**The Shurangama Sutra**

**VOLUME 7**

**CHAPTER 4**

**The Seven Destinies**

C2 Aiding the path: specific explanation of the important dharma of protecting the samadhi.
Dl Discusses the seven destinies and urges separation from them in order to caution those of the future.
El Ananda requests.
Fl Expresses gratitude for prior teaching and traces benefit gained.
 **Sutra:

He arose from his seat, bowed at the Buddha's feet, placed his palms together respectfully, and said to the Buddha, "The great, awesome and virtuous World Honored One, whose compassionate sound knows no limit, has well instructed living beings as to their extremely subtle submersion in delusion and has caused me on this day to become blissful in body and mind and to obtain enormous benefit."

Commentary:**

Then, Ananda arose from his seat. Because he had cut through some of his subtle afflictions upon hearing what the Buddha had to say, he got up at this point, bowed at the Buddha's feet, placed his palms together respectfully, and said to the Buddha, "The great, awesome and virtuous World Honored One, whose compassionate sound knows no limit, has well instructed living beings." "Great awesomeness" subdues living beings. Many living beings are stubborn and obstinate. They don't believe anything you tell them. They don't believe in cause and effect, they don't believe in the cycle of rebirth, they don't believe in retributions. So the Buddha, devising good and clever expedients, uses awesome virtue. With his awesomeness, which can be overwhelming, he subdues living beings. Virtue, on the other hand, gathers in living beings. So this phrase represents the two aspects of subduing and gathering in. He gathers in living beings who have faith and are receptive. His virtue is like a magnet that attracts iron filings, which represent the living beings he gathers in. The Buddha's compassionate voice has no limits. It is unhindered, reaching everywhere to rescue all. He has well instructed living beings as to their extremely subtle submersion in delusion. Originally living beings didn't even realize they were hindered by subtle delusions, so the Buddha pointed it out to them. And he has caused me, Ananda, on this day to become blissful in body and mind. I am experiencing physical and mental joy. I am unspeakably happy. And he has caused me to obtain enormous benefit. I've never known such tremendous benefit.

F2 He asks about the destinies.
 **Sutra:

World Honored One, if the wonderful brightness of this truly pure and wonderful mind is basically all-pervading, then everything on the great earth, including the grasses and trees, the wriggling worms and tiny forms of life are originally true suchness and are themselves the Thus Come One, the Buddha's true body.

Commentary:**

World Honored One, if the wonderful brightness, of this truly pure and wonderful mind is basically all-pervading, if, in fact, it pervades the dharma-realm, then it is perfect without any excess or deficiency. Then everything on the great earth, including the grasses and trees, the wriggling worms and tiny forms of life are part of that. "Grasses and trees" are considered insentient beings. "Wriggling worms and tiny forms of life" are the smallest of the sentient realm. They don't have much awareness. They can move, but not far, and their perception is quite limited. Nonetheless, they are originally true suchness and are themselves the Thus Come One, the Buddha's true body. They are all replete with the true substance of a Buddha, the capacity to become a Buddha.
 **Sutra:

Since the Buddha's body is true and real, how can there also be hells, hungry ghosts, animals, asuras, humans, gods, and other paths of rebirth? World Honored One, do these paths exist naturally of themselves, or are they created by living beings' falseness and habits?

Commentary:**

Since the Buddha's body is true and real, how can there also be hells, hungry ghosts, animals, asuras, humans, gods, and other paths of rebirth? How do you explain the existence of these paths? World Honored One, do these paths exist naturally of themselves, or are they created by living beings' falseness and habits? Have the six paths of rebirth always been in existence or do living beings create them? I don't understand the principle here.

F3 Specifically asks about the hells.
 **Sutra:

World Honored One, the bhikshuni Precious Lotus Fragrance, for example, received the Bodhisattva precepts and then indulged in lustful desire, saying that sexual acts did not involve killing or stealing and that they carried no karmic retribution. But after saying this, her female organs caught fire, and then the raging blaze spread throughout all her joints as she fell into the Relentless Hell alive.

Commentary:**

"Why do I say I don't understand the principle behind the six paths?" Ananda continues. World Honored One, the bhikshuni Precious Lotus Fragrance, for example, received the Bodhisattva precepts and then indulged in lustful desire, saying that sexual acts did not involve killing or stealing. This bhikshuni received the Bodhisattva precepts, but she did not uphold them. She had sex on the sly. Having done this, what do you suppose she said? She had a pretty speech ready. She lied. She said that sex didn't involve killing or stealing. "It's not murder. It's not theft. You're not stealing anyone's things. It's just an enjoyment between men and women, a bliss that they share. What crime is there in that? Although the Buddha told us to refrain from it, I don't think that restraint is necessary in this case. It doesn't matter. It's no big sin. What could be wrong with men and women experiencing such a blissful encounter?"

That was her general line of reasoning. She was really emphatic about it, too. She said of such sexual experiences that they carried no karmic retribution. "As to sex," she said, "have it as much as you want. The more the better. It doesn't matter." Thus it was that she actually advocated sexual desire. She was a bhikshuni and yet she was promoting sex. But after saying this, her female organs caught fire, and then the raging blaze spread throughout all her joints. It doesn't matter, huh? In her female organs a fire sprang up. Terrible, wouldn't you say? I believe by then she was being burned so fiercely that she screamed and cried. She was no longer rationalizing that her conduct incurred no offense. Once her female organs were ablaze, the fire spread to all her limbs and joints. That's because during the sexual act men and women feel a sense of pleasure and contentment throughout their entire body. They take this as pleasure, not realizing that such abandonment is just the next thing to death. What's really happening is that they are going to die a little sooner, just die a little sooner. Plunging into such situations, they totally abandon themselves, to the point that they just want to die, both men and women. To die a little sooner is just fine, they feel. But actually they are drilling their way into the hells; they are burrowing into the hells. The bhikshuni's joints caught fire because sexual desire belongs to the element fire. At its peak there is a kind of fire involved. So we speak of the "fire of desire." The blaze was raging so that fire extinguishers and even the entire three-alarm crew would have been useless. Why is that? It's because the fire came from her own heavy sexual desire. No amount of water could quench it.

