**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 6**

**CHAPTER 4**

**The Two Upside-down Causes**

F4 He explains certification to the position of dhyana causing him to dwell in complete samadhi and tend straight toward bodhi.  
G1 Ananda is grateful for the instruction and asks about the position.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Then Ananda arose from his seat, bowed at the Buddha's feet, and said to the Buddha, "Now that we who are stupid and slow, who are fond of erudition but have not sought to cease the outflows of our minds, have received the Buddha's compassionate instructions and have attained the proper means to become infused with cultivation, we experience joy in body and mind and obtain tremendous benefit."  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Then Ananda arose from his seat, bowed at the Buddha's feet, and said to the Buddha: Now that we who are stupid and slow, that is, those of us in the assembly who still must study and must rely on our memories, who are fond of erudition but have not sought to cease the outflows of our minds: we like to read, to study, and to memorize. We are quite clever at that. But as to the outflows of our thoughts and actions, we have not sought to get rid of them. We have not decided we want to transcend the triple realm. We are not concerned about getting out of the burning house. Now that we have received the Buddha's compassionate instructions and have attained the proper means to become infused with cultivation, we experience joy in body and mind and obtain tremendous benefit. The Buddha has now taught us the genuine dharma-methods that we should cultivate and steep ourselves in. This makes us very happy. It's been of great benefit to us.  
 **Sutra:  
  
"World Honored One, for one who cultivates in this way and is certified as having attained the Buddha's samadhi, but who has not yet reached nirvana, what is meant by the level of 'dry wisdom'? What are the 'forty-four minds'? What is the sequence in which one cultivates till one reaches one's goal? What place must one reach to be said to have 'entered the grounds'? And what is meant by a Bodhisattva of 'equal enlightenment'?"  
  
Commentary:**  
  
World Honored One, for one who cultivates in this way and is certified as having attained the Buddha's samadhi, but who has not yet reached nirvana, what is meant by the level of "dry wisdom"? Buddha, we cultivate in this way until we are certified to the fruition and give proof to the Buddha's samadhi-power. But before we reach nirvana, there are many levels to pass through. What is the level of "dry wisdom", for example? What are the "forty-four minds"? What is the sequence in which one cultivates till one reaches one's goal? What place must one reach to be said to have entered the grounds? How do we know when we reach the level of the tenth ground Bodhisattva? And what is meant by a Bodhisattva of "equal enlightenment"? Since all these terms are going to be explained in the subsequent passages, we will not go into them here.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Having said this, he made a full prostration, and then the great assembly single-mindedly awaited the sound of the Buddha's compassionate voice as they gazed up unblinking with respectful admiration.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
After Ananda had said this, he made a full prostration. He and everyone in the great assembly placed their five limbs; their head, arms, and legs, on the ground in full obeisance. And then the great assembly single-mindedly awaited the sound of the Buddha's compassionate voice as they gazed up unblinking with respectful admiration. They gazed with such fixed intensity that it was as if they could not see. They waited expectantly for the Buddha to speak. What do you suppose the Buddha is going to say?  
  
G2 The Thus Come One answers with instruction in the arisal of conditions.  
H1 The Thus Come One offers to speak and the great assembly waits to hear.  
 **Sutra:  
  
At that time the World Honored One praised Ananda, saying, "Good indeed, good indeed, that you can for the sake of the entire great assembly and those beings in the final age who cultivate samadhi and seek the great vehicle, ask to have explained and revealed the unsurpassed proper path of cultivation that takes one from the level of an ordinary person to final Parinirvana. Listen attentively, and I will speak about it for you." Ananda and everyone in the assembly placed their palms together, cleansed their minds, and silently waited to receive the teaching.  
  
