**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 7**

**CHAPTER 1**

**The Three Gradual Stages**

H4 He explains the pure conditions which give rise to the successive accomplishment of this position.
I1 He answers about the cause and effect of this position.
J1 The three gradual stages of this position.
K1 Concludes the former discussion and begins the next.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, each of these categories of beings is replete with all twelve kinds of upside-down states, just as pressing on one's eye produces a variety of flower-like images.

Commentary:**

Ananda, each of these twelve categories of beings which I have just described is replete with all twelve kinds of upsidedown states. Not just the one kind of upside-down state that I mentioned is specific to each kind. Each category is influenced by all twelve kinds of upside down states. The random thoughts and upside-down states arise from falseness, just as pressing on one's eye produces a variety of flower-like images. If you push your finger up against your eye and then look, you will see weird visions. If you release the pressure, the visions disappear. It's because you pursue the false thoughts and upside-down states that you cannot get out of rebirth and you keep revolving in the cycle of the twelve categories of living beings. If you do not follow after the false thoughts or pursue ignorance, but instead can return the light and illumine within, if you can return the hearing to hear the self nature, then you can break through ignorance, and all that exists disappears.
 **Sutra:

With the inversion of wonderful perfection, the truly pure, bright mind becomes glutted with false and random thoughts.

Commentary:**

From the falseness arises the state of being upside down, which in turn creates false thoughts. In the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One, ignorance arises. From the basis of truth, one gives rise to falseness. The "false and random thoughts" are those just described in detail. The originally pure and bright mind becomes filled with myriad thoughts that are totally false and unreal.

K2 Establishes that the position is the opposite of defilement.
 **Sutra:

Now, as you cultivate towards certification to the samadhi of the Buddha, you will go through three gradual stages in order to get rid of the basic cause of these random thoughts.

Commentary:**
Now, as you cultivate towards certification to the samadhi of the Buddha, you will go through three gradual stages. You must establish three gradual levels and cultivate little by little. Then you can put an end to false thinking and get rid of the basic cause of these random thoughts.
 **Sutra:

They work in just the way that poisonous honey is removed from a pure vessel that is washed with hot water mixed with the ashes of incense. Afterwards it can be used to store sweet dew.

Commentary:**

They work in just the way that poisonous honey is removed from a pure vessel that is washed with hot water mixed with the ashes. "Pure vessel" means that the jar was originally clean. It represents the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One, inherent in us all, which is neither produced nor extinguished. The "poisonous honey" represents people's ignorance and afflictions. The "hot water" represents the Buddhadharma, which gradually washes us clean. "Washing" means to return the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One to its original form. Afterwards it can be used to store sweet dew. It can store our genuine wisdom; it can hold the enlightenment to the Way. That's what "sweet dew" represents.

K3 Explains the establishment of the position.
L1 Asks for and lists their names.
 **Sutra:

What are the three gradual stages? The first is to correct one's habits by getting rid of the aiding causes; the second is to truly cultivate to cut out the very essence of karmic offenses; the third is to increase one's vigor to prevent the manifestation of karma.

Commentary:**
What are the three gradual stages? The first is to correct one's habits by getting rid of the aiding causes. That refers to causes which contribute to the creation of karma. The second is to truly cultivate to cut out the very essence of karmic offenses. That means to sweep clean the nature of karmic offenses that result from greed, hatred, stupidity, and so forth. The third is to increase one's vigor to prevent the manifestation of karma. One progresses in one's cultivation to counteract the creation of any new karma in the present. One does not follow along in the present with one's propensity to create karma.

M1 Caution in eating.
N1 Asks about and answers that they rely on eating and should stop eating pungent plants.
 **Sutra:

What are aiding causes? Ananda, the twelve categories of living beings in this world are not complete in themselves, but depend on four kinds of eating; that is, eating by portions, eating by contact, eating by thought, and eating by consciousness. Therefore, the Buddha said that all living beings must eat to live.

