibration ceases, there is no sound. But the hearing-nature does not appear and disappear depending on your perception of its being there or not. The hearing nature doesn't take its cues from you. If the hearing could really not be there, if you say that the hearingnature really can cease to exist in the absence of sound, what would perceive that it was not? What would know of its absence? What would perceive that there was no hearing? That which knows the absence of hearing is your hearing-nature. You say that you know that you are not hearing, but if you really didn't have a hearing-nature at that point, you wouldn't even realize that you were not hearing.
 **Sutra:

And so, Ananda, the sounds that you hear are what are subject to production and extinction, not your hearing. The arising and cessation of sounds cause your hearing-nature to be as if there or not there.

Commentary:**

And so, because of this, Ananda, the sounds that you hear are what are subject to production and extinction. The sounds you hear arise and cease. The arising and cessation of sounds cause your hearing-nature to be as if there or not there. When the sounds come forth and die away, it is not your hearing that is there or not there. That's not what happens. Whether there is sound or not, the hearing nature remains throughout.

M4 He upbraids him for his confusion and tells him to stop making the same mistake.
 **Sutra:

You are so upside-down that you mistake sound for hearing. No wonder you are so confused that you take what is everlasting for what is annihilated. Ultimately, you cannot say that there is no hearing nature apart from movement and stillness and from obstruction and penetration.

Commentary:**

You are so upside-down that you mistake sound for hearing. Ananda, you don't even recognize where you yourself are upside down. That's why I say that you don't even recognize the difference between right side up and upside down. You think that sound is hearing and that hearing is sound. How can this be? Sound and hearing are different. No wonder you are so confused that you take what is everlasting for what is annihilated. It's not surprising that you're so mixed up. No wonder you don't understand. You think that the true, permanent, undying nature is subject to annihilation. When did I ever tell you that the tranquil, true mind will cease to be? It is fundamentally an eternally abiding principle, and you say that it will come to an end, that it will disappear. You're really awfully confused. How do I know that? You can't even tell the difference between sound and hearing. It's such a simple matter, but you say that it is both sound and hearing that arises and ceases to be. In the end, which is it? Why are you so muddled? Ultimately, you cannot say that there is no hearing nature apart from movement and stillness and from obstruction and penetration. You should never say that apart from these conditions the nature of hearing does not exist. How could it not exist? The hearing-nature abides forever.

L3 He invents a dream to investigate impermanence.
M1 He shows that in the dream he is not oblivious.
 **Sutra:

Consider a person who falls into a deep sleep while napping on his bed. While he is asleep, someone in his household starts beating clothes or pounding rice. In his dream, the person hears the sound of beating and pounding and takes it for something else, perhaps for the striking of a drum or the ringing of a bell. In the dream he wonders why the bell sounds like stone or wood.

Commentary:**

Above, sound was discussed in order to understand the nature of hearing. In talking about the sound of the bell we came to know that the hearing-nature is neither produced nor extinguished. If the hearing-nature were extinguished, there would be no further hearing. But, when the bell is struck, the nature of hearing is neither produced nor extinguished. Regardless of whether there is sound, the hearing-nature abides forever. Now the Buddha makes use of another ordinary happening to illustrate that the nature of hearing is neither produced nor extinguished.

Consider a person who falls into a deep sleep while napping on his bed. He is so sound asleep that he does not wake up when someone calls him. But, even though he does not awaken, hishearing-nature is still present. He perceives sounds, if mistakenly, even though he is asleep. The mistake is not made by the hearingnature; it is the sixth-mind consciousness, the "solitary consciousness," which makes the mistaken perception.

This person, then, is in such a deep sleep that he is unaware of everything. While he is asleep, someone in his household starts beating clothes or pounding rice. "Beating clothes" refers to the method of washing clothes used of old. I remember seeing this done when I was a child. There was a flat stone and two beating-sticks made of wood. They would lay the clothes on the stone and beat them clean with the sticks in a rhythmic fashion.