Commentary:**  
At that time refers to the period when the great assembly was gazing up unblinkingly with respectful admiration. The World Honored One praised Ananda. He perceived how sincere Ananda and the great assembly were, so he praised him saying: Good indeed, good indeed, you are certainly a good person. You can for the sake of the entire great assembly and those beings of the final age. It is excellent that you who still have something left to study can seek for the sake of everyone and not just for yourselves. You are not being selfish or seeking self-benefit in doing this. You are doing it for everyone assembled here and also for beings to come in the future who cultivate samadhi and who want to practice the great vehicle dharmas of benefiting themselves and benefiting others, and so you ask to have explained and revealed the unsurpassed proper path of cultivation that takes one from the level of an ordinary person to final Parinirvana. Nirvana is the fruition where there is neither production nor extinction. You haven't arrived at it yet, but you wish to know about the proper way to get there. Listen attentively, and I will speak about it for you. Pay close attention. I am willing to explain it for you.  
  
Ananda and everyone in the assembly placed their palms together, cleansed their minds, and silently waited to receive the teaching. "Cleansed their minds" means that they cast out their extraneous thoughts, the false thinking of their conscious mind, their mad mind and wild nature. They got rid of the five quick causes,  
  
1. the point of view of a body,  
2. prejudiced views,  
3. the point of view of unbeneficial precepts,  
4. opinionated views, and  
5. deviant views,  
  
as well as the five slow causes,  
  
1. greed,  
2. hatred,  
3. stupidity,  
4. pride, and  
5. doubt.  
  
Just as one hollows out a log to make a boat, they hollowed out their minds so that they could receive the teaching. At this point no one spoke. They were silent as they waited for Shakyamuni Buddha to begin his explanation.  
  
H2 The true suchness which is relied upon is the source of the dharma.  
 **Sutra:  
  
The Buddha said, "Ananda, you should know that the wonderful nature is perfect and bright, apart from all names and appearances. Basically there is no world, nor are there any living beings."**  
**Commentary:**  
  
The Buddha said, "Ananda, you should know that the wonderful nature is perfect and bright. The Buddha nature, the self-nature, the bright nature of enlightenment, all refer to this wonderful nature which is apart from all names and appearances." As the Vajra Sutra puts it,  
  
Whatever has an appearance is empty and false. If one sees all appearances as having no appearance, one sees the Thus Come One.  
  
But you can't get rid of appearances. Whatever you see you become attached to. That's why there are appearances. Basically there are no appearances in the wonderful nature. Nor are there any names. Why aren't there any names or appearances? Basically there is no world, nor are there any living beings. Only because one gives rise to delusion and creates karma is there a world in which living beings undergo retribution.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Because of falseness, there is production. Because of production, there is extinction. The names 'production' and 'extinction' are false.  
  
Commentary:**  
Because of falseness, there is production. Because of production, there is extinction. If there were no production, there would be no extinction. The names "production" and "extinction" are false. Production after production, extinction after extinction are all created from falseness; there is no reality to them.  
 **Sutra:  
  
When the false is extinguished, there is truth, which is called the Thus Come One's Unsurpassed Bodhi and Great Nirvana: those are names for two kinds of turning around.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
When the false is extinguished, there is truth. When your truth reaches the true suchness of the self-nature, you have reached the Buddha-nature, which is called the Thus Come One's Unsurpassed Bodhi and Great Nirvana: those are names for two kinds of turning around. One turns afflictions into Bodhi; one turns birth and death into nirvana.  
  
H3 Defiled conditions arise and become the turning wheel.  
I1 He exhorts Ananda to recognize two causes for being upside down.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, you now wish to cultivate true samadhi and arrive directly at the Thus Come One's Parinirvana. First, you should recognize the two upside-down causes of living beings and the world. If these upside-down states are not produced, then there is the Thus Come One's true samadhi.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, you now wish to cultivate true samadhi and arrive directly at the Thus Come One's Parinirvana. You want to cultivate the great Bodhisattva's dharma and obtain genuine samadhi-power. You want to go right to the Buddha's position and obtain the four virtues of nirvana: permanence, bliss, true self, and purity. First, you should recognize the two upside-down causes of living beings and the world. If these upside-down states are not produced, then there is the Thus Come One's true samadhi. To be able to recognize these inversions and to avoid giving rise to them, is the true samadhi of the Buddha.  
  