Commentary:**

What are aiding causes? Some causes aid in the creation of wholesome karma, and some contribute to the creation of unwholesome karma. Here, the Buddha is referring to causes which bring about bad karma. Ananda, the twelve categories of living beings in this world, just described, are not complete in themselves, but depend on four kinds of eating. They depend on eating to survive. That is, eating by portions: bite by bite, bit by bit, the way beings in the six desire heavens, the asuras, humans, and animals take their food. Eating by contact: the ghosts and spirits eat by contact, and some beings in the heavens also eat this way. Eating by thought: in the dhyana heavens of the form realm, beings don't have to actually ingest the food. They take the bliss of dhyana as food, they can eat by thinking. Eating by consciousness: this includes the beings of the formless realm up through those in the Heaven of Neither Thought Nor Non-Thought. They eat by discriminations of consciousness. Therefore, the Buddha said that all living beings must eat to live. That was at the beginning of his teaching, when the Buddha wanted to break through the doctrines of externalists. When he said to them that all living beings must eat to live, the externalists laughed at him and said, "You call that 'dharma'? Do you think we had to wait for you to tell us that? Who doesn't know that beings have to eat to live? Even children understand that."

In reply the Buddha said, "Well, tell me, then, how many kinds of eating are there?"

At that point the externalists were speechless. They couldn't come up with the answer. Then the Buddha explained the four kinds of eating.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, all living beings can live if they eat what is sweet, and they will die if they take poison. Beings who seek samadhi should refrain from eating five pungent plants of this world.

Commentary:**

This passage discusses the first gradual stage, getting rid of the aiding causes. The five pungent plants aid in the creation of unwholesome karma, and so the first step is to eliminate them from one's diet. Ananda, all living beings can live if they eat what is sweet, and they will die if they take poison. "All living beings" refers to the twelve categories. "Sweet" here really means "edible"; the food is sweet in the sense that it is not poisonous, but is nourishing and palatable. "Poisonous" here does not necessarily mean lethal poison, but refers to such things as the five pungent plants, which in this context are considered poisonous. It refers to any food which has an unwholesome effect on beings, and contributes to an earlier death. It doesn't just mean eating something which is instantaneously fatal. Beings who seek samadhi should refrain from eating five pungent plants of this world. The first step is to get rid of contributing causes. The five pungent plants have been described already. They are onions, garlic, leeks, scallions, and shallots.

N2 Explains in depth the ill-effects of eating pungent plants.
 **Sutra:

If these five are eaten cooked, they increase one's sexual desire; if they are eaten raw, they increase one's anger.

Commentary:**

If these five are eaten cooked, they increase one's sexual desire. Meat has the same effect. That is one reason why people who cultivate the Way do not eat meat. The five pungent plants also increase desire, but not wholesome desire; rather, they are especially potent in increasing sexual desire, to the point that it is unbearable and one goes crazy with lust. If they are eaten raw, they increase one's anger. They make one more stupid. People with wisdom do not lose their tempers. Those who do lose their tempers, for the most part are people who cannot clearly distinguish either the principles or the specifics. Something happens and they can't see beyond it. It becomes an obstruction for them, and they do not know how to resolve it except by getting angry. But losing their temper doesn't actually help the situation one bit. Meat also increases one's afflictions and the propensity to get angry. And the more of these five pungent plants one eats, the bigger one's temper grows.
 **Sutra:

Therefore, even if people in this world who eat pungent plants can expound the twelve divisions of the sutra canon, the gods and immortals of the ten directions will stay far away from them because they smell so bad. However, after they eat these things the hungry ghosts will hover around and kiss their lips. Being always in the presence of ghosts, their blessings and virtue dissolve as the days go by, and they experience no lasting benefit.

Commentary:**

Therefore, even if people in this world who eat pungent plants can expound the twelve divisions of the sutra canon, the gods and immortals of the ten directions will stay far away from them because they smell so bad. This refers to people who eat the five pungent plants or drink wine or eat meat. On the other hand, the gods and immortals will protect someone who does not ingest these things. Body odors come largely from what one eats. People who enjoy eating beef, onions, and garlic have strong body odors. Their armpits often stink so badly that they can be smelled a long way off, and no one wants to get near them.

There are a number of people who are able to expound on the canon with all its twelve divisions:

Repeating verses and predictions,
Interjections and what was spoken without request;
Past events, analogies, causes and conditions,
This life, expansions, and what never before existed;
With discussion, that is twelve all together,
As in Great Wisdom Shastra's thirty-third chapter.
Memorize the verse and you know the twelve divisions of the canon.