What happened to her then? There wasn't any other road to take at that point. She fell into the Relentless Hell alive. In the Relentless Hell, there are no lapses in time at all. There are no breaks. Also, its space is uninterrupted, in that one person fills it, and many people fill it. It's not roomy there, whether you're alone or in a crowd. Further, one knows not how many great aeons pass by while one continuously experiences bitter suffering there. There are no interruptions in time or in space. The extreme suffering is unintermittent. Birth and death are uninterrupted.

When this bhikshuni got to that hell, what do you suppose she found? There were iron-beaked birds and iron-mouthed worms that burrowed in and out of her limbs and joints. The place that received special attention was, of course, her female organs. These creatures would drill their way in and then drill their way back out. Each time they did this, their attack would kill her. But then a clever wind would blow, that wind is a special feature of the hells, and revive her. So in a single day and night she would experience tens of thousands of births and deaths. She would die and be revived, die and be revived, again and again, uncountably many times. In addition, the hells are specially equipped for people who are fond of sexual desire. One of the implements is a copper pillar. It is red-hot because a fire blazes within it. However, when one who is fond of sexual desire looks at that hot pillar, one does not see it as such. When a man looks at the pillar, he sees a woman. When a woman looks at the pillar, it is a man. In fact, they see that pillar as their former boyfriend or girlfriend. So they race towards it and, unaware it is a copper pillar, they madly embrace it. The red-hot copper pillar then fries them to a crisp. As if that weren't enough, out of the corner of their eye they see a bed. Actually, it's an iron bed which is also red hot. But what the person sees is a former boyfriend or girlfriend on the bed. They run to the bed and get burned again. Why? Because their sexual karma is so heavy that every way they turn they must undergo this retribution.

This is the kind of retribution the bhikshuni Precious Lotus Fragrance had to undergo. She experienced the hells while still alive. Could she have continued to state that the sexual act did not involve killing or stealing and that it incurred no retribution? Once she began experiencing the retribution, it was too late. She wasn't sorry soon enough. This happened at the time when the Buddha was in the world. There was a bhikshuni who was this lax. It's not just nowadays that bhikshunis are sometimes lax; it happened even during the Buddha's time.
 **Sutra:

And there were the Mighty King Crystal and the bhikshu Good Stars. Crystal exterminated the Gautama clan and Good Stars lied and said he'd realized that all dharmas are empty. They both sank into the Relentless Hell alive.**
**Commentary:**

And there were the Mighty King Crystal and the bhikshu Good Stars. Crystal exterminated the Gautama clan. King Crystal and the Buddha were supposedly relatives, though in fact they were not. King Crystal's father, also a king, wanted to marry into the Gautama clan. Since the Gautama clan was a more honorable one than the King's, the Gautama people did not like the idea. No one wanted to give a daughter to the King in marriage, but they didn't dare refuse outright, because the King was powerful. A refusal might have resulted in big trouble. Finally they decided among themselves to send one of their servant girls, a particularly beautiful one, and pretend she was of the Gautama clan. King Crystal was an offspring of that marriage.

Once, while that king was still a child, someone built a temple for the Buddha, complete with an elaborate dharma seat. When the seat was finished, but before the Buddha himself had ascended the platform to sit on it and speak dharma, the child who was to be King Crystal climbed up and sat on it. The Buddha's disciples and the donors who saw him all scolded him, saying, "You're the son of a slave, how dare you sit in the Buddha's seat?" Hearing them call him that, he was outraged, and he said to his attendant, "Wait until I'm the King and then remind me of what was said here today, lest I forget it. People from the Gautama clan say I'm the son of a slave. Remind me of that. I intend to get even."

Later, when he was King, his attendant did remind him, and the King issued an edict that the entire Gautama clan was to be exterminated, including the Buddha himself. When Mahamaudgalyayana got wind of this, he went to the Buddha to report. "We have to think of a way to save them," he said. But the Buddha didn't say anything. So Maudgalyayana loosed his spiritual powers, put five hundred members of the Gautama clan into his precious bowl, and sent them to the heavens. He thought they'd be safe there. When the King had completed the extermination, Maudgalyayana told Shakyamuni Buddha, "I've got five hundred Gautamans in my bowl stashed away in the heavens, so the clan isn't totally gone after all. I'll bring them down now and let them go." But when he'd recalled them and took a look in his bowl, he found nothing there but blood. "Why was I unable to save them?" asked the puzzled Maudgalyayana. He wanted the Buddha to explain the causes and conditions.

"Ah, you don't know," said the Buddha. "On the causal ground, a long time ago, at a place where the weather was hot, there was a pool with schools of fish in it. The two leaders of the schools were named 'Bran' and 'Many Tongues.' The water in the pool evaporated in the intense heat, and since the people in the area didn't have anything else to eat, they ate the fish. In the end there was just a mud-hole, but even then they noticed a movement in the mud. Digging in, they found the two big fish-kings, Bran and Many Tongues.

"At that time, I, Shakyamuni Buddha, was a child among these people, who were later to become the Gautama clan. Seeing that the two fish were about to be devoured alive, I beat them over the head three times with a club to knock them out first. That's why in his life as a Buddha, he had to endure a three-day headache as retribution."

Further, the fish, Bran, was the present King Crystal, and the fish, Many Tongues, was his attendant who reminded him of the words spoken by the Gautama clan to the King as a child. So it was fated that he would exterminate the Gautama clan. Even though Shakyamuni had become a Buddha, he could not rescue his people from the fixed karma they were destined to repay.