I2 He clarified the two causes for being upside down, in detail.  
J1 He makes it clear that living beings are upside down.  
K1 From the true they give rise to the false.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, what is meant by the upside-down state of living beings? Ananda, the reason that the nature of the mind is bright is that the nature itself is the perfection of brightness. By adding brightness, another nature arises, and from that false nature, views are produced, so that from absolute nothingness comes ultimate existence.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, what is meant by the upside-down state of living beings? Ananda, the reason that the nature of the mind is bright is that the nature itself is the perfection of brightness. The basic nature is perfectly bright and illumines all appearances. But by adding brightness, another nature arises. By adding brightness to the inherent brightness of the self nature, another nature comes into being, that of karmic obstructions. This is because from the true the false arises. Based in the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One, one gives rise to ignorance. Another way of putting it is that one tries to add brightness to enlightenment when all along the nature of enlightenment is brightness itself. In that one movement of the false thought to add light to brightness, the appearance of karma is created, the first of the three subtle appearances.  
  
And from that false nature, views are produced. This is the appearance of turning. Originally there was the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One, but now ignorance has arisen. Ignorance is a kind of delusion, and once there is delusion, a lack of clarity, then karma arises. The nature of that karma is false, and from it views arise. Birth and death come into being.  
  
From a single unenlightened thought  
the three subtle appearances arise.  
Then external states become the conditions  
for the arising of the six coarse appearances.  
  
This concept was also discussed earlier in the sutra. When falseness arises from within the truth, then the appearance of karma is produced. With the appearance of karma, there comes the appearance of turning. First one gives rise to delusion, but then one creates karma and after that must undergo a retribution. So the last is the appearance of manifestation. These are the three subtle appearances:  
  
1. the appearance of karma;  
2. the appearance of turning;  
3. the appearance of manifestation.  
  
From this process, a great deal of confusion arises, which extends itself into the six coarse appearances:  
  
1. the appearance of knowing, which refers to worldly knowledge;  
2. the appearance of continuation, in which things go on and on without cease;  
3. the appearance of attaching and grasping;  
4. the appearance of reckoning names;  
5. the appearance of the arising of karma;  
6. the appearance of the suffering of being bound by karma.  
  
So that from absolute nothingness comes ultimate existence. That is the third subtle appearance, that of manifestation. Because of the falseness, existence comes into being.  
 **Sutra:  
  
All that exists comes from this; every cause in fact has no cause. Subjective reliance on objective appearances is basically groundless. Thus, upon what is fundamentally unreliable, one sets up the world and living beings.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
All that exists comes from this. "This" refers to ignorance, because:  
  
From a single unenlightened thought  
the three subtle appearances arise.  
Then external states become the conditions  
for the arising of the six coarse appearances.  
  
"All that exists," then, refers to these appearances. Yet, every cause in fact has no cause. "Cause" here refers to a place of reliance. Why is there said to be no cause? It is because, although the three subtle appearances are said to arise from ignorance, ignorance is not really dependable. It is not a true place of reliance. Ignorance itself is a false creation, an empty appearance. Therefore, although it seems to be that the three subtle appearances arise out of ignorance, it doesn't really happen that way, because ignorance itself doesn't even exist! Since ignorance doesn't have any substance of itself, how can the three subtle appearances arise from it? Subjective reliance on objective appearances is basically groundless. Living beings are the subjective aspect that relies on ignorance, the objective aspect. But basically there is no foundation in this. There is really no source. Thus, upon what is fundamentally unreliable, one sets up the world and living beings.  
  
Basically there is nothing to be depended on, but it is on this unreliable ignorance that the world is established. Out of what is empty, false, and unreal the world is set up, and with it all living beings. Their very existence is empty and false; there is nothing real about it.