But if one's eating is not pure, one's sole listeners will be hungry ghosts. The gods and immortals will not listen. The hungry ghosts are creatures that don't have anything to eat. But after people who don't hold to pure eating eat these things, meaning the five pungent plants and the like, the hungry ghosts will hover around and kiss their lips. After people eat these strong-smelling foods, the odor lingers around them and attracts ghosts. The ghosts boldly go up and kiss those who partake of the five pungent plants, in an attempt to taste what they've eaten. Ghosts eat by contact, as we have learned, so those who eat these impure things are literally in the hands of ghosts who hang around and keep touching them. You may not be one who can see them, but they are really there doing just that. Being always in the presence of ghosts, their blessings and virtue dissolve as the days go by, and they experience no lasting benefit. Plain and simple, this passage says that people who eat the five pungent plants end up in the company of ghosts. Ghosts are their constant companions, even though the people themselves may be oblivious to the fact. Their blessings and virtue thereby decrease, and they end up with no advantages at all.
 **Sutra:

People who eat pungent plants and also cultivate samadhi will not be protected by the Bodhisattvas, gods, immortals, or good spirits of the ten directions; therefore, the tremendously powerful demon kings, able to do as they please, will appear in the body of a Buddha and speak dharma for them, denouncing the prohibitive precepts and praising lust, rage, and delusion.

Commentary:**

People who eat pungent plants and also cultivate samadhi will not be protected by the Bodhisattvas, gods, immortals, or good spirits of the ten directions. Who is referred to here? Whoever eats the five pungent plants. If you eat them, it's referring to you. If I eat them, it's referring to me. The text leaves the matter open. Why don't dharma protectors and good spirits guard such people? Because they smell too bad. Preferring purity, the protectors avoid the stench and do not come around to guard such people. However, protectors are essential in cultivation, for where the proper resides, the deviant does not, but where the proper is lacking, the deviant will win the advantage. The "proper" refers to the dharma protectors and good spirits who guard and aid cultivators of the Way. But in this case, where they do not come around, the tremendously powerful demon kings, able to do as they please, will appear in the body of a Buddha and speak dharma for them. Seeing an unprotected cultivator, the powerful demonic kings come on the scene and gather him into their retinue. They will enter when they catch you off guard. How great is their power? They can turn into Buddhas! I've advised you that if in the future you obtain the Buddha eye, you may see Buddhas come or Bodhisattvas come or gods and immortals come or spirits come. But if they are for real, they will have a light about them that is pure and cool, and when it shines on you, you will experience extreme comfort, such as you have never known. That, then, is a true Sage. If it's a demon, it puts out heat. However, it requires a lot of wisdom to make this distinction. If you lack sufficient wisdom, you will not notice the power of his heat. Of course, the heat is not hot like a fire, but it is the case that the light of a demon carries heat, while the light of a Buddha does not.

Another way you can tell the difference between a demon appearing as a Buddha and an actual Buddha appearing is to look at the dharma they propound. Demon kings will go about denouncing the prohibitive precepts and praising lust, rage, and delusion. They will say, "Don't hold the precepts, that's a small vehicle practice. Those of the great vehicle kill, but it's not killing; steal, but it's not stealing; engage in lust, but it's not lust. So it's no problem. If you kill, you haven't broken any precept. The same goes for stealing and lust. Don't cling to such a small state. Don't hold to such fine distinctions in your conduct. Violations don't matter."

What you do before you receive the precepts does not count as a violation of them. But once you have taken a precept, for example, the precept against killing, it is then a violation of the precept if you commit the act of killing. Why? Because you clearly knew it was wrong but intentionally violated the prohibition. If you receive the precept against stealing and you go out and steal, you have violated that precept. You may have indulged in sexual misconduct before receiving the precept against it, but that doesn't count as an offense, because it's over and done. But if you conduct yourself in this way after taking the precept, then you violate it. Before you take the precept against lying, you are not in violation of the precept no matter what you say, but once you receive the precept you can't be irresponsible in what you say. Whatever it is, if you know, you know, and if you don't know, you don't know. You can't say you don't know when you really do; or say you know when you really don't. You can't beat around the bush when you speak. The straight mind is the Bodhimanda.