"Pounding rice." Remember that the Great Master, the Sixth Patriarch, pounded rice for eight months. One uses a pestle and also stamps on the coarse grains with one's feet in order to separate the chaff from the kernels. These methods were used in ancient China and obviously they were familiar to the Indian way of life as well. So, the Buddha gave these two examples.

In his dream, the person hears the sound of beating and pounding and takes it for something else. "That person" refers to the one who is asleep. He hears the sounds of the clothes being beaten and the rice being pounded, but in his dreams he misinterprets them as something else. What does he think they are? He mistakes them perhaps for the striking of a drum or the ringing of a bell. In the dream he wonders why the bell sounds like stone or wood. "How come that bell sounds like a piece of wood or stone?" he thinks. In the dream-state, the sixth mind-consciousness, the "solitary consciousness," misinterprets the sound.

Dreams are the tricks played by the sixth mind-consciousness. It takes control of you and causes you to dream certain things. Why did this person take the sound he heard to be the striking of a drum or the ringing of a bell when, in fact, it was neither of these sounds? It came from a mistaken impression on his part during his dream. And that's why he wonders why the sound is more like wood or stone being struck than like a bell. He finds it strange.

Dreams happen when the sixth mind-consciousness goes awry. Whatever happens to you during the day, or whatever experiences you encounter, will affect the dreams you have at night. Some people who cultivate the Way, cultivate the mind-consciousness until they can "go out esoterically and enter mysteriously" ( chu xuan ru pin). To "go out esoterically" means to send a being out of the crown of one's head. This being can then leave the body and go elsewhere. But this experience is not genuine, because the being is a "yin spirit." Since, when it gets out, it has a certain amount of awareness, it is called a spirit.

Once there was an old Taoist who really was skilled in his practice, but he had a big temper. Whenever anything came up, he'd get angry about it. Since he got angry all the time, he was indulging in hatred. He considered himself to be well-skilled, however, to be pretty remarkable, in fact. He boasted that as soon as he went to sleep, he could send out this spirit. It was like a dream-state, but he had an awareness of it and could remember it clearly afterward. One day, the old Taoist encountered a Buddhist monk, and they discussed their methods of cultivation. The Taoist said, "In Taoism, we can cultivate and become immortal. What talent do you Buddhists have? Shakyamuni Buddha died just the same. But no one knows where the patriarch of Taoism, Li Lao Zhun, went. He died, so they say, but really he went to the heavens. So the skill we develop in Taoism is to "go out esoterically and enter mysteriously."

"How do you go out esoterically?" asked the monk.

"When I lie down and go to sleep, I can go anywhere I please," the Taoist replied.

"Oh? Fine. Go to sleep now and send out a spirit while I watch." said the monk.

The old Taoist laid down and went to sleep, and as soon as he dozed off, he let out a spirit. But what kind? It was a snake that crawled out of the top of his head! The snake slithered off the side of the bed onto the floor and crawled outside to the edge of the cesspool. It drank some of the dirty water and then crept along the edge of the water. The monk picked a blade of grass and set it in the path and then pulled up a clump of sod and set it beside the blade. When the snake saw the blade of grass, it fled in fright and scurried back where it had come from. Having reentered the crown of the Taoist's head, the old cultivator awoke in a sweat, scared to death. "Where did you go,"asked the monk, "when you went out the top of your head?"

The Taoist replied, "I went to the heavens to a heavenly pool." He had mistaken the cesspool for a heavenly pool. "When I got to the heavenly pool, I drank some sweet dew water, and then, as I strolled around, I saw a spirit in golden armor standing in the path wielding a sword. He was intent upon killing me, so I rushed back." The monk said, "Oh, so that's what happened, according to you; you went to the heavens." And then he informed him that his perception of the incident was totally different from the Taoist's, and he related what he'd seen. "The reason a snake came out of your head is probably because you have such a big temper and are always getting angry. If you don't change your fiery nature, you're likely to become a snake. Snakes have poison in their hearts, and your hatred is just like a poison in you right now."

The monk continued, "You went outside and drank a lot of liquid from a cesspool filled with urine and excrement. That is your heavenly pool with sweet dew water! And when I put a blade of grass and a lump of sod in your path, you thought it was an armored spirit out to get you. That's when you hurried back and reentered your head. That's what I saw."