K2 They confuse their origin so it is difficult to return.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Confusion about one's basic, perfect understanding results in the arising of falseness. The nature of falseness is devoid of substance; it is not something which can be relied upon.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Confusion about one's basic, perfect understanding results in the arising of falseness. "Confusion" refers to the arising of falseness out of truth. Basically there is no name or appearance in the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One. But when ignorance is produced, confusion results. Since one is confused, one no longer recognizes one's inherent enlightened nature. Once that happens, it is as if one has lost one's home. Then falseness arises. The nature of falseness is devoid of substance; it is not something which can be relied upon. Although falseness arises out of truth, falseness itself doesn't have any substance. It came out of truth, but it is merely illusory. Since ignorance doesn't have a substance of its own, the three subtle appearances cannot really be based on it.  
 **Sutra:  
  
One may wish to return to the truth, but that wish for the truth is already a falseness. The real nature of true suchness is not a truth that one can seek to return to. By doing so one misses the mark.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
One may wish to return to the truth, but that wish for the truth is already a falseness. Basically, ignorance has no substance of its own, and as a consequence the three subtle appearances aren't really based on anything. Therefore, it is a mistake to decide that you want to "return to the truth," to go back to the source in order to seek for the truth. You've just given rise to more falseness. If you want to return to the truth, you should merely refrain from adding brightness to enlightenment; just don't add a head on top of a head. Don't go looking for a donkey while riding on a donkey.   
  
The real nature of true suchness is not a truth that one can seek to return to. It's not that you decide to return to inherent truth. Rather, you simply dispense with ignorance; that itself is the truth. There's no need to seek further. The entire reason you do not grasp the truth is that you are possessed with ignorance. If you discover that ignorance has no substance, then "you don't get rid of false thinking, and you don't seek the truth." All you have to do is destroy ignorance, and the dharma nature manifests. By doing so one misses the mark. Basically one does not have to seek truth or cut off falseness. All one has to do is smash through ignorance, and one's enlightened nature appears spontaneously. But if one does not smash through ignorance and yet seeks the truth, one is doing what is called "letting go of the root and grasping at the branches." The first step is to break through ignorance. When ignorance is destroyed, the three subtle appearances also disappear, and so do the six coarse appearances. How can one seek truth when one has not destroyed ignorance? If one tries to do it that way, one ends up with more false appearances.  
  
K3 They produce karma which brings a retribution.  
 **Sutra:  
  
What basically is not produced, what basically does not dwell, what basically is not the mind, and what basically are not dharmas arise through interaction. As they arise more and more strongly, they form the propensity to create karma. Similar karma sets up a mutual stimulus. Because of the karma thus generated, there is mutual production and mutual extinction. That is the reason for the upside-down state of living beings.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
What basically is not produced refers to the ignorance which produces appearances. What basically does not dwell refers to karmic consciousness, which is to say the eighth consciousness. What basically is not the mind refers to the aspect of seeing. What basically are not dharmas refers to the aspect of appearances. Ignorance, karmic consciousness, and the aspects of seeing and appearances have no source and no substance of their own. Their very existence is illusory. Nonetheless, this sickness is contagious once it arises: that is what is meant by they arise through interaction. It is the same as the interconnection of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. As they arise more and more strongly, they form the propensity to create karma. Their continual arisal and transformation become powerful, and, so similarly, the karma they make increases. Ignorance, karmic consciousness, and the aspects of seeing and appearances aid one another; they borrow strength from one another. This interaction becomes stronger and stronger until, when it reaches its peak, they become fused and create karma. Karmic obstacles arise. Similar karma sets up a mutual stimulus. Because of the karma thus generated, there is mutual production and mutual extinction. Because of this interconnection and mutual stimulation, production and extinction are created. That is the reason for the upside-down state of living beings. That's how living beings come to be and how they give rise to inversions.  
  