Someone may think; well, then, if I don't take them, I won't commit any violations, right? But now you know that it is better to take them, and if you don't you are missing the opportunity. If you do not receive the precepts, you will not be able to make any progress, either in your personal life or with regard to the Buddhadharma.

You certainly should continue to make progress. Since we know it is a good thing to do, we should receive the precepts and then carefully uphold them.

But the demon kings do nothing but slander and tear down the precepts and encourage you not to receive them. They praise sexual desire. "It's great," they say. "The more sexual desire you have, the loftier the level of Bodhisattvahood you will realize. Just take Ucchushma, who had to have two to three hundred women a day, but then later cultivated and became Fire-head Vajra. So what's the problem?" And so they go on. Actually, as soon as he begins praising sexual desire, you should know immediately that he is not a genuine Buddha. As to rage, he says, "Having a temper doesn't matter. The bigger your temper, the bigger your Bodhi. After all, affliction is just Bodhi, so it follows that the more affliction you have, the more Bodhi you'll get. It doesn't matter. Lose your temper whenever you feel like it." The demon king praises rage in this way. "Delusion" just means being stupid and doing things that are upside down. We discussed it earlier:

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.

And the beings without thought turn into earth, wood, metal, or stone. Of course, this doesn't happen to every stupid being. It does happen occasionally, however. But here the demon king praises delusion; he tells you that the stupider you are, the better it is, because if you are stupid it will be easier for him to get you to obey his instructions. You'll fall right in with him. You'll become one of the retinue of the demon kings.

Recently a book came out of India that specializes in praising the tantric practice of men and women cultivating together. This is a book written by demons. Demons praise sexual desire and do not instruct people to put a stop to it. They say that without cutting off sexual desire one can become a Buddha. But Buddhas are pure, whereas the filthiest thing, the most turbid emotion, is sexual desire. In Chinese the word for marriage (hun) contains a character which is a combination of the word for "woman" (nu) and the word for "confusion" (hun), or "dark delusion." So the very word marriage itself says that as soon as one gets married, one loses wisdom. One's life is spent as if in perpetual night, in darkness and impurity. It is as if one were sleeping the days away, and when one is asleep, one is totally oblivious to everything. Just that is stupidity. Chinese characters often shed insight on the meanings they represent.

On the other hand, what I just said about marriage is not always the case. You have to be flexible when you view things. You can't be too rigid in your opinions. Although I said that marriage is confusion, you can try to gain understanding within that confusion. You can enter that confusion but not get muddled. Shakyamuni Buddha married, and yet he was the wisest of people.

When you just heard that people who eat the five pungent plants are kissed by ghosts, did it alarm you? If you weren't frightened, then you must see it as no problem. If it alarmed you, then stop eating the five pungent plants. If you don't eat them, the gods and immortals will protect you and the ghosts will leave you alone. If you can marry and stay alert, stay awake, then you won't sink into that confusion. If you enter into the situation, you must not be turned by it. Don't mistake what I said as meaning that I'm opposed to anyone getting married. I'm just exploring a principle.
 **Sutra:

When their lives end, these people will join the retinue of demon kings. When they use up their blessings as demons, they will fall into the Relentless Hell.**

**Commentary:**
When their lives end, these people will join the retinue of demon kings. This refers to people who eat the five pungent plants. Because they eat such things, the gods, immortals, Bodhisattvas, and good spirits do not protect them. Therefore, the demon kings who possess great power can have their way with them. The demon king appears as a Buddha and speaks demonic dharma to them, praising sexual desire, anger, and stupidity. Having been confused by the demons, these people lose their proper knowledge and proper views and any real wisdom. Instead, they harbor deviant knowledge and deviant views. The demon king says sexual desire is good, and they believe it. "The Buddha told me so! He said it's no problem." That's called mistaking a thief for one's own son. One mistakes the demon king for the Buddha. Therefore, "When their lives end, these people will join the retinue of demon kings." When their worldly blessings are used up, they die and obediently go over to the retinue of the demon king. When they use up their blessings as demons, they will fall into the Relentless Hell. Demons also have their own kind of blessings.

