**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 6**

**CHAPTER 5**

**The Twelve Categories of Living Beings**

K3 He explains the retributions of the categories of beings.  
L1 He lists the names of the categories of beings.  
 **Sutra:  
  
The appearance of being upside down is based on this continuous process. Therefore, in the world there are those born from eggs, those born from wombs, those born from moisture, those born by transformation, those with form, those without form, those with thought, those without thought, those not totally endowed with form, those not totally lacking form, those not totally endowed with thought, and those not totally lacking thought.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
The appearance of being upside down is based on this continuous process. The mutual interaction of the six defiling objects and the twelve categories of living beings brings about the appearance of the upside-down state. Therefore, in the world there are those born from eggs, those born from wombs, those born from moisture, those born by transformation. These are four categories of birth.  
  
There are four conditions necessary for birth from an egg to occur:  
  
1. the condition of a father;  
2. the condition of a mother;  
3. the condition of individual karma;  
4. the condition of warmth.  
  
There are three conditions necessary for birth from wombs to occur:  
  
1. the condition of a father;  
2. the condition of a mother;  
3. the condition of individual karma.  
  
There are two conditions necessary for birth from moisture to occur:  
  
1. the condition of individual karma;  
2. the condition of moisture.  
Birth by transformation needs only one condition:  
1. the condition of individual karma.  
  
Based on one's own karmic consciousness, one transforms as one wishes. One can appear and disappear at will. The next four categories of living beings are those with form, those without form, those with thought, and those without thought, also those not totally endowed with form, it's not that they have form, and yet it's not that they lack form, those not totally lacking form, those not totally endowed with thought, and those not totally lacking thought, it's not that they have thought, and yet it's not that they lack thought. These are the twelve categories of living beings. Because time is limited, each category cannot be described in great detail. A simple explanation will have to suffice.  
  
L2 He explains the retributions of the categories of beings.  
M1 A specific listing of the categories of beings.  
N1 Egg-born.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Ananda, through a continuous process of falseness, the upside-down state of movement occurs in this world. It unites with energy to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts that either fly or sink. From this there come into being the egg kalalas which multiply throughout the lands in the form of fish, birds, amphibians, and reptiles, so that their kinds abound.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Ananda, through a continuous process of falseness, the upside-down state of movement occurs in this world. We have learned that falseness arises out of truth, and that out of ignorance arise the three subtle and six coarse appearances, which in turn become numerous empty false appearances. Within the turning cycle of rebirth this process goes on continuously. The arising of karma belongs to movement, so movement is a further creation of the upside-down state. It unites with energy to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts that either fly or sink.  
  
"Energy" refers to the karma that is created. "Thoughts that fly" refers to the category of birds and the like. "Thoughts that sink" refers to the category of reptiles and amphibians. From this, because of all these scattered thoughts, there come into being the egg kalalas. "Kalala" is a Sanskrit word that means "slippery coagulation"; it refers to the foetus resulting from the union of the male semen and female blood in its first week of development. Birth from an egg is a result of thought and the four conditions listed above. These kalalas multiply throughout the lands in the form of fish, birds, amphibians, and reptiles. They multiply and spread everywhere. Fish swim in the water, birds fly in the air, and frogs, which can live both in and out of the water, are amphibians. Snakes and turtles belong to the reptile class. These kinds of beings multiply until their kinds abound. They spread throughout all the lands of the world.  
  
N2 Womb-born.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Through a continuous process of defilement, the upsidedown state of desire occurs in this world. It unites with stimulation to become eight-four thousand kinds of random thoughts that are either upright or perverse. From this there come into being the womb arbudas, which multiply throughout the world in the form of humans, animals, dragons, and immortals until their kinds abound.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This passage discusses womb-born beings. Womb-born beings exist because of emotion. When emotional love reaches its peak and intercourse results, the womb-born being is conceived. Human beings, animals, dragons, and immortals are born in this way. Through a continuous process of defilement, the upside-down state of desire occurs in this world. "Defilement" refers to what is unclean, disorderly, and confused. The "continuous process" can refer to the six paths of rebirth, or it can refer to a single being's cycle, a rebirth among humans, animals, dragons, and immortals.  
  
