**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 4**

**CHAPTER 6**

**The Source of the Knot**

J2 He certifies to an understanding of the explanation of the doubt that there is another source for the knot.  
K1 Ananda specifically asks about the source of the knot.  
L1 He uses an analogy to discuss the origin.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, the Thus Come One has explained the two meanings, yet, as I now contemplate people in the world, I believe that if they try to untie a knot and cannot find its center, they will never get the knot undone."  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Having listened to all the principles explained above, Ananda has another doubt, so he constructs arguments where there is no room for argument. Ananda said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, the Thus Come One has explained the two meanings." This refers to two kinds of decisive meanings, one which makes use of the mind subject to production and extinction to cultivate and one which does not make use of the mind subject to production and extinction in cultivating. Yet, as I now contemplate people in the world, I believe that if they try to untie a knot and cannot find its center, if they don't know where the center of the knot is, they will never get the knot undone. Since they can't even locate the center of the knot, how can they untie it?  
  
L2 He compares the analogy to the people in the assembly.  
 **Sutra:  
  
World Honored One, I and all the other sound-hearers in the great assembly who are not beyond learning are the same way. From time without beginning we have been accompanied in birth and death by ignorance. We have obtained these good roots of erudition and are said to have left the home life, yet in fact we act like someone with a recurrent fever.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda is very frank. He has the natural happiness and innocence of a child; he's very naive. World Honored One, I and all the other sound-hearers in the great assembly who are not beyond learning are the same way. The first three stages of arhatship are "not beyond learning." When one reaches the fourth fruition, one is beyond learning. We sound-hearers are like the person trying to untie a knot; we don't know where the center of the knot is. At what place do we untie the knot? You have said that we can make use of the six sense-organs, but which sense-organ do we actually start with? Which organ is the very last to be released? Right now we have no idea.  
  
From time without beginning we have been accompanied in birth and death by ignorance. From beginningless kalpas until today we have been born and have died, doing one thing in this life and something else in the next life. In this life you believe in Buddhism, but in the next life you don't. Or in this life you don't believe in Buddhism, and in the next life you do. Or perhaps you believe in Buddhism, but you don't really understand it very well. You vacillate and only dabble in it.  
  
In this way we become inseparable from ignorance. It's said that one is closest to one's parents or one's spouse, but that's not so. What we are closest to is ignorance. Ignorance is to you as a shadow is to your body; it follows you wherever you go. It never leaves you for an instant. That's being even more intimate than newlyweds.  
  
Ignorance accompanies you in birth and death: this is further evidence of how eternally inseparable it is from you. It's not the case that when the husband dies, the wife accompanies him in death. In exceptional cases this may perhaps occur, but not as a rule. Only ignorance will die with you and be reborn with you. This is truly to be together in life and inseparable in death. It takes half of all that is yours, just like a shadow follows a form.  
  
And, of course, you all know what we're referring to as ignorance? If you understand ignorance, then don't be so intimate with it after this. If you don't understand, you'd better figure it out fast. If you understand ignorance, then there's some hope for you. If you don't understand ignorance, then you are forever an ordinary person. If you understand ignorance, then you're halfway to sagehood. But you have to truly understand; you shouldn't seem to understand and yet not understand, so that you both have ignorance and do not have it.  
  
We have obtained these good roots of erudition and are said to have left the home life. Our propensity for learning is a kind of good root; but, yet, even though I'm called a left-home person, in fact we act like someone with a recurrent fever. The nature of this sickness is that it manifests only every other day, at a fixed time. The analogy represents his ignorance. Today he doesn't have any ignorance; his head is clear and he's not crazy. But tomorrow the ignorance crops up again. I believe that it's not only Ananda who has this problem; I suspect everyone present here has the same difficulty.   
  
Today you resolve your mind on Bodhi and decide to cultivate the Way, so you meditate single-mindedly. "I'm not going to pay attention to anything that comes up. I'm going to put everything down." But then tomorrow you can't put it down. Once again you pick up all the things you ordinarily are attached to and you can't let go of them. Even if you want to put them down, you can't loose your grasp on them. Do you see how pitiful it is? That's what's meant by a recurrent fever. So we should quickly find a way to cure this disease in ourselves. What's the cure? Drink more of the water of wisdom. Once you have wisdom, you will naturally see through things and be able to put them down. When you put them down, you obtain comfort. Why do you have this disease? It's because you consider your body to be very fine, with a pleasing appearance and physically fit, and you always have a scheme going on its behalf. You can't see through it or put it down. But no matter how beautiful a physical form you may have, it will stink just the same when it's time to die. No one will get near you.  
 **Sutra:  
  
I only hope that you, the Greatly Compassionate One, will take pity on us. We are sinking and drowning so that to this very day we do not know how our bodies and minds are in knots or how to go about untying them. Your explanation will also enable future living beings who are in suffering and difficulty to avoid the turning wheel and not fall into the three realms of existence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda is really pitiful. I only hope that you, the Greatly Compassionate One, the World Honored One, will give rise to great compassion and take pity on us. We are sinking and drowning so that to this very day we do not know how our bodies and minds are in knots. We are so deeply sunk in delusion that we don't know about our present bodies and minds. Which of the six sense-organs does the knot start with, and which senseorgan does it end with? If I am to untie these knots, I have to start at the beginning. I can't pick it up halfway along and expect to unravel it, I don't know how to go about untying them. Where do we untie them? Your explanation will also enable future living beings, I'm not just asking for myself. I have also brought forth the mind of a Bodhisattva and want to help those who are in suffering and difficulty, so that they may avoid the turning wheel and not fall into the three realms of existence. If they know the method for untying the knots, they won't fall into the three realms of existence. They will avoid the suffering of the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.  
  
L3 He begs for instruction.  
 **Sutra:  
  
After saying this, he and the entire great assembly made full prostrations. He wept profusely, and with sincere anticipation awaited the unsurpassed instruction of the Buddha, the Thus Come One.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
After saying this, after Ananda finished making his request, he and the entire great assembly made full prostrations. Literally, they "placed their five limbs on the ground." The five limbs are the legs, the arms, and the head. He wept profusely, and with sincere anticipation, do you see how indecisive Ananda is? From the beginning of the sutra to this point he's cried six times, including this time. No one who is listening to the sutra now has cried. Doesn't that mean that you are all much stronger than Ananda? Ananda listens to Shakyamuni Buddha's discussions and explanations as they investigate the dharma, and he cries. This time he cries very hard, profusely, like rain. His tears were probably enough to wash his face clean. "Anticipation" literally means to "stand on tiptoe;" this represents the depth of Ananda's sincerity. Perhaps this word is the origin of women's high heeled shoe. They read that Ananda was sincere to the point of being on tiptoe and they decided to walk around with the same attitude. He awaited the unsurpassed instruction of the Buddha, the Thus Come One. I just said that everyone now listening to the sutra is better than Ananda, but you shouldn't, therefore, conclude that you are in fact better than Ananda. To tell the truth, I was poking fun at you.  
  