The old Taoist thought: "Then everything I have cultivated is totally wrong!" So he bowed to the monk as his teacher and followed him to cultivate the Buddhadharma. He gave up indulging in his former skills. So, if people tell you they can leave their body during their dreams, it is a yin spirit they are referring to. This yin spirit will mirror your own disposition; if you are a compassionate person it will be a compassionate spirit; if you are an angry person, or a greedy person, it will be like that. That's why it's said of people,

With a single thought of hatred,
Eighty thousand obstacles arise.

The old Taoist had such a temper that he could transform into a snake. Thank goodness he met a monk who saved him and kept him from having to become a snake in some other life.
 **Sutra:

Suddenly he awakens and immediately recognizes the sound of pounding. He tells the members of his household, "I was just having a dream in which I mistook the sound of pounding for the sound of a drum."

Commentary:**
Suddenly the person in the deep sleep who is dreaming awakens. He comes out of his sound sleep, probably because the sound of the rice being pounded is so loud, and because the sound of the cloth being beaten is also noisy. He comes out of his dream and immediately recognizes the sound of pounding. Very quickly he recognizes the sound of rice being pounded and knows it is not a bell being rung.

There are many methods used to pound rice. Sometimes it is done with water power, sometimes with man power. In the past I manned the pestle at Ze Xing monastery at Da Yu mountain. But usually I would pound only for a little while before someone came along to relieve me. At Da Jiao monastery in Yunmen, established by the Elder Master Hsu Yun, the rice was pounded by water power, which was very convenient.

When this person wakes up he knows that the sound he's heard is the sound of pounding rice. He tells the members of his household, "I was just having a dream in which I mistook the sound of pounding for the sound of a drum." "When I was asleep, I was dreaming, and my perceptions went awry. I though the sound of the rice being pounded was actually a drum being beaten." The text above mentions the sound of a bell as well as the sound of a drum, but the principle is the same. The drum can represent the bell, and vice verse. It's not important. In lecturing sutras you have to be flexible when explaining the text. Don't be too exacting. In lecturing, you want to explain the principle. If you make the principle clear, slight variations in the text are of no great importance.

M2 He confirms that the nature is everlasting.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, how can this person in the dream-state remember stillness and motion, opening and closing, and penetrability and obstruction? Yet, although he is physically asleep, his hearing nature is not drowsy.

Commentary:**
Ananda, do you understand now, or don't you? How can this person in the dream-state, I don't know who the person in the dream-state is; is it me, is it you, or is it someone else? How can he remember stillness and motion? How can he remember stillness and movement, though he's in his dream? How does he still recollect opening and closing, and penetrability and obstruction? He doesn't have this kind of discriminating mind in his dream-state. He doesn't make distinctions between stillness and movement or between what is open and penetrable and what is closed and obstructed. Yet, although he is physically asleep, his body is sleeping, his hearing-nature is not drowsy. His hearing nature isn't dozing; it has not be severed from him. Even in sleep, his hearing-nature remains. If it's still there, then, why did he mistake the sound of beating clothes and pounding rice for a drum being played or a bell being rung? In his waking state he is familiar with the sounds of a drum and bell, and so in sleep these sounds manifest in his eighth consciousness and lead him to believe he is hearing a drum or bell. He makes a mistake in perception.

All the upside-down things that people involve themselves in are like the mistaken interpretations of sounds in a dream. The mistake brings about upside-down thinking, just like the old Taoist's. He thought he was going to the heavens and drinking sweet dew when, in fact, he was drinking urine from a cesspool. If he'd realized the truth, he'd have vomited for sure. But at the time he didn't know what he was doing. He was like a dog eating excrement: he took the whole thing for granted and even though he was really in a good place. He felt like he was being treated to something special, all because he failed to recognize what was really happening.
 **Sutra:

Even when your body is gone and your light and life move on, how could this nature leave you?