Thoughts of love and desire are upside down. Doing what one should not do is to be upside down. Doing what is against the law or not in accord with dharma is to be upside down. The desire unites with stimulation to become eighty four thousand kinds of random thoughts that are either upright or perverse. "Stimulation" refers to the creation of karma, to the acting out of the desire. From this there come into being the womb arbudas, which multiply throughout the world in the form of humans, animals, dragons, and immortals until their kinds abound. Birth from a womb, that of mammals, is a result of emotion and the three conditions of father, mother, and individual karma. Warmth, a condition necessary for egg-born beings, is not necessary for birth from a womb. "Arbuda" is a Sanskrit word which means "globule" and refers to the foetus in its second week of development. These kinds of beings, humans, animals, dragons, and immortals, spread throughout every land.  
  
N3 Moisture-born.  
  
**Sutra:  
  
Through a continuous process of attachment, the upsidedown state of inclination occurs in this world. It unites with warmth to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts that are vacillating and inverted. From this there come into being through moisture the appearance of peshis, which multiply throughout the lands in the form of insects and crawling invertebrates, until their kinds abound.**  
  
Commentary:  
  
This passage discusses beings born from moisture. Birth from moisture is a result of warmth and the two conditions of individual karma and moisture. Through a continuous process of attachment, the upside-down state of inclination occurs in this world. "Attachment" refers to clinging and being unable to change. Beings whose natures are attached undergo the turning wheel of rebirth. "Inclination" refers to a tendency to go in certain directions or toward certain things. The inclination unites with warmth to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts that are vacillating and inverted. "Warmth" refers to the creation of karma. "Vacillating" means fluttering. "Inverted" means covered. From this there come into being through moisture the appearance of peshis, which multiply throughout the lands in the form of insects and crawling invertebrates, until their kinds abound. "Peshi" is a Sanskrit word which means "soft flesh"; it refers to all initial stage of development of beings born from moisture. "Insects and crawling invertebrates" refer to small worms, bugs, and microscopic-organisms, simple forms of life. These creatures breed in ponds and pools or whereever there is moisture. They are found everywhere throughout the world. Ordinary people cannot observe it, but all twelve types of beings are in fact interrelated. People have a connection with all these other kinds of beings.  
  
N4 Transformation-born.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Through a continuous process of change, the upside-down state of borrowing occurs in this world. It unites with contact to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of new and old. From this there come into being through transformation the appearance of ghanas, which multiply throughout the lands in the form of metamorphic flying and crawling creatures, until their kinds abound.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This section discusses birth by transformation. Only one condition is required, the condition of individual karma. If one's karma is such that one delights in what is new and grows tired of what is old, then birth by transformation can occur. So it is that some mice can be transformed into bats. Some birds can turn into fish or amphibians. Caterpillars can turn into butterflies. This kind of upside-down state among creatures causes them to change and transform. Through a continuous process of change, the upsidedown state of borrowing occurs in this world. Because there is a borrowing back and forth, changes and transformations take place among creatures. It unites with contact to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of new and old. Some creatures despise the old and enjoy the new. They get tired of what is old and want to trade it for something new. And so a bird may tire of being a bird and wish to change into an amphibian, such as a frog. Some caterpillars, grubs, or maggots tire of being worms and want to change into insects, such as butterflies. Some mice tire of being mice and want to change into bats. These are all examples of the birth of beings by transformation. From this there come into being through transformation the appearance of ghanas, which multiply throughout the lands. "Ghana" is a Sanskrit word which means "solid flesh," referring in this case to the bodies of metamorphic beings. All the subsequent categories of beings use the term "ghana" to represent their development. These transformation- born beings spread throughout the world in the form of metamorphic flying and crawling creatures, until their kinds abound. Crawling creatures turn into flying creatures; flying creatures can turn into creatures that swim. They transform among one another, and their kinds abound.  
  