"Oh?" you say, "the teacher has to poke fun at the disciples?" If I didn't poke fun, you wouldn't bring forth the resolve to study. Ananda cried because he was so intent upon seeking the dharma, so profoundly sincere. He realized that although he had been certified to the first fruit of arhatship, he still was not clear about the Buddhadharma, so he felt very repentant. That is why he wept remorsefully. And why haven't you cried? I'll tell: basically you are unconcerned about the Buddhadharma. You don't place any importance on it.  
  
"That's not so," you say. "Every day I study really hard." That doesn't count, because you haven't yet taken the Buddhadharma to heart, to your true heart. If you had, you might cry every day. Now my disciples who like to cry figure they're off the hook. "I can continue to cry every day because I don't understand the Buddhadharma." But those of you who like to cry should not cry. You should try to get yourselves under control and calm down. And those who don't cry should feel ashamed and ask yourselves, "Why don't I understand the Buddhadharma?" If you can weep because of that, as remorsefully as Ananda does here, then there's some hope for you.  
  
Those who don't mind crying, they can try it out. Those who don't like to cry won't be forced to do so. And those who enjoy crying can't cry. That's the way the Buddhadharma goes. Those who go too far should be reined in a bit. Those who don't go far enough should exert themselves a bit. That's the ultimate meaning of the Middle Way.  
  
K2 The Thus Come One certifies that there is no other source.  
L1 The prose.  
M1 All Buddhas have identical accomplishment.  
N1 He pities the assembly, rubs Ananda?s crown, and influences the Buddhas.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Then the World Honored One took pity on Ananda and on those in the assembly with something left to study, as well as on living beings of the future, in order to help them transcend the world and become eyes for the future.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Then is when Ananda asked the Buddha for his unsurpassed instruction. The World Honored One took pity on Ananda and on those in the assembly with something left to study. "Those with something left to study" refers to the first three fruitions of sagehood: the positions of shrotaapanna, sakridagamin, and anagamin. As well as on living beings of the future. "The future" refers to our present time; we are the living beings of the future. In order to help them transcend the world, this is a proper cause. "The world" refers to ordinary beings. Those who transcend the world are the sound-hearers, the arhats, those enlightened to conditions, the Bodhisattvas, and the Buddhas. For the sake of helping them transcend the world and become eyes for the future, that they might be the eyes for all living beings in the future, the Buddha does something extraordinary.  
 **Sutra:  
  
He rubbed the crown of Ananda's head with his Jambunada purple-golden bright hand. Instantaneously all the Buddhalands in the ten directions quaked in six ways.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
He rubbed the crown of Ananda's head with his Jambunada purple-golden bright hand. His hand was the color of the gold of the Jambu tree in southern Jambudvipa. In Buddhism, the gesture of rubbing the crown of the head represents compassionate care and protection. Instantaneously all the Buddhalands in the ten directions quaked in six ways. The six kinds of earthquakes have been discussed before. When a person who is cultivating the Way opens enlightenment and accomplishes Buddhahood, the six earthquakes occur. When the Buddha is about to speak the unsurpassed wonderful dharma, the six also occur. In the Dharma Ending Age, when someone is certified to the fruition of sagehood, the six kinds of earthquakes occur. There are various reasons for them. When the heavenly demons and adherents of external paths want to harm someone, they can also make the earth quake, but not necessarily in these six ways. There is no fixed number to the kinds of earthquakes demons cause. For instance, recently there was an earthquake in the Philippines which was reported to have killed  
four hundred people, though I imagine that was a modest estimate. I believe it was at least five or six hundred, as I see it.   
  
That kind of incident is a response to living being's karma, in which the heavenly demons and adherents of external paths come to destroy our world. That's what happens whenever there's a natural disaster or a man-made calamity. But if there is a high Sanghan with great virtue at the place where a calamity is to occur, for instance in the Philippines, or if there is a Bodhisattva or an Arhat who has been certified to the fruition living at that place, then the disaster can be averted. When a person of greatly virtuous practice goes even into the most dangerous situations, he can turn the inauspicious into the auspicious; he can make difficulties become fortunate circumstances. He can cause the most dangerous moments to pass uneventfully.  
  
The six kinds of quaking are: cracking, roaring, and striking, quaking, erupting, and heaving up. The first three belong to sound; the second three belong to motion. Quaking is a movement back and forth. Erupting is a sharp upward thrust, looking like a breaker on the ocean. Heaving up is a gradual rising, like the movement of an elevator.  
  
When the earth quakes, a sound occurs. One day here in San Francisco the earth quaked and the windows all began to rattle. "Danger, danger," they were saying. I noticed one person got scared at that point and put her palms together. Others noticed her and followed suit. Cracking brings sound, but when there is roaring, the very earth itself cries out like the roar of a lion. Striking occurs when the earth splits and the two parts scrape against one another. What do the six kinds of earthquakes represent? Why does the great earth tremble and move in six ways at this point in the Shurangama Sutra, when the Buddha is rubbing the crown of Ananda's head? It's because the Buddha is about to proclaim very important dharma. All the Buddhas of the ten directions have come to praise him in a single voice. That's the situation. It also represents the liberation of the six sense-organs, the release of the six knots. Ananda has just asked about the source of the six knots and how to end them. He asked where their beginning and end are. And the Buddha is about to explain this doctrine, so he rubbed the crown of Ananda's head and the great earth trembled and moved in six ways.  
  
N2 All Buddhas emit light and anoint their crowns.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Thus Come Ones as numerous as fine motes of dust, each dwelling in his respective world, emitted a precious light from the crown of his head.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Thus Come Ones as numerous as fine motes of dust, that many Buddhas, each dwelling in his respective world. Each Buddha was dwelling in his own Buddhaland. Each emitted a precious light from the crown of his head. Each of these many Buddhas emitted a rare light from the top of his head. Some lights were red, some were white, some were yellow, some were blue, all kinds of lights were emitted from the crown of their heads. Thus Come Ones as numerous as fine motes of dust emitted these various lights in order to represent the supremacy of the dharma that the Buddha was about to speak and to demonstrate that it was an ultimately high, wonderful dharma, the dharma of the great Buddha's summit.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At one and the same time their light went from their own countries to the Jeta Grove and anointed the crown of the Thus Come One's head. All in that great assembly obtained what they had never had before.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
At one and the same time their light, the light that the Thus Come Ones as numerous as fine motes of dust emitted from the crowns of their heads, went from their own countries, from the land in which each Buddha was dwelling, to the Jeta Grove. Note that it was the light that came to the Jeta Grove, not the Buddhas themselves. The light from each of the Thus Come Ones as many as the sands of the Ganges River and as numerous as fine motes of dust, came to anoint the crown of the Thus Come One's head, of Shakyamuni Buddha. This demonstrates that the Way of all Buddhas is the same. The dharma you speak is the dharma I also speak. It is one and the same. The light is interpenetrating and people's minds are also interpenetrating. The Buddhas' lights are interpenetrating and so are the Buddhas' minds. The same is true of people's minds. If you are upset in your mind with someone, that person will realize it, even if you haven't said a word. It's not that the person knows it consciously, on the level of his sixth mindconsciousness which makes discriminations, but there is a response that occurs in his eighth consciousness. He has an awareness on the level of the eighth consciousness because people's minds are interpenetrating.  
  