Commentary:**
The above section of text explains that your hearing nature does not sleep even when your body is asleep. Even in dreams, the hearing-nature is not cut off. It is eternal. Not only is it not severed in the dream-state, it is not cut off at death, either. Thus, the text now says, even when your body is gone, when you die and your body is gone, and your light and life move on. When your life is cut off, it's not that it's actually cut off, rather, when a person dies, his life moves on. It's just like a person who lives in a hotel; he will move to a new hotel when the old one gets too run-down. So when you've cast off this shell, when you have finished with this body, you will move somewhere else. How could this nature, the hearing-nature, leave you? How could it disappear when your physical form disappears? Even at death, this nature is not cut off.

L4 He reveals the confusion and teaches him to be on guard.
M1 He reveals how perpetual confusion causes one to fall into a state of
impermanence.
 **Sutra:

But because living beings, from time without beginning, have pursued forms and sounds and have followed their thoughts as they turn and flow, they still are not aware that their nature is pure, wondrous, and everlasting.

Commentary:**

When you reach the end of your physical existence, when your body decays and dies, your light and life move on; but your nature, your hearing-nature, is indestructible. But because living beings, from time without beginning, have pursued forms and sounds. Why don't living beings become Buddhas? Why don't they come to understand the Way? It is because they have pursued forms and sounds from limitless, limitless kalpas past right down to the present. They chase the defiling objects of forms and sounds and get involved with them. They have followed their thoughts as they turn and flow, over and over, and they still are not aware. They mistake the false for the true and are turned around by this mundane dust. They are so involved with what is false that they fail to recognize what is true, and so now they are still not aware that their nature is pure, wondrous, and everlasting. They don't understand this doctrine, which is subtle, wonderful, and truly permanent.
 **Sutra:

They do not accord with what is eternal, but chase after things which are subject to production and extinction. Because of this they are born again and again and become mixed with defilement as they flow and turn.

Commentary:**
They do not accord with what is eternal. They do not pursue the principle of the wonder and permanence of their own nature; what is more, they go counter to this principle, and they chase after things which are subject to production and extinction. Is there anything in this world which is not subject to production and extinction? Everything with form and appearance is a dharma of production and extinction. The dharma of non-production and nonextinction has no form or appearance. But most people become attached to things with form and appearance and forget about the principle of wonderful permanence. Because of this they are born again and again. This life is followed by the next life, and the next life turns into the one after that. What happens life after life? Beings have to become mixed with defilement as they flow and turn. The word "mixed" implies that one does not maintain purity but is stained by defilement, which further pollutes the mixture. What does one get mixed up with? With the turning and flowing. And what is meant by turning and flowing?

In this life one is named Smith, and in the next life one is called Jones. In the following lifetime one is called cow, in the one after that one is named horse, and in the one that follows, one is called a pig. You shouldn't think that things are always going to be like they are right now. The old pig was the former Old Man Jones. The Elder Jones is just the present old cow. One person just keeps turning around and around; it is the same nature with a different body. And because that's the way it goes, you fail to understand. You don't recognize what's going on. Although you don't recognize what's going on, I do. I recognize that you are Old Cow, Old Horse, and Old Pig. When you act like a horse, you turn into a horse; when you act like a pig, you turn into a pig; when you act like a dog, you become a dog; when you act like a cow, you turn into a cow. And if a pig is capable of human behavior, if it does something meritorious, it can become a person. One turns and flows in the paths of rebirth.

Sometimes one is born in the heavens, but once the heavenly blessings are used up one falls into the hells again. When the sufferings of the hells have been endured, one gets born in the human realm, or becomes an animal. If a person is very uncouth and has no understanding of human behavior, there's no need to wonder about it. In his last life he was certainly an animal. If he hadn't been an animal in his last life, he wouldn't be so rude in this life. But, even though you understand that he was an animal before, you should not slight him by saying something like, "You! Last life you were a pig for sure." Or, "You must have been a cow before." Even if he was a pig or a cow, all living beings have the Buddha-nature and all can become Buddhas. He may be stupid now and not know that he should cultivate; but if on the other hand he were to become vigorous, he might become a Buddha before you do. There's nothing fixed about it. Even if he is an animal, you should not look down on him.