N5 Having form.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Through a continuous process of restraint, the upsidedown state of obstruction occurs in this world. It unites with attachment to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of refinement and brilliance. From this there come into being the ghanas of appearance that possess form, which multiply throughout the lands in the form of auspicious and inauspicious essences, until their kinds abound.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This section discusses beings with form. Through a continuous process of restraint, the upside-down state of obstruction occurs in this world. "Restraint" refers to detaining and hindering. Many circumstances unite to form an obstruction. It unites with attachment to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of refinement and brilliance. "Attachment" refers to the actualizing of karma. These kinds of beings are extremely intelligent. From this there come into being the ghanas of appearance that possess form, which multiply throughout the lands. This kind of solid flesh has form. These beings appear in the form of auspicious and inauspicious essences, until their kinds abound. These brilliant beings have form, and sometimes it is extremely auspicious for people to see them, though it may be very inauspicious for other people to see them. Although these beings have form, they are not a common sight. Fireflies and pearl-producing oysters are examples of this category of beings. Even though they are rarely seen, they do exist. These kinds of living beings also abound in the universe.  
  
N6 Without form.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Through a continuous process of annihilation and dispersion, the upside-down state of delusion occurs in this world. It unites with darkness to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of obscurity and hiding. From this there come into being the ghanas of formless beings, which multiply throughout the lands as those that are empty, dispersed, annihilated, and submerged until their kinds abound.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This section discusses beings without form; it refers to beings in the heavens of the formless realm. Through a continuous process of annihilation and dispersion, the upside-down state of delusion occurs in this world. Although "annihilation and dispersion" implies total negation, so that one sees nothing, there still exists, nonetheless, a consciousness and karma, which are what these beings are composed of. Therefore, there is rebirth. "Delusion" refers to a lack of clarity, which comes about because of ignorance and through being upside down. It unites with darkness to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of obscurity and hiding. Imperceptibly there is karma which invisibly becomes these myriad random thoughts.   
  
"Obscurity and hiding" means that these thoughts are not easy to detect. From this there come into being the ghanas of formless beings, which multiply throughout the lands. They spread through every land, as those that are empty, dispersed, annihilated, and submerged until their kinds abound. "Empty" refers to beings in the Heaven of Boundless Emptiness. "Dispersed" refers to beings in the Heaven of Boundless Consciousness. "Annihilated" refers to beings in the Heaven of Nothing Whatsoever, and "submerged" refers to beings in the Heaven of Neither Thought Nor Non-Thought. So these are beings of the Heavens of the Four Stations of Emptiness in the formless realm. These beings are endowed with a karmic consciousness, but no physical form. These beings, too, abound in the world.  
  
N7 Having thought.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Through a continuous process of illusory imaginings, the upside-down state of shadows occurs in this world. It unites with memory to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts that are hidden and bound up. From this there come into being the ghanas of those with thought, which multiply throughout the lands in the form of spirits, ghosts, and weird essences, until their kinds abound.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Through a continuous process of illusory imaginings, the upside-down state of shadows occurs in this world. This passage refers to beings born with thought, but without physical form. These are such beings as spirits, ghosts, and weird essences. In the beginning these beings come about because of shadows that unites with memory to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts that are hidden and bound up. They are hidden away, and no one is aware of them. Their random thoughts mass together, and from this there come into being the ghanas of those with thought, which multiply throughout the lands in the form of spirits, ghosts, and weird essences, until their kinds abound.  
  
"Those with thought" does not refer to the kind of thought necessary for birth from an egg. The kind of thought referred to here is false thinking that is created. Some ghosts and spirits are devious, and some behave properly. Some ghost kings are even manifestations of Bodhisattvas, while others are actually unreliable beings. "Weird essences" however, are totally unorthodox and devious. Sometimes people are referred to in this way, indicating that they are not wholesome or good. The manifestation of these weird essences are eerie unpredictable portents. Their kinds are so many one could never describe them all. The retinue of such creatures fills up every corner of the world.