Science has now discovered this, that there is an invisible connection, like a telegram, that can arrive very quickly even from afar. And people's minds have a mutual telegraphic system. It cannot be seen with the ordinary eye, but if you genuinely obtain the perfectly fused and unobstructed Buddha eye, you will see why you are aware of the arising of another's thoughts. It's because he has sent out a telegram. If you open the Buddha eye or the wisdom eye, you will know naturally and will be able to see it.  
  
Because of these telegrams, people realize it as soon as you have the thought that you disagree with them. Your telegram arrives, and they become upset with you in turn. Some people have good feelings about others, and that, too, is known by the other person, but the response is slower. If you want to influence someone to change by means of positive reinforcement, then you can use all kinds of good thoughts to influence them, but the process will be gradual. Bit by bit you can cause them to awaken. As they awaken, their response will be positive in turn.  
  
Now that I've explained this telegraphic system that operates between people, some may not believe what I've said; nevertheless, it's true. In the future, when you actually open your Buddha eye, you won't have any doubts about this doctrine. Then you will realize, "Oh, I didn't believe it at the time, but it's actually true." The anointing of the crown of the Thus Come One represents the identity of the Way of all Buddhas and the shining of their light upon one another. The summit-dharma they speak is one and the same.  
  
All in that great assembly obtained what they had never had before. No one understood what they saw going on. "Ah? Why are the Buddhas of the ten directions emitting light that is shining upon our Buddha? What's the principle behind this?" Can you imagine how many rays of light were being sent there by Thus Come Ones as numerous as fine motes of dust? The light was immeasurable. But it was not the least bit mixed up. Each one very clearly illumined the crown of the Thus Come One's head. Those who had opened their Buddha eyes, those who had attained the first three fruitions of arhatship, did not understand what they saw. Even those who had attained the fourth fruition of arhatship did not understand it clearly. The reason they didn't understand is that they had never seen such a thing before. "Obtained what they had never had before" means they had never experienced anything like this.

N3 They hear the Buddhas speak with one sound.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Then Ananda and everyone in the great assembly heard the Thus Come Ones as numerous as fine motes of dust throughout the ten directions speak to Ananda in unison.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Then Ananda and everyone in the great assembly, the great Bodhisattvas, the great Arhats, the great bhikshus, heard the Thus Come Ones as numerous as fine motes of dust throughout the ten directions. All these people became as one person; each person was a part of the whole. At the same time they all heard the Thus Come Ones speak to Ananda in unison. Although there were many mouths, the voice was the same. What they had to say is meant not only for Ananda, but also for you and me and all those present listening to the sutra. This instruction is a very important section of the Shurangama Sutra. It concerns a crucial point: the matter of birth and death. If you understand this section, you can quickly put an end to birth and death. If you don't understand it, you'll have to double your efforts and make progress in your study and practice.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Good indeed, Ananda! You wish to recognize your innate ignorance that causes you to turn on the wheel. The origin of the knot of birth and death is simply your six sense-organs and nothing else.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
These words make it absolutely crystal clear. It is stated as plainly as it can be. If we truly understood it now, we would obtain liberation on the spot. If you haven't understood, you have to keep on investigating it. Thus Come Ones as numerous as fine motes of dust speak to Ananda with different mouths but a single voice, first of all praising him. "Good indeed, Ananda!" they say, like one would to a child. "You're a good boy. Very good, really smart!" They praise and flatter him first to draw his attention. And, once they've got his attention they tell him the truth. "You are very intelligent, Ananda, because you wish to recognize your innate ignorance. You want to know some genuine principle and learn about the ignorance that came with you at birth." It is also referred to as the "ignorance which appears with production." It causes you to turn on the wheel of the six paths of rebirth, bobbing up and down, being born here, dying there, and then being reborn in yet another place, in this life perhaps a Westerner, in the next life a Chinese, in the next a Japanese, the one after that an Indian, and in the life after that an African. Who sends you out to do this? Who tells someone to become a Japanese? Who tells someone to be a Chinese? Who tells someone to be a Westerner or an Easterner, or a Northerner or a Southerner? Nothing else than your innate ignorance does it. Because there is ignorance, one gives rise to delusion, and upon the arising of delusion one creates karma. Upon the creation of karma one must undergo retribution.   
  
For instance: "In this life I'll go to Africa. There are a lot of diamonds there. On the Gold Coast there are more riches than are found in America. It's still not developed, so if I am reborn there and develop it, won't I be wealthy? I'll be one of the world's richest people." From that one false thought you make a false move and end up in Africa, to develop the Gold Coast and mine diamonds. Those who like America will go there, those who like Australia will go there. Those who like Europe will go there, those who like Asia will go there. It's up to you. Whatever karma you create, you undergo that reward or retribution. You go there to be a person and once you get there you don't know how it happened. And then you don't know where you are headed next. The dream of riches is over, but you still haven't awakened. It's pitiful, isn't it? The dream of riches never ends, and when the time comes to die, the mine isn't finished, yet the life is exhausted.  
  
The origin of the knot of birth and death is simply your six sense-organs and nothing else. The root of birth and death becomes bound into a knot from which you cannot escape. What is it? It is nothing but a trick of your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. These six bring about your death and your birth. Did you know that? Nothing else is responsible. What keeps us so upside down, life after life and death after death, is simply your six sense organs.  
  
Why? The eyes see defiling objects of form and are turned around by then. The ears hear sounds and chase after them. The nose smells fragrances and goes out after them. The tongue tastes flavors and seeks after them. The body is touched and pursues the objects of touch. The mind entertains dharmas and races after dharmas. Tell me, how many things do you have altogether? So many! Following out after the six sense-organs, you become divided in six departments. You're like a business with six different departments and each takes a little money until the business is bankrupt. So you end up dying. Bankrupt. Closed down. Out of business. And with the little capital you have left, you puzzle over where you're going to open another business. Then you go somewhere else and open a new company. And there you are again, doing the same thing over again. Six bosses are in their offices expecting to do good business, but in the end it doesn't work out, and the work stops again. That's where the problem of birth and death comes from. Earlier in the sutra the Buddha admonished, "You only need not follow." You shouldn't follow the discriminating mind. You should not pursue the activities of the six organs, the six objects, and the six consciousnesses. Don't go along with them. Turn around to the shore.  
  