The bhikshu Good Stars was forever voicing his deviant knowledge and deviant views. When he spoke dharma, he did not speak in accord with what the Buddha taught. He made up his own. For instance, the Buddha instructed us to refrain from killing, but this bhikshu's instruction was, "It's not necessary. Why should we refrain from killing? Birth and death goes on and on for living beings, and some of them are especially intended for people to eat. If you don't eat them, what use will they be left alive? They don't have any sense." In this way he countered the Buddha's admonishment not to take life.

This bhikshu had originally left home under the Buddha, but later he disagreed with the dharma the Buddha spoke. Whatever the Buddha said he found questionable, and he was able to influence a lot of the less intelligent bhikshus to go along with him. They began believing him. "Right!" they said. "What he says makes sense. What's the crime in killing?" It was much the same situation as with the bhikshuni Precious Lotus Fragrance. "We just take what we need; it's not that we steal. If we have something, then we don't need to take it. But if you don't take what you need, how can you get by in this life?" That's what he said about stealing. He thought of ways to counter the five most basic precepts established by the Buddha. Good Stars lied and said he'd realized that all dharmas are empty. His best line was,

"Everything is empty. Killing is empty, and stealing is empty, since there isn't anything at all to begin with: There's no substance to karma. You talk about creating karma? Then bring out your 'karma' and show it to me. It doesn't exist!"

They both sank into the Relentless Hell alive. They didn't even wait until they died to fall into the hells. King Crystal, bhikshu Good Stars, and bhikshuni Precious Lotus Fragrance experienced hell in their physical bodies while still alive. So Ananda asks the Buddha about these causes and conditions.
 **Sutra:

Are these hells fixed places, or do they arise spontaneously? Is it that each individual undergoes whatever kind of karma he or she creates? I only hope the Buddha will be compassionate and instruct those of us who do not understand this. May he cause all beings who uphold the precepts to positively and respectfully receive this determination upon hearing it and be careful and clear, free from any violations.

Commentary:**

Are these hells fixed places, or do they arise spontaneously? Since bhikshuni Precious Lotus Fragrance, bhikshu Good Stars, and King Crystal all fell into the hells alive, Ananda brings them up as examples and then asks if the hells are in a fixed and certain place. Is it that each individual undergoes whatever kind of karma he or she creates? Each of these three people had to undergo retribution in accord with the kind of karma they created.

What is the principle involved here? Are the hells prepared in advance for them, or do they make their own? Where do hells come from? How do they relate to the creation of karma and the undergoing of retribution? Are the hells public facilities like prisons, or are they private cells? "I only hope the Buddha will be compassionate and instruct those of us who do not understand this. I'm totally uninformed on this matter," says Ananda. "I'm as innocent as a child when it comes to this. May he cause all beings who uphold the precepts to positively and respectfully receive this determination upon hearing it. I hope they will all listen and obey the decisive instructions offered by the Buddha. I hope they will be careful and clear, free from any violations. May they cultivate with the utmost purity and be very cautious and clean, so that in no way do they transgress the pure precepts. Please, Buddha, explain this for us."

E2 The Thus Come One answers in detail.
Fl Praises him and promises to speak.
 **Sutra:

The Buddha said to Ananda, "What a good question! You want to keep all living beings from entering into deviant views. You should listen attentively now and I will explain this matter for you."

Commentary:**

When the Buddha heard Ananda ask how to help living beings of the future guard the precepts carefully, he was extremely happy. The Buddha said to Ananda, "What a good question! This is a most appropriate question. It's exactly the doctrine you should be asking about. You want to keep all living beings from entering into deviant views. This can keep them from falling into deviant knowledge and views and help them to obtain proper knowledge and views instead. You should listen attentively now and I will explain this matter for you."

F2 Clarifies the destinies.
G1 A general explanation of the basic principle of rising and falling according to emotion and reason.
H1 He enumerates the accumulated habits that divide emotion and thought.
 **Sutra:

Actually, Ananda, all living beings are fundamentally true and pure, but because of their false views they give rise to the falseness of habits, which are divided into an internal aspect and an external aspect.

Commentary:**

Actually, Ananda, all living beings are fundamentally true and pure, but based on the truth they give rise to falseness: they produce ignorance. From ignorance they give rise to false views. Because of their false views they give rise to the falseness of habits. These false habits pertain to their internal physical being and to their external environment. They are divided into an internal aspect and an external aspect. There are false habits that occur outside the physical body and false habits that occur within it also.

H2 He specifically describes the rising or sinking at death.
I1 The internal aspect belongs to emotion and so causes one to fall.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, the internal aspect refers to what occurs inside living beings. Because of love and defilement, they produce the falseness of emotions. When these emotions accumulate without
cease, they can create the fluids of love.

Commentary:**

Ananda, the internal aspect refers to what occurs inside living beings. This means within the physical body. What is within the physical body? Because of love and defilement, they produce the falseness of emotions. There is love and desire and defiled dharmas. From the love and defilement, false emotions come up. These emotions accumulate without cease. The emotions pile up day by day, month after month. They become abundant and do not stop. The emotions of love are ever-present. They can create the fluids of love.
 **Sutra:

That is why living beings' mouths water when they think about delicious food. When they think about a deceased person, either with fondness or with anger, tears will flow from their eyes. When they are greedy for wealth and jewels, a current of lust will course through their hearts. When confronted with a smooth and supple body, their minds become attached to lustful conduct and from both male and female organs will come spontaneous secretions.