Once there was a cultivator who recited the name of Amitabha Buddha. However, he was particularly greedy, especially for silver and gold. He did recite the Buddha's name, but that's because he had heard that the Land of Ultimate Bliss had ground made of gold, and he figured he could amass a pile of it when he got there. Then one day he saw Amitabha Buddha come. The Buddha said to him, "Today you should be reborn in the Happy Land, and you can take your gold and silver with you." So he put his four or five hundred ounces of gold on the lotus flower that Amitabha Buddha was holding. But before he had a chance to hop on the flower himself, it disappeared, as did the Buddha holding it. "Oh," thought the man, "Amitabha Buddha likes money, too. He's run off with all my gold!" At just about that time, in the household of the donor where he was living, a new-born donkey died. They noticed that the belly of the young donkey was hard and heavy, and when they cut it open, lo and behold, the old cultivator's gold and silver were tucked away inside! At that point the old cultivator realized how heavy his greed was, and he rejoiced that he had not gone off with "Amitabha Buddha," for had he gone, he would have become that small donkey. And he knew that the "Amitabha Buddha" who had come was not a genuine state.

Someone wonders, is there really an Amitabha Buddha? Of course there is. But because people have deviant knowledge and deviant views, there are also demons who can appear in the likeness of Amitabha Buddha. Clearly, we should aim to be straight and proper. But how do you do that? Be extremely careful not to be greedy. Anybody who has the idea he can go to the Land of Ultimate Bliss and mine for gold had better wake up fast. Although the Pure Land may be paved with gold, you can't harbor thoughts of self-benefit and make plans to use it as you please. In cultivation, being off by just one thought can bring about demonic karma. The text says that because people who eat the pungent plants have deviant knowledge and deviant views, they first become demons themselves, and after that they fall into the hells. When will they get out? Nobody knows.

N3 Concludes by calling this practice the foremost increase in vigor.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, those who cultivate for Bodhi should never eat the five pungent plants. This is the first of the gradual stages of cultivation.

Commentary:**
Ananda, have you been listening? Those who cultivate for Bodhi, anybody on the path to Bodhi, should never eat the five pungent plants. You definitely must stop eating onions, garlic, leeks, scallions, and chives. If you eat these things, you can end up in the company of the demon kings. If you don't eat these things, you can join the Buddha's retinue. This is the first of the gradual stages of cultivation. This is the first step of progress for a cultivator of the Way. In cultivation, one must get rid of the causes which aid in the creation of bad karma. The five pungent plants are one cause which aids the demon kings. You should not regard them as unimportant. The five pungent plants make you turbid and confused. They make you impure, and your impurity puts you together with the retinue of demon kings, for the more impure one is, the better they like it.

N1 Asks about and answers that first one must cut off lust and killing.
 **Sutra:

What is the essence of karmic offenses? Ananda, beings who want to enter samadhi must first firmly uphold the pure precepts.

Commentary:**

The first gradual stage consists of getting rid of the aiding causes, which are eating meat and the like. The second gradual stage concerns the essence of karmic offenses. What is the essence of karmic offenses? Ananda, beings who want to enter samadhi must first firmly uphold the pure precepts. The "essence of karmic offenses" refers to the workings of the karmic consciousness. The karmic consciousness must be transformed, and that is done by holding the precepts. "Firmly uphold" means one is firm with oneself. One is not the least bit casual or sloppy. One relies on the precepts in cultivation.

Anything you did before receiving the precepts does not count as a violation of them, because you were in ignorance. If one doesn't know one is committing an offense, then one hasn't committed one. But once you receive the precepts, you can't perpetuate your offenses. Before you heard about the precepts, you may have enjoyed indulging in things which are not in accord with the rules. But once you learn about the precepts, you should receive them and then not indulge in such activities any more.
 **Sutra:

They must sever thoughts of lust, not partake of wine or meat, and eat cooked rather than raw foods. Ananda, if cultivators do not sever lust and killing, it will be impossible for them to transcend the triple realm.

Commentary:**

They must sever thoughts of lust. "Lust" refers to love and desire, which are born of ignorance. Love which is not founded on ignorance, in the sense that it is loving regard for one's spouse and children, is not what is meant here. Or, if special causes and conditions arise where one wishes to help someone else, and one is not just selfishly seeking some ephemeral bliss, that too would not be considered a violation, because one's wish is to help someone else and one is basically doing something one would prefer not to do in order to help cross someone else over. It is a temporary expedient and is not a violation.