The sea of suffering is boundless,  
But a turn of the head finds the shore.  
  
A turn of the head finds the shore of enlightenment. If you don't turn around, then the more confused you get, the deeper you go in. The deeper you go in, the more confused you get. You get into debt to a lot of people, and your books are never in balance. Now that you recognize the six organs, you should not mistake a thief for your own son. Don't keep spinning around at the portals of the six organs. Come back. Come back. To where? To the Buddhist lecture hall!  
 **Sutra:  
  
You also want to understand unsurpassed Bodhi, so that you can quickly realize bliss, liberation, tranquility, and wonderful eternity. It, too, is your six sense-organs and nothing else.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Just before this passage, the sutra said that it is the six senseorgans that cause you to undergo birth and death, to give rise to delusion, to create karma, and to undergo retribution. But you should not despise the six sense-organs. You can't say, "You six things are horrible! I'm going to pluck out my eyes and pitch them some place far away. I'm going to cut off my ears and cast them aside as well. I'll lop off my nose and cut out my tongue. In fact, I'll dismember my body and grind up my bones and be done with the whole thing. I'll shred my heart to bits and scatter it into emptiness, and let it return to the great void that way."  
  
That attitude is also a mistake. People who cultivate the Way can't give rise to hatred. Although the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind don't treat you well, like in business, they're all embezzlers; still you don't fire them. Why not? Because, although they are not good now, they will help you if they change. If they stop their embezzling, they can help you make a profit.  
  
This section of text says that if you become enlightened and obtain permanence, bliss, true self, and purity, it is the six senseorgans that bring it about. It is thanks to them that it happens. This is like the analogy of water and ice. Water can be in liquid or solid form; it can be beneficial to people or it can harm them. So you can't lose your temper and say you don't want your eyes and ears. If you don't want your eyes, you become blind. If you don't want your ears, you go deaf. If you don't want your nose, you turn into some weird thing. If you don't want your tongue, you can't speak, and if you don't want your body, you wouldn't have anything at all; you'd turn into dull emptiness. Nor can you do without your mental processes. Thus, the Buddhas of the ten directions now say to Ananda: "You also want to understand the method for untying the knot, right?"   
  
Notice that these two sections of the sutra are not spoken by Shakyamuni Buddha alone. It is the Buddhas of the ten directions as numerous as fine motes of dust, limitless and boundless numbers of Buddhas, who are speaking now. "Very good, Ananda, you are a fine person. You are truly a good cultivator. You also want to know about unsurpassed Bodhi." The "Bodhi" referred to here is the cause for Bodhi. It cannot be explained as the Bodhi-result in this case. The meaning is, "You also want to bring forth the resolve for unsurpassed Bodhi so that you can obtain the Bodhi-result, so that you can quickly realize bliss, liberation, tranquility, and wonderful eternity." I assume that everyone understands what "quickly" means here, that everyone is eager to become a Buddha as soon as possible.   
  
The four virtues of nirvana are what is meant here: "Bliss" is the virtue of bliss, while "liberation" is the virtue of true self. If you have a self, you are not free. If you want to obtain liberation, you have to be without a self. You obtain the true self and are liberated from the false self. "Tranquilit" represents the virtue of purity. "Wonderful permanence" represents the virtue of permanence. "These are the four virtues of nirvana without residue, and it, too, is your six sense-organs and nothing else. Do you understand now, Ananda?" But after the Buddhas of the ten directions had spoken this doctrine, Ananda still didn't understand. When you are confused, then no matter how clearly someone may explain to you, you still do not understand it clearly yourself. "What's this mean, anyway? Birth and death are caused by the six sense-organs, but when one becomes liberated and is certified to the fruition, it is also caused by the six sense-organs. How can these six organs be responsible for what is bad and for what is good?" He doesn't understand. But people can be both good and bad. Today some one feels good and wants to help people. "I want to give to the poor," he says and he takes out his money and gives it away. But the next day he's broke and thinks, "Yesterday I gave all my money away and today I don't have any to spend. I'll get my gun and go rob someone." So he turns into a bad person. Who was it who did good? It was he. Who was it who did bad things? It was he also.  
  
I say to you, then, the one who becomes a ghost is the same one who becomes a Buddha. But for the most part, Americans don't believe in ghosts. Why do I keep bringing up ghosts even though you don't believe in them? Since I'm not a ghost, I dare talk about them. If you believe in the Buddha, you should also believe that there are ghosts. After all, Buddhas come from ghosts. If you do things well, you become a Buddha. If you don't do things well, you end up a ghost. By the same token, the six sense-organs cause your births and deaths; they also bring about your certification to the fruition. If there aren't any ghosts, then there aren't any people, either, or any Buddhas. There isn?t anything at all, and the world will go to wrack and ruin. People who say they believe in Buddhas but don't believe that there are ghosts are so obstinate that even if the Buddha were in the world, he couldn't teach them. The Buddha says very clearly in the sutras that there are ghosts; why don't you believe that they exist? "Other religions talk about ghosts and spirits," you argue. But you can't choose to believe that there are no ghosts and spirits just because another religion says that there are. The reason that other religions discuss them is that in fact they exist. Just because you don't believe in a certain religion doesn't mean you can reject what is true in its doctrines, such as the existence of ghosts and spirits. Such people may think themselves smart, but they're witless. Not only do they completely fail to understand Buddhist doctrine, they don't even understand human existence. Pitiful!  
  
M2 The Thus Come One explains in detail.  
N1 Ananda has not yet awakened and so asks a question.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda heard these sounds of dharma, but he did not yet understand in his mind. Bowing his head, he said to the Buddha, "How can what causes me to revolve in the cycle of birth and death and what enables me to gain bliss and wonderful eternity be the six sense-organs in both cases and nothing else?"  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda heard Shakyamuni Buddha and the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions as numerous as fine motes of dust, speaking with different mouths but in a single voice, say that the source of birth and death is the six sense organs and that the bliss and permanence of the nirvana of Bodhi is also brought about by the six senseorgans and nothing else. But Ananda didn't understand. Ananda heard these sounds of dharma, he listened to the subtle, wonderful, inconceivable sounds of dharma, but he did not yet understand in his mind. And since he didn't understand, therefore, bowing his head, he said to the Buddha, he bowed from the waist to the Buddha, how can what causes me to revolve in the cycle of birth and death, spinning again and again on the wheel of rebirth, and what enables me to gain bliss and wonderful eternity, these two that Ananda mentions include liberation and tranquility as well, be the six sense-organs in both cases and nothing else? I don't understand this principle.  
  