Commentary:**

That is why living beings' mouths water when they think about delicious food. Why is it said that once living beings have love and defilement they develop emotions which eventually, if not stopped, will produce fluids of love? Some examples will substantiate this. Just thinking about eating some delicacy makes people salivate. It happens because of their gluttonous thought. When they think about a deceased person, a friend or close relative, someone with whom they had the most affinities, either with fondness or with anger, tears will flow from their eyes. The person who has died was so close to them that they give rise to anger, resentment or even rage, and think, "He was so fine. Why did he have to die so soon? Things were so good between us. Why him?" Excessively fond regard or tremendous resentment both cause a person to cry. When they are greedy for wealth and jewels, a current of lust will course through their hearts. They dream about getting rich, and in their hearts a flow of lust is stirred.When confronted with a smooth and supple body, their minds become attached to lustful conduct and from both male and female organs will come spontaneous secretions. When they see a particularly attractive person they have thoughts of sexual desire. With that, their essence flows of itself. Strange, isn't it?
 **Sutra:

Ananda, although the kinds of love differ, their flow and oppression is the same. With this moisture, one cannot ascend, but will naturally fall. This is called the 'internal aspect.'

Commentary:**

Ananda, although the kinds of love differ, although there are various kinds of love, their flow and oppression is the same. Their currents and enticements are the same. With this moisture, one cannot ascend, but will naturally fall. Emotion sends one down. This is called the "internal aspect."

I2 The external aspect belongs to thought and so one is able to ascend.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, the external aspect refers to what happens outside living beings. Because of longing and yearning, they invent the fallacy of discursive thought. When this reasoning accumulates without cease, it can create ascending vapors.

Commentary:**
Ananda, the external aspect refers to what happens outside living beings. Because of longing and yearning, they invent the fallacy of discursive thought. The "longing and yearning" also refer to love. The "discursive thought" is in fact false thought, which accumulates. When this reasoning accumulates without cease, it can create ascending vapors. You think of it from all angles. You think about it today and you continue thinking about it tomorrow. You thought about it during your last life; you're thinking about it in this life. You thought about it in former kalpas and you think about it now in this kalpa. No one knows how long you've been thinking. And you never rest. However, from this continual thinking, a special response can occur, which is an "uplifting (ascending) motion of spirit."
 **Sutra:

That is why when living beings uphold the prohibitive precepts in their minds, their bodies will be buoyant and feel light and clear. When they uphold mantra seals in their minds, they will command a heroic and resolute perspective. When they have the desire in their minds to be born in the heavens, in their dreams they will have thoughts of flying and ascending. When they cherish the Buddhalands in their minds, then the sagely realms will appear in a shimmering vision, and they will serve the good and wise advisors with little thought for their own lives.

Commentary:**

That is why when living beings uphold the prohibitive precepts in their minds, their bodies will be buoyant and feel light and clear. This can happen to any living being. "Prohibitive" refers to things which one cannot do. These precepts keep people from doing bad things, from creating evil. Don't do the things you should not do, and then you are upholding the precepts in your mind. If your mind holds the precepts, then your body will experience a sensation of lightness. You feel almost like you're floating when you walk. And your mind will be extremely pure and clean. When they uphold mantra seals in their minds, they will command a heroic and resolute perspective. If you specialize in holding the mantras in your mind, there are many mantras and this refers to any one of them, you will have a response. The "seal" refers to the mind-to-mind seal as it pertains to mantras. When you recite the mantra, a certain response occurs. If you are a specialist in mantras, you will have a heroic air about you when you gaze around. Your glance will be powerful and determined. You will know no fear. When they have the desire in their minds to be born in the heavens, in their dreams they will have thoughts of flying and ascending. In your dreams you'll be able to fly and to soar into empty space. That's all because you want to go to the heavens.

When they cherish the Buddhalands in their minds, then the sagely realms will appear in a shimmering vision, and they will serve the good and wise advisors with little thought for their own lives. If you'd like to get born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, or some other Buddhaland, then the Western Pure Land will secretly appear with its pools of seven jewels and waters of the eight meritorious virtues, with its white cranes, egrets, parrots, and kalavinka birds, and with a myriad other states. It won't be something others can see, but you will see it. Others will be unaware of it, but you will know. You will be able to see the Eastern Crystal World of Medicine Master Buddha as well. You will get to serve these good and wise advisors. You can draw near to them, respect them, and make offerings to them. And you will have total disregard for your former lifestyle. Your very life itself will seem unimportant when faced with this opportunity to serve and draw near those good and wise advisors. Nothing you might do will seem as important to you as serving these sages.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, although the thought varies, the lightness and uplifting is the same. With flight and ascension, one will not sink, but will naturally become transcendent. This is called the 'external aspect.'

Commentary:**

Ananda, although the thought varies, the lightness and uplifting is the same. Although the things one thinks about are different, the comfort and light ease that one attains, the feeling of floating, is the same. With flight and ascension, one will not sink, but will naturally become transcendent. With this upward movement one will not fall downward. "Transcendent" means rising above everything, surpassing all. This is called the "external aspect."

H3 He specifically describes the rising or sinking at death.
I1 The appearances that manifest at the time of death.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, all beings in the world are caught up in the continuity of birth and death. Birth happens because of their habitual tendencies; death comes through flow and change. When they are on the verge of dying, but when the final warmth has not left their bodies, all the good and evil they have done in that life suddenly and simultaneously manifests. They experience the intermingling of two habits: an abhorrence of death and an attraction to life.

Commentary:**

The Buddha calls again: Ananda, do you know that all beings in the world are caught up in the continuity of birth and death? They get born and die, die and get reborn, again and again in a never-ending cycle. They spin on the wheel of the six paths of rebirth. Birth happens because of their habitual tendencies.