They must not partake of wine or meat. One should eat pure vegetarian food. What disadvantages are there in wine and meat? Wine and alcohol in general derange one's nature. Once you drink alcohol, you lose your concentration. And then you are likely to do just about anything. You'll be like the man in the story I told before who broke the one precept against intoxicants and subsequently violated all five. If one refrains from drinking, one's nature will not get scattered and one's actions will not be upside down. Another reason is that the odor of wine and other alcoholic drinks, which may be considered fragrant by people and ghosts, upsets the Bodhisattvas and good spirits. They do not like the smell. Bodhisattvas and Arhats regard the smell of wine as we regard the smell of urine. To them it is rank and stinking. People don't like to be around toilets, cesspools, and sewers, but there are certain bugs, dung beetles, who spend their whole lives eating excrement in cesspools and sewers. They like it. Further, wine and meat are aphrodisiacs.

So people who cultivate the Way should not consume these things. They should eat cooked rather than raw foods. All foods should be cooked, even vegetables, before they are eaten, because almost all raw foods will increase one's anger. Ananda, if cultivators do not sever lust and killing, it will be impossible for them to transcend the triple realm. "Lust" refers to deviant, improper sexual desire. It is absolutely unprincipled to think that a lustful person could become a Buddha.

N2 And vigorously cultivate the other precepts.
 **Sutra:

You should look upon lustful desire as upon a poisonous snake or a resentful bandit. First hold to the sound-hearer's four or eight parajikas in order to control your physical activity; then cultivate the Bodhisattva's pure regulations in order to control your mental activity.

Commentary:**

You should look upon lustful desire as upon a poisonous snake or a resentful bandit. Make this contemplation: lust is like a poisonous snake. If it bites you once, you may lose your life. If one regarded lust as being as poisonous as that, one would not be able to take delight in it. Even thoughts of lustful desire would not arise. Why? Just imagine that such a thought is as violent as a tiger or wolf. It's fine if you don't encounter such animals, but if you do, you're likely to lose your life. Or look upon such thoughts as upon a rebel or a thief who bears a grudge. His resentment pushes him to the point of murder.

First hold to the sound-hearer's four or eight parajikas. You must keep the shravaka precepts against killing, stealing, lust, and lying, these apply to both bhikshus and bhikshunis; in addition, the precepts against touching, the eight matters, covering, and not following apply to bhikshunis. Keep them in order to control your physical activity. You uphold these precepts to keep from creating these kinds of karma. Then cultivate the Bodhisattva's pure regulations in order to control your mental activity. Then you cultivate the Bodhisattva precepts. You receive the ten major and forty-eight minor precepts and pay special attention to regulations. Then your mind will not give rise to thoughts of lust. You won't have such deviant thoughts. This is the path that people who cultivate must walk.

N3 He explains the benefits in detail and concludes with the name.
 **Sutra:

When the prohibitive precepts are successfully upheld, one will not create karma that leads to trading places in rebirth and to killing one another in this world. If one does not steal, one will not be indebted, and one will not have to pay back past debts in this world.**

**Commentary:**

When the prohibitive precepts are successfully upheld. "Prohibitive" implies the practice of restraint. "Precepts" are defined as "stopping evil and counteracting wrongdoing." The precepts are divided into four aspects:

1) maintenance,
2) restraint,
3) exceptions,
4) violations.

Sometimes exceptions are made, so that you are not considered to have violated the precept even if you have acted against it. "Restraints," as already mentioned, refer to prohibitions. They are honored because to violate them would contribute to further violations, as in refraining from taking intoxicants one avoids breaking other precepts as well. "Maintenanc" means upholding the precepts and cultivating in accord with them. "Violation" refers to breaking a precept.

The following event will illustrate the aspect of exceptions. Once when the Buddha Shakyamuni was in the world, there were two bhikshus cultivating in the mountains. One day, one of the bhikshus went down the mountain to get food and left the other one sleeping. In India at that time, the bhikshus simply wore their sashes wrapped around them; they did not wear clothing underneath. This bhikshu had shed his robe and was sleeping nude. He probably was a lazy person, and with no one on the mountain to watch after him, he'd decided to take a nap.