N2 The Thus Come One explains in detail and gets rid of his doubts.  
 **Sutra:  
  
The Buddha said to Ananda, "The sense-organs and the objects are of the same source. The bonds and the release are not two. The nature of the consciousnesses is empty and false; it is like strange flowers in space."  
  
Commentary:**  
  
The Buddha said to Ananda, "The sense-organs and the objects are of the same source." The six sense-organs, the six sense-objects, and the six sense-consciousnesses come from the same source. If there weren't six organs, there wouldn't be six objects, and if there weren't six objects, there wouldn't be six consciousnesses. The three are one; the one is three. The bonds and the release are not two. "Bonds" refers to the knots. "Release" refers to their untying. These two are non-dual. There's no fundamental difference between them. The bonds are the release; the release is the bonds. When you don't understand, they are knots. When you understand, it is liberation. The knot is release. It depends on your own ability. The nature of the consciousnesses is empty and false. The nature of the six consciousnesses has no substance or appearance. It is like strange flowers in space. Do you remember the person with the eye-disease? His staring caused fatigue and the appearance of strange flowers in space. The six organs, six objects, and six consciousnesses are just like the strange flowers in space. They are completely unreal in themselves. Good comes to them, and so does evil. In the same way, one person can be both good and evil. Although "good" and "evil" are different words, they refer to the same person.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, sense-awareness arises because of the sense objects: the appearance of objects exists because of the senseorgans. The appearance and the perception, both devoid of a nature, support each other like intertwining reeds.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, sense-awareness arises because of the sense objects. A discriminating knowing and perception arise due to the six sense-objects. The appearance of objects exists because of the sense-organs. The appearance of the six sense-objects arises due to the six sense-organs. The appearance and the perception, both devoid of a nature, support each other like intertwining reeds. "Perception" here refers to the sense-awareness first mentioned. Neither the appearance nor the awareness has an inherent self-nature; the appearance arises only because the six sense-organs match with the six sense objects. It is therefore not real; it is empty and false. The perception is also empty and false. They "support each other like intertwining reeds." The reeds referred to here have a common root, from which the two reeds grow. They will only stand if there are two; one by itself will fall down. The six organs, six objects, and six consciousnesses are the same way. The organs and objects must work together to bring about the six consciousnesses. One alone will not stand. To further the analogy, the reeds are hollow, so that there appears to be something substantial to them when one looks at them, but they are ultimately empty inside. That represents the empty falseness of the six organs and objects.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Therefore, you now base your knowledge on awareness and perception; but that is fundamental ignorance. The absence of a view regarding awareness and perception is nirvana; the true purity of no outflows. How could there be anything else in the midst of it?  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Therefore, you now base your knowledge on awareness and perception. You set up another awareness and perception based on an awareness and perception that are in themselves wrong. But that is fundamental ignorance. The absence of a view regarding awareness and perception is nirvana. You realize that your awareness and perception are basically non existent, and so you establish no opinion based on them. To have no awareness and perception in the midst of awareness and perception is to be in accord with the Way. It is nirvana and the true purity of no outflows. How could there be anything else in the midst of it? In the midst of the absence of awareness and perception, how could you harbor anything else? That place is pure at its origin and pervades the dharma realm. Why would you want to add anything to it? Why add awareness and perception to awareness and perception? This principle is like the one in the passage above that  
states, "Basic enlightenment is necessarily bright but is falsely referred to as bright enlightenment."  
  
L2 The verses.  
Ml Mention of the verses.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Then the World Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses, saying:  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Then Shakyamuni, the World Honored One, knew that Ananda had still not understood the answer to his question: wishing, then, to restate this meaning, he spoke verses, saying. Verses have a fixed number of syllables in each line; perhaps five, six, or seven in the Chinese.  
 **Sutra:  
  
In the true nature, conditioned things are empty.  
They spring from causes, as illusions do.  
Things unconditioned neither rise nor cease.  
Unreal they are, like flowers in space.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
In the true nature, that is, in the absence of any falseness; a falseness, nonetheless, relies on the true nature to come into being. Thus, conditioned things arise out of true emptiness. But the conditioned dharmas are empty.  
  
They spring from causes, as illusions do. Conditioned dharmas arise when certain conditions are present. But, once conditions arise, they will also cease to be. Thus, the fundamental substance is emptiness. That's why it's said to be like an illusion. Things unconditioned neither rise nor cease. You say that conditioned dharmas are empty. What about unconditioned dharmas? Are they empty, too? Yes. They are not born and do not become extinct. Wouldn't you call them neither rising nor ceasing emptiness? Unreal they are, like flowers in space. They don't have a substantial nature; they are not real, just like the strange flowers in space.  
 **Sutra:  
  
To speak of the false is to reveal the true.  
But both the false and the true are false themselves.  
If there is neither truth nor untruth,  
How can there be perceiver and perceived?  
  
Commentary:**  
  
To speak of the false is to reveal the true. Why do we talk about falseness? It is in order to manifest all that is true. But true and false are opposites, and so they are not ultimate dharmas. In his Song of Enlightenment, the Great Master Yong Jia says:  
  
When the true is not set up,  
the false is basically empty;  
When both existence and  
non-existence are dispelled,  
What wasn't empty is made empty.  
  
There isn't any true. The false is basically empty, but the true doesn't exist, either. What's to be called true? The true does not remain. Nor is there any existence or non existence. You have to make empty what is not empty: this is the same principle. The false is spoken to reveal the true. But the true and the false that you speak about are both false. They are not true. If they were true, how could there be a false among them? There isn't anything at all: that is the dharma-realm of true emptiness. It is the "one true dharma-realm", the "dharma-realm of true suchness". In it not a single dharma is established. As soon as you speak about the true by comparing it to falseness, then the true becomes false. The true referred to is no longer fundamental truth. Both are false because they are opposites.   
  
At its ultimate point, Buddhism is absolute; there are no dualities. True and false are still at the level of opposites and in the realm of duality. The true which is the opposite of the false is itself false. If there is neither truth nor untruth. The Buddha explains that it appears to be true, but that it is not fundamental truth. As soon as a name is applied to it, it be comes a secondary truth, not the primary truth. How can there be perceiver and perceived? How can you say there is a subjective perceiver and an object perceived? The subjectivity of the "seeing division" and of the six defiling objects, the "appearance division," which is what is perceived, cannot be spoken of, because they do not exist.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Between them the two in fact have no nature.  
Thus they are likened to entwining reeds.  
The knots and their release have a common cause.  
The sages' and ordinary people's paths are not two.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Between them the two in fact have no nature. In the midst of the true and the false, the six organs, the six objects, and the six consciousnesses there is no nature that actually exists. Thus they are likened to entwining reeds. The knots and their release have a common cause. When you do not understand, you get tied up in knots and cannot undo them. When you understand and obtain liberation, you know that the cause of both the knots and their release was the same. Lack of understanding is the knots; understanding is the release. The sages' and ordinary people's paths are not two. Holy people and ordinary people don't tread separate paths. A sage is someone who understands the principle of things. He has fathomed the myriad aspects of the entire universe and thus has a sage's wisdom. An ordinary person, when he does not understand, turns his back on enlightenment and unites with the defilements of the world. So, an ordinary person,  
  
Turns his back on enlightenment  
and unites with the dust.  
  