Birth is something living beings want. They tend toward it. Death comes through flow and change. When they die, they follow their karmic retribution to turn again in rebirth. According to the kind of karma they have created, they will revolve on the wheel. When they are on the verge of dying, but when the final warmth has not left their bodies, all the good and evil they have done in that life suddenly and simultaneously manifests. "The final warmth has not left their bodies" means that the six consciousnesses and the seventh consciousness have passed out of the body, but the eighth consciousness still remains. Its passage will be marked by warmth, that is, the place on the body where the eighth consciousness leaves will be warm to the touch. For instance, if the eighth consciousness leaves through the soles of the feet, that spot will be warm. If it leaves from the legs, the legs will be warm. If it departs from the waist, the waist will be warm. If it goes out the top of the head, the top of the head will be warm. That's the "final warmth" that's mentioned here in the text. Before the eighth consciousness goes, it is referred to as the "present skandha body." Once it leaves the body it is the body between the skandhas, or "intermediate skandha body." So the text here refers to the present skandha body, before it has left the physical body. If one cultivates well, the skandha body is a Buddha. If one does not cultivate, it is a ghost. So when people ask, "Are there really ghosts?" they must first ask themselves if there are Buddhas. If they know there are Buddhas, then of course there are ghosts as well. If you are not sure that there are Buddhas or ghosts, ask yourself if there are people. If you acknowledge the fact that there are people, then you will know that there are also Buddhas and ghosts, because they are all different aspects of the same thing.

After one dies then, the eighth consciousness is called the intermediate skandha body. Before one dies it is called the present skandha body. It is also known as the "soul" and as the "Buddha nature." When a person is on the verge of death, the good and evil he or she has done is revealed and a reckoning is at hand. Depending on what one did, one will have to undergo retribution or reward. If one did good, one can get rebirth in the heavens; if one did evil, one falls into the hells. If you did more in the way of good deeds and meritorious acts, then you can leave from your head. If you did more in the way of committing crimes and creating offenses, then you'll leave from your feet. Obviously then, to leave from the upper part of one's body means one will gain a higher rebirth, whereas to leave from the lower part means one is going to fall. One's kind of rebirth is evident at death. They experience the intermingling of two habits: an abhorrence of death and an attraction to life. They are repelled and attracted when confronted with death and birth.

I2 The scale of ascending and falling.
J1 Ascent with no fall.
 **Sutra:

Endowed solely with thought, they will fly and can certainly be reborn in the heavens above. If they fly from the heart, and if they have blessings and wisdom, as well as pure vows, then their hearts will spontaneously open and they will see the Buddhas of the ten directions and all their pure lands and they will be reborn in whichever one they wish.

Commentary:**

Endowed solely with thought, means that the person has no emotion, no yin, but has only reason, which belongs to yang. "Solely" means it is present to the exclusion of any other mental process. There is only thought, nothing else. It is a kind of true sincerity.

People's thoughts are such that they govern what happens. For instance, eating, drinking, and smoking all come about based on thought. First one thinks about it and then one does it. Conversely, if one decides not to do something, that thing won't be done. "If I want to eat something good, I go buy some good things to eat. If I want something nice to wear, I go buy it." The same is true for drinking. If one is thirsty, one goes out and gets some brandy, whiskey, rum, or beer. Just mentioning it is enough to make some people's mouths water. People who like to smoke are always mulling over the best brands of cigarettes. They've always got their mind on these things. Then they meet a good and wise advisor who tells them to stop smoking, stop eating meat, and stop drinking. Obediently they stop, but since heir minds habitually run to these things, they start having dreams about smoking cigarettes, drinking liquor, and eating meat. They don't actually do these things in their waking hours, but because the thought remains, they dream of indulging in them at night. When they awaken they regret their conduct in the dream. "I've already stopped doing that. Why would I resort to it in a dream?" they admonish themselves. As I've told you before, it's difficult to remain in control of yourself when you're sick and even more difficult to do so in a dream.

Endowed solely with thought, they will fly and can certainly be reborn in the heavens above. If they fly from the heart, and if they have blessings and wisdom, as well as pure vows, then their hearts will spontaneously open. However, if one's thought is of the heart and one does not wish to be reborn in the heavens, but instead keeps blessings and wisdom in mind at all times, then, even better than to be born in the heavens, one may have made pure vows to be reborn in a Buddhaland. The Buddha is known as the Doubly Complete One; that is, he is complete in both blessings and wisdom. Aware of this, one wants to cultivate blessings and wisdom oneself.

But to cultivate blessings and not wisdom
is to be like an elephant wearing a necklace.
And to cultivate wisdom and not blessings
is to be an arhat with an empty begging bowl.

The necklace is handsome and valuable, but it's all the elephant has; it doesn't have any thought-power, any wisdom. If you seek wisdom in your cultivation by studying the sutras and sitting in meditation, but fail to plant any blessings and are unable to practice giving, then you'll end up smart but hungry. To plant blessings means one should do meritorious and virtuous deeds, especially on the Buddhist holidays, the birthdays and anniversaries of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, or on your own birthday, or on the first and the fifteenth of the lunar month. If you practice giving and create merit before the Triple Jewel, then you will amass blessings. If you do not do meritorious and virtuous deeds, then you won't have any blessings. If you concentrate on wisdom and don't develop blessings, then no one will make offerings to you when you become an arhat. That's because on the cause ground you did not make offerings in your turn. So if you want people to make offerings to you when the time comes, you should make offerings to them now. It's as simple as the principle of

Planting melons, you get melons.
Planting beans, you get beans.

"Pure vows" means that before the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas you say:

I vow to be born in the Western Pure Land
With the nine grades of lotuses as my parents.
When the flower opens I will see the Buddha
and awaken to non-production.

Non-retreating Bodhisattvas will be my companions. Or you may wish to be reborn in the Eastern Land. Any such vow is a pure one. "Their hearts will spontaneously open" means they will awaken and they will see the Buddhas of the ten directions and all their pure lands and they will be reborn in whichever one they wish. If a person has blessings, wisdom, and vows, then at the end of his or her life he or she will see the Buddhas of the ten directions and be able to be reborn in whichever pure land he or she wants.