J2 He makes clear the world is upside down.  
K1 He explains the meaning of the word world.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, what is meant by the upside-down state of the world? All that exists comes from this; the world is set up because of the false arising of sections and shares. Every cause in fact has no cause; everything that is dependent has nothing on which it is dependent, and so it shifts and slides and is unreliable. Because of this, the world of the three periods of time and four directions comes into being. The union and interaction of times and direction bring about changes which result in the twelve categories of living beings.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, what is meant by the upside-down state of the world? Ananda, I will explain the inversions of the world. You should listen to this. All that exists comes from this. "This" refers to ignorance. "All that exists" refers to the physical bodies and faculties of living beings. The world is set up because of the false arising of sections and shares, of ignorance and living beings.  
  
"Sections" refers to the individual bodies of living beings. "Shares" refers to their various lifespans. When beings give rise to ignorance, to an unenlightened thought, it is as if they have taken some drug which confuses them, or as if they had gotten drunk on too much wine. They no longer know what they should be doing. So they simply go along with their karma. Whatever karma they create, they undergo retribution for those deeds. This is why the world comes into being. Every cause in fact has no cause; everything that is dependent has nothing on which it is dependent, and so it shifts and slides and is unreliable.   
  
Although ignorance is groundless and void, nonetheless it is the cause of this world. "No cause," then, refers to ignorance, which, being empty, cannot form a cause. And yet, illusory though it is, it gives rise to the world, "every cause." The world is empty, too, then, and since it is empty, it cannot be relied upon. And yet, it appears it can be relied upon. "Everything that is dependent has nothing on which it is dependent." Basically, the world is not something on which anything can be dependent, but because living beings give rise to false attachment and false emotion, they become something "that is dependent." This dependency is a manifestation of their karmic consciousness. But since the whole situation is basically empty, basically non-existent, basically causeless and unreliable, things "shift and slide and are unreliable."  
  
The entire circumstance is never-ending and always in a state of flux. Because of this, the world of the three periods of time and four directions comes into being. All these influences combine to create the world. The world has three periods of time: past, present, and future. It also has four aspects of space: the four directions. The union and interaction of times and direction bring about changes which result in the twelve categories of living beings. They borrow on one another's strength. The twelve categories of living beings will be discussed below.  
  
K2 He shows its characteristic is constant flux.  
 **Sutra:  
  
That is why, in this world, movement brings about sounds, sounds bring about forms, forms bring about smells, smells bring about contact, contact brings about tastes, and tastes bring about awareness of dharmas. The random false thinking resulting from these six creates karma, and this continuous revolving becomes the cause of twelve different categories.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
That is why, in this world, movement brings about sounds. Because of the appearance of movement, the defiling object of sounds arises. Sounds bring about forms. Once the defiling object of sounds exists, the defiling object of forms comes into being. Forms bring about smells. Forms influence the arising of smells. Smells bring about contact, contact brings about tastes, and tastes bring about awareness of dharmas. The random false thinking resulting from these six creates karma. The "six" refer to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, contact, and dharmas. These six create scattered false thoughts and together they play tricks. They are a gang of thieves. They plunder and rob. They create karma. And this continuous revolving becomes the cause of twelve different categories. The interactions of the six defiling organs make continuous karma, which divides into twelve distinct types. From this, beings undergo continual rebirth in the six paths.  
 **Sutra:  
  
And so, in the world, sounds, smells, tastes, contact, and the like, are each transformed throughout the twelve categories to make one complete cycle.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
And so, in the world, sounds, smells, tastes, contact, and the like, that is, forms, sounds, smells, tastes, contacts, and dharmas, are each transformed throughout the twelve categories to make one complete cycle. There is one change after another as they go through the twelve categories, until a complete revolution is made. These changes can be explained in two ways: first, each defiling sense-object relates to each category of beings, so that there are womb-born sounds, egg-born sounds, and so forth, up to and including womb-born dharmas, and egg-born dharmas. The other explanation is that each kind of being complete with the six faculties goes through each category of rebirth in a sequence, based on the weight of its particular karma. Thus if one's thinking is predominant, one becomes first an egg-born being, and so forth.