A sage,  
  
Turns his back on the dust,  
and unites with enlightenment.  
  
If you renounce enlightenment, you become one with the defiling appearances of conditioned dharmas. But, basically, the sage and the ordinary person are not on different roads. Why aren't their paths different? One is confused and the other has awakened. But the source of confusion and enlightenment is one. Here we are speaking of ultimate dharmas:  
  
Sweep away all dharmas,  
Separate from all appearances.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Regard the nature of the intertwined.  
Emptiness, existence both are naught.  
Dark confusion is simply ignorance;  
Bringing it to light is liberation.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, regard the nature of the intertwined. Minutely examine the intertwining reeds, especially the nature that lies between them. What nature do the intertwining reeds have? None at all! There is neither emptiness nor existence in evidence. Emptiness, existence both are naught. You may say that it's empty, yet there is something there. You may say that it exists, but, in fact, it doesn't. The intertwining reeds represent the non-existent quality of both conditioned and unconditioned dharmas. You should understand this.  
  
Dark confusion is simply ignorance. This means that, with reference to your six sense-organs, when you do not understand, when you have not yet awakened, you are confused about true emptiness. A darkness grows in the emptiness; that's where ignorance comes from. In the pure nature and bright substance of your everlasting true mind, confusion grows into ignorance. Bringing it to light is liberation. If you discover this, there is no ignorance. You discover your inherent, enlightened nature. This discovery is just liberation.  
  
In the past, there was a monk of the Chan school who heard about an enlightened high Sanghan with virtue in the Way. He went to request instruction from him. In Buddhism, asking for instruction is a very formal affair. It isn't just a matter of tossing out a casual question and getting a casual answer back. Since the instruction is given for the sake of ending birth and death, the whole matter is looked upon quite seriously. I's necessary to put on good robes and the sash and take your sitting cloth with you. When you arrive in the master's presence, you completely open out your sitting cloth, spread it on the ground, bow three times, and then kneel erect on both knees with your palms together. Then you can ask about whatever you don't understand.  
  
What did the monk ask? He wanted to know how to obtain liberation. He sought release. How could he get free? This was his question to the Superior-seated One, that is, to the Sanghan who had held the precepts for a long time, one whose general status among the Sangha was of long standing. The monk asked, "If you please, Superior-seated One, how can I become liberated?"  
  
The elder Sanghan retorted, "Who's tying you up?" With that one sentence, the monk asking for instruction became enlightened. Was it really just that one sentence that caused his enlightenment? Yes and no.  
  
"How can that be?" you wonder. Almost always, a situation can be looked at from both sides and explained in more than one way. "Isn't that just being evasive or vague?"  
  
No, not if you can really speak to the principle involved. In this case, we can say that it was just that one sentence that brought about the monk's enlightenment, because the old cultivator who said it had looked into the causes and conditions that had brought the monk to the point of asking for liberation. He knew that his answer, "Who's tying you up?" would give the monk an immediate understanding, an enlightenment. Therefore, he chose to answer in that way. Even so, there are times when a person doesn't become enlightened, even though one wants him to. This time, however, we can say that the old cultivator was successful with his sentence and that he enabled that student of Chan to obtain enlightenment.  
  
On the other hand, how can it be explained that it was not just that one sentence that brought about the monk's enlightenment? Ordinarily that monk cultivated on a daily basis to develop his skill in meditation. He'd been cultivating for a long time but still had not had a breakthrough. Even so, every day he worked on it and every day his wisdom grew. He hadn't actually become enlightened, but he was close. Then, the one sentence that the superior seated Sanghan spoke was opportune, and he suddenly became enlightened. He encountered the mixing and uniting of causes and conditions, and so as soon as the high Sanghan pointed the Way, he understood. There is a saying:  
  
Sitting ten years in contemplation alone in the mountain wilds,  
Isn't as good as a slight indication given by a Bright Advisor.  
  
A "bright advisor" means a "bright-eyed" advisor, that is, someone who has opened the Buddha eye. A "good knowing one" like this can look into causes and conditions. He speaks dharmas that accord with the point to which your causes and conditions are developed. So you may sit ten years in the mountains, but it won't match having a bright-eyed advisor point out a bright path to you.  
  
Therefore, drawing near a good and wise advisor is very important in Buddhism. Among elder monks, there are very, very few who are genuine bright-eyed advisors. They may be good and wise advisors, but not necessarily "bright-eyed," that is, they may not have opened their five eyes. You should not think this is such an easy thing to do, either. Opening the Buddha eye is certainly not the same as certification to the fruitions of arhatship, but it does require that you have good roots in past lives.  
  
To be able to open the Buddha eye, one has to have singlemindedly cultivated the dharmas of great compassion, specifically the Forty-two Greatly Compassionate Hands and Eyes. If you have cultivated these earnestly, you can open the Buddha eye, that is a dharma that "gets you through the gate." If a person who has opened the Buddha eye leaves the home life, he or she can save a lot of beings, but it all depends on causes and conditions. Those of you who would like to open the Buddha eye should be extremely rigorous in your cultivation of the Forty-two Hands and Eyes. Never miss a day in your practice. And most important, you can't smoke cigarettes if you cultivate this dharma. If you try to do both, the dharma-protecting good spirits will reprimand you. So don't be sloppy about it.  
  
I hope every one of you will be very attentive to the practice of the Forty-two Hands and Eyes. Never miss a day, and even at that, it will take several years of skill before you have any success. If you have cultivated them in previous lives, then your progress will be more rapid. You will open the wisdom eye very quickly.

N2 Finally the explanatory gatha.  
O1 The explanation.  
 **Sutra:  
  
The knots must be untied successively.  
When the six are released, even the one ceases to be.  
Select an organ preferred for perfect penetration;  
Enter the flow and realize proper enlightenment.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
The knots must be untied successively. It is necessary to follow an order in releasing the knots.' How does one release them successively? How did they get bound together in the first place?" you ask.  
  
To begin with, the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One is not subject to production and extinction. But, confusion takes on the aspect of emptiness, delusion and obscurity make emptiness. At that point, ignorance arises. Therefore, although the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One is neither produced nor destroyed, relying on truth, a falseness arises, and with it the mind subject to production and extinction, a consciousness. This consciousness divides into the sixth, seventh, and eighth consciousnesses.  
  
But the source of the eighth consciousness, which is founded on ignorance that creates production and extinction, is the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One, which is not subject to production or extinction. Its source is the pure nature and bright substance of the eternal true mind.  
  