At that time a woman happened along, and seeing the bhikshu, she was aroused and took advantage of him. Just as she was running away from the scene, the other bhikshu returned from town and saw her in flight. Upon investigation he found out that the woman had taken advantage of the sleeping bhikshu, and he decided to pursue her, catch her, and take her before the Buddha in protest. He took out after her, and the woman became so reckless that she slipped off the road and tumbled down the mountain to her death. So one bhikshu had violated the precept against sexual activity and the other had broken the precept against killing. Although the bhikshu hadn't actually pushed her down the mountain, she wouldn't have fallen if he hadn't been pursuing her.

"What a mess!" concluded the two bhikshus. Messy as it was, they had to go before the Buddha and describe their offenses. The Buddha referred them to the Venerable Upali. But when Venerable Upali heard the details, his verdict was that, indeed, one had violated the precept against sexual activity and the other against killing, offenses which cannot be absolved. "You're both going to have to endure the hells in the future," he concluded.

Hearing this, the two bhikshus wept, and they went about everywhere trying to find someone who could help them. Eventually, they found the Great Upasaka Vimalakirti, who asked why they were crying. When they had related their tale, he pronounced his judgment that they had not violated the precepts.

"If you can be repentant," he said, "then I can certify that you didn't break the precepts."

"How can that be?" they asked.

"The nature of offenses is basically empty," replied the upasaka. "You did not violate the precepts intentionally, and so it doesn't count. It is an exception"

Hearing this explanation by the Great Teacher Vimalakirti, the two bhikshus were enlightened on the spot and were certified as attaining the fruition. After that, they became arhats. So there are many explanations within the prohibitive precepts. But if people always look to the exceptions, they will simply not hold the precepts. They will beg the question. So the Buddha did not speak much about this aspect.

If one upholds the precepts, one will not create karma that leads to trading places in rebirth and to killing one another in this world. One is born and then kills, and the victim is reborn and kills the one who killed him. But now karmic offenses created in the cycle of mutual rebirth and mutual killing cease. If one does not steal, one will not be indebted, and one will not have to pay back past debts in this world. The offenses of stealing will also cease when one stops stealing. "I won't take your things, and you won't take mine. I won't eat your flesh, and you won't eat mine. I won't become indebted to you, and you won't become indebted to me. In that way we won't have to pay each other back." You won't have to pay back the debts for offenses committed in the past once you sever your relationship with animals by not eating meat. If you don't eat their flesh, then you don't have any connections with them.
 **Sutra:

If people who are pure in this way cultivate samadhi, they will naturally be able to contemplate the extent of the worlds of the ten directions with the physical body given them by their parents; without need of the heavenly eye, they will see the Buddhas speaking dharma and receive in person the sagely instruction. Obtaining spiritual penetrations, they will roam through the ten directions, gain clarity regarding past lives, and will not encounter difficulties and dangers.

Commentary:**

If people who are pure in this way, who do not eat the five pungent plants, do not drink intoxicants, and do not eat meat, and can firmly uphold the four or the eight parajikas, the precepts, if such people cultivate samadhi, they will naturally be able to contemplate the extent of the worlds of the ten directions with the physical body given them by their parents; without need of the heavenly eye. They don't need to have the power of the heavenly eye in order to spontaneously see all around them. They will see the Buddhas speaking dharma and receive in person the sagely instruction. They will be able to encounter the Buddhas and hear the dharma. They will receive in person the Buddhas' compassionate guidance. Obtaining spiritual penetrations, they will roam through the ten directions, gain clarity regarding past lives, and will not encounter difficulties and dangers. Their spiritual powers will enable them to go through the ten directions while in this place. They will obtain the knowledge of past lives. They accomplish these things with their physical bodies. Although they haven't obtained the power of the heavenly eye, it is as if they had. The same is true for the power of the heavenly ear. They'll never get into difficult situations or find themselves in dangerous positions.
 **Sutra:

This is the second of the gradual stages of cultivation.