N8 Without thought.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Through a continual process of dullness and slowness, the upside-down state of stupidity occurs in this world. It unites with obstinacy to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts that are dry and attenuated. From this there come into being the ghanas of those without thought, which multiply throughout the lands as their essence and spirit change into earth, wood, metal, or stone, until their kinds abound.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Through a continual process of dullness and slowness, the upside-down state of stupidity occurs in this world. Obtuseness and dullness create an entire cycle from which arise the li, mei, and wang liang ghosts. The karma wrought from stupidity unites with obstinacy to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts that are dry and attenuated. They simply dry up mentally. From this there come into being the ghanas of those without thought, which multiply throughout the lands as their essence and spirit change into earth, wood, metal, or stone, until their kinds abound. Because their thought is dry and attenuated, their very essence and spirit transform into earth, wood, metal, or stone. These kinds of beings are also found everywhere. How can their essence and spirit turn into these things?  
  
In Hong Kong there's a place called Wang Fu mountain. The story goes that a certain woman's husband enlisted in the navy and never returned to her. But every day she would go stand on this mountain and gaze out to sea. Every day she would stand there gazing and holding her child until eventually her thought became so attenuated that her essence underwent a transformation, and she turned to stone. To this day you can see the rock shaped like the woman with the child on her back. She's still gazing. It's not at all easy to convince people that one's spirit and essence can turn into earth, wood, metal, or stone, but in fact it can. It really does happen. There are many instances of people turning into stone. There's another way this can happen, too. If, for example, a person has a fiery temper, and the fire of his nature reaches a peak, his very essence can transform into coal. The fire in his nature is so intense that he becomes a substance that is easily burned. People are composed of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, and if they remain in constant contact with any one element and become too much involved in it, they can turn into that very element. It happens because of attachment and attenuated thoughts. When that phenomenon occurs, can that being ever become a person again? Yes, but one knows not how long it will take. It would involve an extremely long period of time.  
  
N9 Not totally having form.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Through a continuous process of parasitic interaction, the upside-down state of simulation occurs in this world. It unites with defilement to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of according and relying. From this there come into being those not totally endowed with form, who become ghanas of form which multiply throughout the lands until their kinds abound, in such ways as jellyfish that use shrimp for eyes.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This section discusses living beings who are not totally endowed with form. Through a continuous process of parasitic interaction, the upside-down state of simulation occurs in this world. It unites with defilement to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of according and relying. "According and relying" refers to a mutual dependence. From this there come into being those not totally endowed with form, who become ghanas of form which multiply throughout the lands until their kinds abound. They are not totally endowed with form, but through a parasitic interaction they become involved with a being that is endowed with form. These beings appear in such ways as jellyfish that use shrimp for eyes. The jellyfish doesn't have any eyes in its physical makeup, so it borrows the eyes of the shrimp, by allowing a parasitic relationship. Jellyfish often look like mere bubbles in the water, but they actually belong to this category of beings: those not totally endowed with form. There are all kinds of beings all over the place that fall into this category.  
  
N10 Not totally without form.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Through a continuous process of mutual enticement, an upside-down state of the nature occurs in this world. It unites with mantras to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of beckoning and summoning. From this there come into being those not totally lacking form, who take ghanas which are formless and multiply throughout the lands, until their kinds abound, as the hidden beings of mantras and incantations.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
This category is those not totally lacking form. Basically they have no form, except when they are beckoned by mantras. Through a continuous process of mutual enticement, an upsidedown state of the nature occurs in this world. There is an interaction which is enticing to both. This perversion of the nature results in a union with mantras to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of beckoning and summoning. Recently I talked about the dharma of "hooking and summoning," which is another name for what is being discussed here. One beckons by calling the name of the being. Usually one does not see such beings, but when one recites a mantra, the being reveals its form. When they reveal themselves, one can often see them.  
  