Relying on truth a falseness arises, the treasury of the Thus Come One changes into the alaya consciousness, the eighth consciousness, also called the "storehouse" consciousness. The eighth consciousness is the basis for the existence of the five skandhas: form, feeling, thought, activity, and consciousness. Starting with the skandha of consciousness, one progresses to the skandha of activity. This is the seventh consciousness, the manas consciousness (mo na shi), also called the "transmitting" consciousness (chuan song chi). This consciousness transmits messages from the sixth consciousness to the eighth consciousness. It forms the activity skandha.  
  
The next skandha is that of thought; this is the sixth consciousness, the mind-consciousness. The feeling skandha is the first five consciousnesses of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. The skandhas of feeling, thought, activity, and consciousness correspond to one knot each. The form-skandha counts as two knots, because it is coarser. Thus, the six knots start with the eighth consciousness and progress through the seventh and the sixth, and then through the five. With the existence of the five skandhas, the five turbidities come into being, producing all kinds of obstructions. If we want to untie these knots we must first stop chasing after the skandha of form. Once these two knots are broken open, then the other skandhas of feeling, thought, activity, and consciousness are released as well; the six knots are all untied. "The knots must be untied successively," because the skandha of form is composed of coarse knots, while the remaining skandhas of feeling, thought, activity, and consciousness are extremely subtle.  
  
"So why do they begin their formation from the inside and work outward?" you wonder.  
  
It is because the eighth consciousness is the first to arrive at conception. It all starts with the eighth consciousness. The five skandhas and the eighth consciousness become bound together in the knot of birth and death. It starts with the eighth consciousness; you release it by starting with the form skandha. The process can be likened to removing clothes. You take off an outer layer, and an inner layer is revealed. In this way, you take off layer after layer until you have removed them all; then the knot is untied. That's how it's explained, but actually if you release one knot, the other five will disappear as well. The verse says: When the six are released, even the one ceases to be. When the six sense-organs, the knots, are freed, the one disappears as well. This will be explained in detail later in the text.  
  
Select an organ preferred for perfect penetration. The method for cultivation is applying effort right at the entrance to the six organs. That is, the eyes are not turned by forms, the ears are not turned by sounds, the nose is not turned by smells, the tongue is not turned by flavors, the body is not turned by objects of touch, and the mind is not turned by dharmas. You transform what takes place at the entrance to the six organs. You return the light to illumine within; you do not seek outside. Guard and gather in your body and mind. Seek within yourself.  
  
In cultivating the six organs, you have to select one organ which will lead you to perfect penetration. The Buddha has already laid the groundwork for this. He discussed the efficacy of twelve hundred of each of the organs and told Ananda to see which organs were more complete. The eyes, for instance, are not complete, but the ears are. The tongue and the mind are also complete organs. Three are complete and three are not. You are to select a complete organ and then develop your skill in cultivation with regard to it. Shakyamuni Buddha has tacitly implied that the organ of the ear will lead to perfect penetration, but he has not come right out and said it. He wants Ananda to make his own selection; he wants him to figure it out for himself.  
  
Select an organ preferred for perfect penetration, and enter the flow and realize proper enlightenment. Enter the flow of the dharma-nature  
of the sages. Turn against the flow of the six sense-objects of an ordinary person. After entering the flow, one can accomplish proper enlightenment, that is, become a Buddha.  
  
O2 Specific passage about the supreme meanings.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Extremely subtle, the adana consciousness  
Makes patterns of habit that flow on in torrents.  
Fearing you will confuse the truth with what is not,  
I rarely tell you of all this.  
  
Commentary:**

This is dharma which Shakyamuni Buddha rarely speaks. "I rarely tell you of all this," I don't ever like to explain this dharma. Just imagine: Shakyamuni Buddha rarely explained this dharma for the great Arhats, the great Bodhisattvas, and the great bhikshus, and yet how easily we have had the opportunity to hear this wonderful dharma spoken by the Buddha!  
  
Extremely subtle, the adana (tuo na) consciousness. This is a very subtle consciousness, even more so than the eighth. The "adana" is also called the "pure" consciousness. It is the seed of purity.  
  
This especially fine and subtle consciousness makes patterns of habit that flow on in torrents. This is the source of our birth and death. As soon as falseness arises in the one truth of that subtle consciousness, one thought of ignorance, it turns into habits that come on like a torrent. Nothing will curtail them. Here the torrent refers to our birth and death. Being born and dying, in birth and death, again and again, sometimes a person, sometimes an animal, sometimes born as a god, sometimes falling into the hells, spinning ceaselessly, patterns of habit flow on in torrents.  
  
Fearing you will confuse the truth with what is not, I rarely tell you of all this. Why isn't the true dharma talked about? Why don't I express the subtle wonder of the genuine dharma for you? I'm afraid people will think that the true is false and that they will think what is really false is true. For example, you were determined to add "bright" to "enlightenment," and by doing so you just add confusion to confusion and become doubly deluded.  
  
"Normally I don't explain this wonderful dharma. I speak the small vehicle doctrines for you small vehicle people. The genuine, wonderful dharma of the great vehicle is something I've never told you about before. I haven't done so because you people of the small vehicle still don't have the stature to hear it. You haven't turned from the small toward the great. So even when I wanted to explain it, I refrained."  
 **Sutra:  
  
With your own mind, you grasp at your own mind.  
What is not illusory turns into illusion.  
If you don't grasp, there is no non-illusion.  
If even non-illusion does not arise,  
How can illusory dharmas be established?  
This is called the Wonderful Lotus Flower,  
The Regal Vajra Gem of Enlightenment.  
  
Commentary:**  
With your own mind, you grasp at your own mind. Living beings do not understand that the division of seeing and the division of appearances are manifestations of the mind alone. The three realms come only from consciousness; The myriad dharmas spring only from the mind. Not understanding that all things are made from the mind alone, they become attached to the seeing-division, that is, to their own subjective viewpoint, their eighth consciousness. The appearance division refers to external objects. Basically, the division of seeing and the division of appearances are both empty and false. They are figments of your own mind. Most people never realize that they should return the light and illumine within. They just keep seeking outside themselves. They get confused about the true and chase after what is false. If you realize that the myriad dharmas come from your mind alone; if you, recognize your own mind, and see your own nature, you will know that the two divisions of seeing and appearances arise from your own mind. If you understand the bright substance and pure nature of your eternal true mind, you will not run outside, but will return home.  
  