The Seven Destinies 109
 **Sutra:

When they have more thought than emotion, they are not quite as ethereal and so they become flying immortals, great mighty ghost kings, space traveling-yakshas, or earth-traveling rakshasas who roam the form heavens, going where they please without obstruction.

Commentary:**
When they have more thought than emotion, they are not quite as ethereal. "Emotion" can be defined as sentience. It is said that,

Those with sentience and those lacking sentience
Have the sane potential for knowledge of all modes.
"Sentience," in turn, is defined as having thought and feeling.
Insentient objects include grasses, trees, and so forth. It is said,

People are not grass and trees,
Who among them doesn't have emotion?

That's just a way of rationalizing. "Everybody's got emotion." True, everyone does. And when is it evident? In youth. That's why the character "emotion" ( qing) is made up of the word for mind ( xin) and the character for youth ( qing). When we get right down to it, we're talking here about emotional love. Basically, the word for emotion is not limited to that meaning, but that's the use of it here.

Young men and women talk all the time about love and emotion. Why? Because they don't really know about it. They never finish talking about love and emotion. Day in and day out, month after month, year after year that's the entire topic of conversation.

Young people become totally engrossed in emotion. It confuses them. It's said,

Weighed down by karma and confused by emotion
One is a common person.

Confusion is a kind of attachment, the inability to let go. Where does emotion come from? From your mind. Where does he mind come from? From your nature. That's why it's said,

The nature flows out and becomes emotion.
The emotion flows out into desire.
The "out" means "down." As when,
The superior person's aims are lofty.
The petty person's aims are base.

When a person goes down, down, down and reaches the level of desire, then the fire of desire consumes the body. One totally loses control. It happens to both men and women. They lose self-control. "Thought" is persistent thought. This character also contains the character for "mind." It, too, comes from the mind. At first the mind has not moved, but with thought, something appears in the mind. So the character for thought (xiang) is the character for "appearance" (xiang) over the character for "mind" (xin).

Whatever you think about appears. This character is quite descriptive. For instance, you think about drinking, and an image of wine appears in your mind. If you're thinking about eating meat, a piece of meat appears in your mind. It's the same for anything you think about from the affairs of state to your own private matters. The sutras talk about there being no appearance of self, no appearance of others, no appearance of people, and no appearance of a lifespan. But with thought, there are appearances. Is thought right then or wrong? Basically, it, too, is not right. But since people are attached to appearances, they end up with thought.

When the thought is more than the emotion, "they are not quite as ethereal." This can be explained in two ways. It can mean that they don't get far. Their flight is limited. But to hold strictly to that interpretation doesn't exactly fit the context here. A better way to explain it is that their flight is not very much less extensive than the kind of flight described in the previous section. "Not quite as ethereal" then, would mean that they can go quite far. How far? They become flying immortals. They are such that,

In the morning they can roam a hundred thousand miles,
And in the evening go to nine thousand altars.

Or they become great mighty ghost kings, or space traveling yakshas, or earth-traveling rakshasas. These kinds of beings have already been described. They can roam the form heavens, going where they please without obstruction. Nothing hinders their travel. Nothing stops them.
 **Sutra:

Among them may be some with good vows and good hearts who protect and uphold my dharma. Perhaps they protect the pure precepts by following and supporting those who hold precepts. Perhaps they protect spiritual mantras by following and supporting those who hold mantras. Perhaps they protect Chan samadhi by guarding and comforting those who are patient with dharmas. These beings are close at hand beneath the Thus Come One's seat.

Commentary:**

Among them, among the great mighty ghost kings, spacetravelling yakshas, and other such beings, may be some with good vows and good hearts who protect and uphold my dharma. By "my dharma" Shakyamuni Buddha is referring to the Buddhadharma.

Perhaps they protect the pure precepts by following and supporting those who hold precepts. Maybe they make the wholesome vow to guard and uphold the precepts spoken by the Buddhas. Then they will also follow and guard people who hold the precepts. They make sure that everything for these people who uphold the precepts is auspicious and in accord with their wishes. No difficulties or troubles will arise for them. Perhaps they protect spiritual mantras by following and supporting those who hold mantras. Maybe they protect the Shurangama Mantra, the Great Compassion Mantra, or any of the other various mantras. This is the kind of resolve they have. They follow along after the people who uphold mantras and protect them day and night. Perhaps they protect Chan samadhi by guarding and comforting those who are patient with dharmas. Maybe some of these beings make the good vow that in the future they will protect people who investigate Chan and sit in meditation, so that they obtain Chan samadhi. They help them obtain patience with dharmas so that they can endure any dharma whatever. These beings are close at hand beneath the Thus Come One's seat. These beings who have made good vows and are dharma protectors are always able to be beneath the Thus Come One's seat and to hear the dharma spoken.

J2 No ascent and no fall.
 **Sutra:

When their thought and emotion are of equal proportions, they cannot fly and they do not fall, but are born in the human realm. If their thought is bright, their wits are keen. If their emotion is dark, their wits are dull.

Commentary:**

With ninety-percent thought and ten percent emotion, one gains a higher rebirth. With ninety percent emotion and ten percent thought, it is certain that one will fall into the hells. Now when their thought and emotion are of equal proportions, they cannot fly and they do not fall, but are born in the human realm. With fifty percent thought and fifty percent emotion, there is a balance. They can't fly to the heavens to be a god or an immortal, and they can't fall into the hells to become a hungry ghost. Where do they end up? Right where you and I are now. To be born into the human realm does not mean one will remain forever in the human realm. The human realm is nothing more than a transit stop, a place to transfer to the next place. "From the human realm what will one transfer to?" you wonder. Well, in order to get to the human realm you had to have fifty percent thought and fifty percent emotion. All you have to do is take a look and see if you've got more emotion now or more thought. If you've got more emotion, your next transfer will be to the hells. If you've got more thought, your next transfer will be to the heavens. If you are devoid of emotion, you can transfer to the Buddhas' fruition, for then you are pure yang, without any yin. If you have ten percent emotion, you have yin. If you don't have any emotion, you are pure yang and can become a Buddha.