Although we speak of these creatures as being "ghosts and spirits," they are a special kind of mantra spirit, as we can see from this passage of text. From this there come into being those not totally lacking form, who take ghanas which are formless and multiply throughout the lands, until their kinds abound. "Those not totally lacking form" refers to this category of ghosts and spirits, be they dharma protectors or deviant spirits. They are the hidden beings of mantras and incantations. In the Secret school there exist mantras which summon these kinds of beings.  
  
N11 Not totally with thought.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Through a continuous process of false unity, the upsidedown state of transgression occurs in this world. It unites with unlike formations to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of reciprocal interchange. From this there come into being those not totally endowed with thought, which become ghanas possessing thought and which multiply throughout the lands until their kinds abound in such forms as the varata, which turns a different creature into its own species.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Through a continuous process of false unity, the upsidedown state of transgression occurs in this world. It unites with unlike formations to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of reciprocal interchange. The two are different, but they change formation to become the same. "Eighty-four thousand" is a general number that is used for each category of being, but in fact each category contains tremendously many kinds of beings, an incalculable number. From this there come into being those not totally endowed with thought, which become ghanas possessing thought and which multiply throughout the lands until their kinds abound. To begin with, the creature did not conceive of itself as becoming a certain kind of being, but through a process of thought it becomes a certain type of being. This refers to beings in such forms as the varata, which turns a different creature into its own species. "Varata" is a Sanskrit term for a kind of wasp. This wasp takes silk worm caterpillars and transforms them into its own young. It puts the caterpillars in its mud nest and for seven days recites a mantra which says, "Be like me, be like me." At the end of that period, the change takes place. They are called beings not totally endowed with thought, because the caterpillars do not initially think they will turn into wasps. In the Book of Poetry (Shi Jing) there is the phrase:  
  
The wasp owes its offspring to the caterpillar.  
  
The wasp steals the caterpillars and removes them to its nest where it uses the mantra to transform them.  
  
N12 Not totally without thought.  
 **Sutra:  
  
Through a continuous process of enmity and harm the upside-down state of killing occurs in this world. It unites with monstrosities to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of devouring one's father and mother. From this there come into being those not totally lacking thought, who take ghanas with no thought and multiply throughout the lands, until their kinds abound in such forms as the dirt owl, which hatches its young from clods of dirt, and the Pou Jing bird, which incubates a poisonous fruit to create its young. In each case, the young thereupon eat the parents.**  
**Commentary:**  
  
This is the twelfth category of beings, those not totally lacking thought. They have thought, but it is totally warped. Their very spirit is twisted. Through a continuous process of enmity and harm the upside-down state of killing occurs in this world. You injure me, and I'll injure you. You kill me, and I'll kill you. You hate me, and I hate you. It unites with monstrosities to become eighty-four thousand kinds of random thoughts of devouring one's father and mother. When this hate has built to the point that it permeates everything, then weird creatures come into being.  
  
From this there come into being those not totally lacking thought, who take ghanas with no thought and multiply throughout the lands, until their kinds abound. They appear in such forms as the dirt owl, which hatches its young from clods of dirt. The owl is known in China as the "cat-headed hawk" and as "the unfilial bird." This bird lays no eggs, but incubates a clod of dirt and is able to bring its young out of it. The problem is that when these young dirt owls hatch, they devour their mother. That's why the bird is called unfilial. The Pou Jing bird, which incubates a poisonous fruit to create its young. There is an animal in China called the pou jing that looks like a wolf but is smaller. This animal can't reproduce, either, so it takes the fruit from a poisonous tree and can incubate it to create its young. In each case, the young thereupon eat the parents. But the case is the same: the young eat the mother. This unfilial beast is perhaps the one being referred to in the text. "Bird" may be a mistranslation. These kinds of beings can be found in every country.  
  
M2 Reiterates their name and number.  
 **Sutra:  
  
These are the twelve categories of living beings.  
  
Commentary:**  
  
Above have been explained the twelve categories of living beings.