What is not illusory turns into illusion. Because living beings are confused about what is true and chase after what is false, they come to have doubts about what basically was not illusory, and so that becomes illusory. You must be able to not grasp at these illusory appearances. Not grasping is the important point here. The reason most people are confused by the six sense-organs and six sense objects is that they grasp at the two divisions of seeing and appearances. They become attached to the belief that their capacity to see is the division of seeing and that what they see really exists. They don't know that it is empty and false, it is illusory. If you don't grasp, there is no non-illusion. There isn't any non-illusion. If even non-illusion does not arise. What is not empty and false basically does not come into being: there is no place where it is produced. How can illusory dharmas be established? How can empty illusory dharmas exist? They don't.  
  
This is called the Wonderful Lotus Flower, wonderful and subtle. The lotus flower arises from the mud but is not defiled by it. It grows in mud but is itself pure. And, the flower and fruit appear simultaneously. It is the Regal Vajra Gem of Enlightenment. Vajra is the most durable and toughest substance. It represents wisdom. Nothing can destroy or break through genuine wisdom. "Regal" means free and easy, as a king is. "Gem of enlightenment" refers to our true mind. If you can keep from grasping at the two divisions of seeing and appearances; if you can return to the source, then you can return to the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One by turning the consciousnesses into wisdom. Once the turning is accomplished, the two divisions turn into a wonderful lotus flower, the gem of enlightenment.  
 **Sutra:  
  
In this Samapatti that is likened to illusion,  
Transcend all study instantly.  
  
Commentary:**  
It is also called by another name, Samapatti that is likened to illusion. "Samapatti" is a Sanskrit word which means "holding equally," that is, the equal maintaining of the power of samadhi and the power of wisdom. With wisdom you can untie the six knots. With samadhi you will not create the six knots. In this samapatti, one should transcend all study instantly. "Instantly" is literally "in a finger-snap." In no time at all, one transcends the positions in which there is still study and arrives at the position of no further study, that is, the fourth fruition of arhatship. The positions of the first, second, and third fruitions, where there is something left to study, are transcended in a finger-snap, as one is certified to the fourth fruition, arhatship.  
 **Sutra:  
  
This abhidharma, incomparable  
Is the single pathway through nirvana's gate,  
Taken by Bhagavans in all the ten directions.  
  
Commentary:**  
This Abhidharma, incomparable. "Abhidharma" translates as "peerless." This refers to the kind of dharma, the method, being discussed. Is the single pathway through nirvana's gate, it is the unsurpassed method to untie the knots, taken by Bhagavans in all the ten directions. "Bhagavan" in the transliterated pronunciation po qie fan, is found at the beginning of the fourth section of the Shurangama Mantra. It is a universal name for the Buddha, used and recognized by Buddhas, spirits, and ghosts in referring to Buddhas. Here "Bhagavan" is not translated, because the original word includes six meanings. A translation can render only one meaning.   
  
The six meanings of Bhagavan are:  
  
1) Comfortable. The Buddha's nature is comfortable, in the same way that the name "Contemplate in Comfort" given to Guan Yin Bodhisattva means that he is a comfortable Bodhisattva.  
  
2) Dazzling. This meaning describes the Buddha's light, which pervades the dharma realm.  
  
3) Decorous. The Buddha is correct in his bearing and never lax or lazy. We should try to be the same. When you listen to sutras, you should sit in an appropriately respectful manner. Don't lounge or slouch or stretch out. It should be as if the Buddha himself were before you speaking the dharma. Since we believe in the Buddha, we should show our respect to him. We shouldn't be lazy right before the Buddha's eyes; when listening to sutras, you cannot lie down or go to sleep. You shouldn't lie down when reading sutras, either. I've told you before that if you do that, you will become a snake in a future life. Snakes have to lie down even when they move from place to place. They can't stand up. When you read a sutra, you should sit up straight and perhaps place it on a table in front of you. If you have one degree of respect, you increase your wisdom by one degree. If you have ten degrees of respect, you increase your wisdom by ten degrees. If you have a hundred, thousand, or ten thousand degrees of respect, you increase your wisdom by the same amount. You also increase your good roots.  
  
The Vajra Sutra says it clearly: "There is a Buddha in any place that the sutra text is found," a Buddha. Your respect will bring a response; if you lack respect, there won't be a response. Consider it as if Shakyamuni Buddha himself were lecturing the sutra for you and the Venerable Ananda was by your side. And around you in the great assembly are all the great Bodhisattvas as well. Let it be just like the dharma assembly on Magic Mountain. If you had that kind of respect, there would be no way you could fail to get enlightened. "But Ananda had listened to so much of the teaching and still hadn't become enlightened. Can I become enlightened now, on first hearing it?" How do you know Ananda hadn't become enlightened? Maybe Ananda was intentionally pretending not to be enlightened so that the Buddha would speak the sutra and we now can hear it. Ananda became a Buddha a long time ago, not to speak of his gaining any lesser enlightenment! He's just appearing as the spokesperson and acting like he doesn't understand. In fact, Ananda remembered every bit of the dharma the Buddha spoke; how could he not have understood the principles the Buddha is explaining here? He has long since understood and is just requesting dharma on behalf of us who are living beings now. He's a model, an example for us. You shouldn't think that you're smarter than Ananda. You're not.  
  
4) Renowned. Everyone praises the Bhagavan; everyone respects him.  
  
5) Lucky.  
  
6) Honored and noble.  
  
Since the title, Bhagavan, has these six meanings, it is not translated. Among the five kinds of terms not translated, it is the one that has many meanings.  
  
Is the single pathway through nirvana's gate. This dharma door is the one by which the Buddhas of the ten directions accomplished Buddhahood. They took the road that led to nirvana.  
  
L3 He discusses his enlightenment.  
 **Sutra:  
  
When Ananda and the great assembly heard the unsurpassed, compassionate instruction of the Buddha, the Thus Come One, this harmonious and brilliant geya verse with its clear and penetrating wonderful principles, their hearts and eyes were opened, and they exclaimed that dharma such as this had never been before.  
  
Commentary:**  
When Ananda and the great assembly heard the unsurpassed, compassionate instruction of the Buddha, the Thus Come One. Ananda and everyone in the great assembly were influenced by the reiterative verse the Buddha spoke about the one path for entrance into nirvana taken by all the Buddhas of the ten directions. Nothing could be more lofty than this compassionate explanation. This harmonious and brilliant geya verse. "Geya," reiterative verse, recapitulates the prose which precedes it. Such verses have a fixed number of characters in each line in the Chinese, be it four, five, six, or seven. This verse's dharma is expressed in a harmonious and illuminating way, so it is said to be "harmonious and brilliant," with its clear and penetrating wonderful principles. This subtle wonderful principle expresses what is absolutely fundamental and essential.  
  
Their hearts and eyes were opened. Ananda and the members of the great assembly came to understand a great deal more doctrine than they ever had before. Their minds were clearer and their eyes were brighter, and this in turn increased their wisdom. Here, "eyes" refers to the opening of the wisdom eye. And they exclaimed that dharma such as this had never been before. "This dharma is so wonderful! There's never been anything like it before!"