If their thought is bright, their wits are keen. If their emotion is dark, their wits are dull. This is the point of transfer. The more you think, the smarter you get and the more you understand. You attain wisdom if you cultivate and make progress day-by-day. In this way your light grows a little more day-by-day. It keeps increasing until it is the same as the light of the Buddhas. That's what's meant by "if their thoughts are bright, their wits are keen."

Emotion is said to be yin, because it is a private matter. Thought is very open and out front, very public and bright. To cultivate, investigate Chan, sit in meditation, study the Buddhadharma, and listen to the sutras are proper activities. From them you will gain keen intelligence. But love and emotion can't be discussed in a crowd. Rather, a man and woman must go to the park or the seashore or beneath a tree alone to speak in whispers. They must slowly talk things over in secret. This is what is meant by emotion being "dark." Things which others cannot see are dark. The darker they get, the less light there is for them to see by, and "their wits are dull." They go into the forest where they can't see the sky. Or they get into cars or on boats. They go to places where there are few people; is to be "dark." This belongs to yin and causes people be stupid and dull-witted. They chat and chat and become stupider and stupider until eventually they fall into a bottomless pit. That's why emotion makes you fall. You talk together until you both slip and fall into the sea of suffering. Then it won't be easy to get out; you'll have make a tremendous effort. Unless you're lucky enough to have a good and wise advisor who grabs you by the hand and shouts, "Get out!" getting out will be very difficult.

J3 Fall with no ascent.
 **Sutra:

When they have more emotion than thought, they enter the animal realm. With heavier emotion, they become fur-bearing beasts; with lighter emotion, they become winged creatures.

Commentary:**
When they have more emotion than thought, they enter the animal realm. With heavier emotion, they become fur-bearing beasts. People with heavy emotion end up getting born as cows, horses, sheep and the like. Do you see how dangerous it is? You'd better be careful: That's why I say the Shurangama Sutra is so important. This section shows exactly the point at which people and animals cross paths. One wrong step and you end up an animal. If you're off by just a little, then it gets you. With lighter emotion, they become winged creatures. This refers to a slight variation in the degree of emotion on the part of these animals. The creatures that fly still have a bit of thought about them. Did you ever wonder why birds are so colorful? It's because when they were human beings, they liked to wear colorful clothes. They would get all dressed up and then constantly admire themselves. The combination of excessive attention to clothing and a lot of emotion with a little thought caused them to fall into the realm of birds. Some birds are really exquisite. They must have been people who dressed especially well. Because of their emotion, they end up as animals, but the degree of their emotion is slightly less than that of beasts, and so they become birds.
 **Sutra:

When they have seventy percent emotion and thirty percent thought, they fall beneath the wheel of water into the regions of fire, where they come into contact with steam which is itself like a terrible blaze. In the bodies of hungry ghosts, they are constantly burned by that fire. Even water harms them, and they have nothing to eat or drink for hundreds of thousands of kalpas.

Commentary:**

With sixty percent emotion and forty percent thought, one falls into the animal realm. With sixty percent thought and forty percent emotion, one can gain a higher rebirth. Now, when they have seventy percent emotion and thirty percent thought, they fall beneath the wheel of water into the regions of fire, where they come into contact with steam which is itself like a terrible blaze. Beneath the water cycle is fire. Volcanoes are a common example which proves that fire resides beneath the water level. In the bodies of hungry ghosts, they are constantly burned by that fire. At that time, they take on the bodies of hungry ghosts, and it would be too late for them if they decided they'd rather be birds or beasts. There are a myriad kinds of hungry ghosts. The worst kind there is to be is the one whose throat is as thin as a needle and whose stomach is as big as a drum.

Even water harms them, and they have nothing to eat or drink for hundreds of thousands of kalpas. They don't even have a drop of water to drink. Why not? Because their karma is such that when they see water, it turns to a raging fire. Gods see water as crystal. Fish, shrimp, oysters, and things of the sea look upon water as their palace, their home. They live in it and therefore don't see it, in the same way that people live in air but aren't aware of it. If we people didn't have air, we would die. It's said that people must eat to live, but they also must have air to breathe. But do we see air? No. Fish see water as their home, and people see water as water, but ghosts see water as fire. Why don't we see it as fire? If you want to know the difference, you can try being a ghost and find out. But you protest that you'd like to know without having to be a ghost. All right, I can tell you. It's because of karmic obstacles. It's a result of the karma that they themselves created.

If you make the karma that sends you into the body of a hungry ghost, then you will perceive water as fire. If you still don't believe it, you can try it out. But if you do, and really turn into a hungry ghost, it will be very difficult to get to be a person again. It won't be easy to return. So now I'm telling you, and the best would be to believe me, because I'm really not cheating you. Then you don't have to go try it out for yourself.

As a hungry ghost one is burned to death, but after a while one revives and then has to go through being burned to death again. In that way, one undergoes birth after birth and death after death as a ghost. Because they see water as fire, the ghosts have nothing to drink, and they can't eat, either. How long does this go on? It goes on for hundreds of thousands of kalpas.
 **Sutra:

When they have ninety percent emotion and ten percent thought, they fall through the wheel of fire until their bodies enter wind and fire, in a region where the two interact. With lighter emotion they are born in the intermittent hell; with heavier emotion they are born in the Relentless Hell.