In a former life, the Buddha was Never Slighting Bodhisattva, who always said, "I don't dare slight any of you. In the future, you will all become Buddhas." "All" includes all living beings. People who have not obtained the Buddha eye and the wisdom eye should not slight living beings. People who have obtained the Buddha eye should even less slight living beings! All living beings are your past fathers and mothers and are future Buddhas. How many parents have we had in the past, through life after life? It's not known how many there have been. Because of this, the Ullumbana assembly, celebrated every year on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, is an excellent opportunity to save a lot of people. In celebrating it, we set up memorial plaques so that our ancestors, the ghosts, can stay here and listen to the sutras. After they've heard the sutra, they can go to rebirth, and at the very least they will become influential people who in the future will protect and uphold the Buddhadharma.

M2 He teaches him to be on guard in order to once and for all accomplish right enlightenment.
 **Sutra:

But if they reject production and extinction and uphold eternal truth, an everlasting light will appear, and with that, the sense-organs, defiling objects, and consciousnesses will disappear.

Commentary:**
But if they reject production and extinction, if, in cultivating the Way, you don't make use of your conscious mind that makes discriminations, and if you uphold eternal truth, if you use your true and actual, wonderfully eternal mind, your true mind and eternal nature, then an everlasting light will appear. Eventually, you will produce a constant light, the light of your self-nature, and with that, the sense-organs, defiling objects, and consciousnesses will disappear. Your thoughts involving the six sense-organs, the six sense objects and the six consciousnesses will disappear at the same time.
 **Sutra:

The appearance of thought becomes defilement; the emotions of the consciousness become filth. If you stay far away from these two, then your dharma eye will accordingly become pure and bright. How could you fail to accomplish unsurpassed knowledge and enlightenment?

Commentary:**

The appearance of thought. "Appearance" refers to one of the two aspects of the eighth consciousness: the aspect of appearance, which means all external conditioned dharmas. "Thought" refers to your false thinking. False thinking and the aspect of appearance combine to form defilement, literally, "dust." The emotions of the consciousness become filth. This refers to attachment to the second aspect of the eighth consciousness, the aspect of seeing, which means internal perceptions. In your discriminating mind consciousness you produce emotions and with them comes defilement. The origin of filth is emotions.

What harms people most is their emotions. No matter what situation they encounter, they react with emotion. The problem of emotion causes people to be born in a swoon and die in a dream. If you stay far away from these two, the appearance of thought, which brings defilement, and the emotions of consciousness, which make filth, you want to separate from both aspects of the eighth consciousness, appearances and seeing, if you can be apart from thoughts and emotions, then your dharma eye will accordingly become pure and bright. The dharma eye referred to here is not necessarily the dharma eye that is one of the five eyes and six spiritual penetrations. It can be interpreted to figuratively mean the opening of your wisdom. It's even more wonderful if you actually open your dharma eye, so that, throughout the ten directions and the three periods of time to the ends of empty space and the dharma-realm, everything is a dharma-treasury. If your dharma eye is clear and pure, you immediately stop being muddled. In your mind there is genuine wisdom. How could you fail to accomplish unsurpassed knowledge and enlightenment? How could you not obtain unsurpassed wisdom and enlightenment? You will certainly obtain it. Just stay away from the dust of false thought and the defilement of emotion.

This is just a short passage of sutra text, but everyone should pay particular attention to it. Don't get attached to emotion and love and become involved in discriminations and false thinking. You want to separate yourself from them. Did you hear? This is very important. Don't take it lightly. Don't fall asleep now. If you fall asleep and fail to study this sutra, you've truly missed an opportunity. Everyone should write this passage in his or her mind and never forget it.

The appearance of thought becomes defilement; the emotions of the consciousness become filth. If you stay far away from these two, then your dharma eye will accordingly become pure and bright. How could you fail to accomplish unsurpassed knowledge and enlightenment? Not only should you memorize the Shurangama Mantra, you should memorize the sutra text as well. Every day your responsibilities become greater. I'm not here just to play with you; I'm not just joking with you. You can't be the least bit sloppy.