Commentary:**

What has been discussed is the need to cut out the essence of karmic offenses. One must rectify one's karma. Until now it has not been proper, and so one must work in order to change. One must guard and uphold the precepts and rules. Just that, the maintaining of precepts, is the second of the gradual stages of cultivation.

M3 Tells them they should counter the manifestations of their karma.
N1 He asks about and answers that based on the precepts one should cultivate samadhi.
 **Sutra:

What is the manifestation of karma? Ananda, such people as these, who are pure and who uphold the prohibitive precepts, do not have thoughts of greed and lust, and so they do not become dissipated in the pursuit of the six external defiling sense-objects.

Commentary:**

We first discussed the causes that aid in the creation of karma. Next we talked about rectifying the nature of the karmic consciousness which creates offenses. Now the discussion turns to the manifestation of karma. What is the manifestation of karma? It is the karma created in this very life. We must counteract it; oppose it. We should not allow ourselves to succumb to the creation of new karma. We should return; we should turn back from it. Ananda, such people as these, who are pure and who uphold the prohibitive precepts, do not have thoughts of greed and lust. This refers to the people we have been discussing, who at this stage are pure and keep the precepts. These people are not greedy for the false and illusory bliss of sexual desire, and so they do not become dissipated in the pursuit of the six external defiling senseobjects. They are not turned by the experience of the six senseobjects of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables, and dharmas. They return the light and come back home.
 **Sutra:

Because they do not pursue them, they turn around to their own source. Without the conditions of the defiling objects, there is nothing for the sense-organs to match themselves with, and so they reverse their flow, become one unit, and no longer function in six ways.

Commentary:**

Because they do not pursue them, they turn around to their own source. They are not turned by the six sense-objects, and so they go back to the origin. They return the light and illumine within, and turn back their hearing to hear their self-nature. They cultivate the perfect penetration of the ear. Without the conditions of the defiling objects, there is nothing for the sense-organs to match themselves with. They no longer have any connection with the six sense-objects. The relationship between them is severed when people stop pursuing them, and so the sense-organs no longer are matched with the sense-objects, and so they reverse their flow. That refers to the cultivation of the perfect penetration of the ear, whereby one enters the flow and forgets the place of entry. They become one unit; the six organs are interpenetrated and function together. They no longer function in six ways. The six sense organs no longer are dissipated in their pursuit of the experiences of the six sense-objects.

N2 In conclusion he explains this is obtaining patience with the non-production of dharmas.
 **Sutra:

All the lands of the ten directions are as brilliantly clear and pure as moonlight reflected in crystal.

Commentary:**

At that time, all the lands of the ten directions are as brilliantly clear and pure as moonlight reflected in crystal. In other words, they are transparently clear and visible to all.
 **Sutra:

Their bodies and minds are blissful as they experience the equality of wonderful perfection, and they attain great peace.

Commentary:**

When the crystal captures the light of the full moon, there is both brilliance and transparency. It can be completely seen through. This analogy represents the state of cultivators who have reached the level where both their bodies and minds are pure. At that point, Their bodies and minds are blissful as they experience the equality of wonderful perfection, and they attain great peace. This sense of peace is something one experiences oneself, not something that is evident to others.
 **Sutra:

The secret perfection and pure wonder of all the Thus Come Ones appear before them.

Commentary:**

The secret perfection and pure wonder of all the Thus Come Ones refers to the Buddha's pure dharma nature. At this point they appear before them. A cultivator such as this can experience this state.
 **Sutra:

These people then obtain patience with the non-production of dharmas. They thereupon gradually cultivate according to their practices, until they reside securely in the sagely positions.

Commentary:**

These people then obtain patience with the non-production of dharmas. What is meant by patience with the non-production of dharmas? One does not see the slightest dharma arise, nor the slightest dharma extinguished. Dharmas are neither produced nor destroyed. But it is not easy to obtain this state. They thereupon gradually cultivate according to their practices, until they reside securely in the sagely positions. From the point of attaining patience with the non-production of dharmas, they gradually progress in their practice as they go through the sagely positions, without being shaken or moved.

N3 He concludes with the name: because of the gradual one can enter into the sudden.
 **Sutra:

This is the third of the gradual stages of cultivation.

Commentary:**

This is the third of the gradual stages of cultivation, that of preventing the manifestation of karma.