Commentary:**

When they have ninety percent emotion and ten percent thought, they fall through the wheel of fire until their bodies enter wind and fire, in a region where the two interact. In this place there's not only fire but a wind that whips up the fire so that it burns even more fiercely. With lighter emotion they are born in the intermittent hell; with heavier emotion they are born in the Relentless Hell.
 **Sutra:

When they are possessed entirely of emotion, they sink into the Avichi Hell. If the emotion has gone into their hearts so that they slander the great vehicle, defame the Buddha's pure precepts, speak crazy and false dharma, are greedy for offerings from the faithful, recklessly accept the respect of others, commit the five rebellious acts and the ten major offenses, then they are further reborn in Avichi Hells throughout the ten directions.

Commentary:**

When they are possessed entirely of emotion, when they have no thought, only emotion, they sink into the Avichi Hell. If the emotion has gone into their hearts, if their minds are totally governed by emotion, so that they slander the great vehicle. They make judgments about things with their emotions and as a result they take right to be wrong and wrong to be right. They take black to be white and white to be black. They are totally unreasonable. They always oppose what others say. If you say, "Don't do things that are not good," they come back with, "What's there to be afraid of?" Their motto is "Eat meat, drink wine, and pass the time. The Buddha is only a figment of the imagination." They argue that "Your mind is the Buddha and the Buddha is your mind." That's the kind of deviant knowledge and deviant views they have.

Their views become so deviant that they defame the Buddha's pure precepts. "Don't take the precepts," they say. "What do you want to do that for? You end up with a bunch of precepts controlling you. If you don't take the precepts, see how free you'll be." In fact, if one does not take the precepts, it is very, very easy to end up in the hells. Do you call that freedom? But if you receive the precepts and then use them as a guide to govern yourself, if you receive the precepts and then govern yourself by the appearance, the dharma, and the substance of the precepts, it's not so likely that you'll fall into the hells. Even if you do fall into the hells, you'll get out much more quickly. But if you advocate not taking the precepts in order to be free, then when you fall into the hells there's no guarantee when you'll get out again. If you take the precepts, then a long term in the hells gets cut to a short term. It's as if you were a president's aide and broke some major law and were caught. Just a note from the president would suffice to effect your release. Without that help, it might be a long time before you were released. If you have the precepts for protection, then the suffering you have to endure for having committed major offenses will be lessened significantly. So don't outsmart yourself by deciding not to take the precepts. It's better to take the precepts. A living being who receives the Buddha's precepts enters into the position of a Buddha.

Don't slander the Buddha's precepts, and don't speak crazy and false dharma. Don't deny cause and effect. Don't say things like "There's no cause and no effect; people are just Buddhas, after all. There's no need to cultivate. Eat meat, drink, and be merry, because no matter what you do, you still can become a Buddha. It's really easy to become a Buddha."

Right, it is easy to become a Buddha, but the way to do it is to get rid of your faults. There aren't any Buddhas who have faults. They are all pure and undefiled. They didn't become Buddhas by being filthy and full of karmic offenses. They didn't become Buddhas by drinking wine and eating meat. If that's the way it was, then the Buddha would not have had to speak the precepts. Don't be greedy for offerings from the faithful. Don't scheme to get people to believe in you, to give you gifts, to make offerings to you. Don't think about how you'd have more money if you took more disciples. I never discuss money with my disciples. Usually when people take disciples it's made clear from the start that they should give at least fifty or sixty dollars just to take refuge. But I don't pay attention to that kind of thing.

These kinds of beings also recklessly accept the respect of others. Or they commit the five rebellious acts, which are killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an Arhat, shedding the Buddha's blood, and breaking up the harmony of the Sangha. Or they commit the ten major offenses, that is, they violate the ten major Bodhisattva precepts. Having committed these grave offenses, then they are further reborn in Avichi Hells throughout the ten directions. After they have undergone suffering in the Avichi Hell of this world they go to Avichi Hells in every world in the ten directions. Can you imagine how long a time that would take? When this hell is finished, they are transported to another Avichi Hell. When that Avichi Hell is destroyed, they move on to the next Avichi Hell. It's endless. And so Devadatta, the one who tried to compete with the Buddha, fell into the hells alive. He's still suffering in the hells. From the time of Shakyamuni Buddha until now he's been undergoing hellish suffering, but in fact that's just the blink of an eye.

H4 He concludes that there are places where both individual and collective punishment are undergone.
 **Sutra:

Although one receives one's due according to the evil karma one has created, a group can undergo an identical lot, and there are definite places where it occurs.

Commentary:**

Although one receives one?s due according to the evil karma one has created, by slandering the great vehicle dharma masters, by defaming the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, by committing the five rebellious acts and the ten major offenses, a group can undergo an identical lot, and there are definite places where it occurs. Although they fall into the hells because of what they themselves have done, they create the karma and undergo the retribution, still, a group can undergo similar retribution, and it can happen in a fixed and certain place. There are definite places where they create the karma, and there are definite places where they undergo the retribution.

Destiny of Hells

G2 He specifically describes the various causes and results of falling and rising.
H1 Destiny of hells.
I1 Traces prior instruction and introduces this.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, it all comes from the karmic responses which living beings themselves invoke. They create ten habitual causes and undergo six interacting retributions.

Commentary:**

Ananda, it all comes from the karmic responses which living beings themselves invoke. They give rise to delusion, create karma, and undergo retribution. They create ten habitual causes and undergo six interacting retributions. The retributions are interconnected.

I2 Explains ten causes.
J1 Habits of lust.
 **Sutra:

What are the ten causes? Ananda, the first consists of habits of lust and reciprocal interactions which give rise to mutual rubbing. When this rubbing continues without cease, it produces a tremendous raging fire within which movement occurs, just as warmth arises between a person's hands when he rubs them together.

Commentary:**

What are the ten causes? Ananda, I will now tell you in detail. The first consists of habits of lust and reciprocal interactions. The habits of lust bring men and women together, and their interactions give rise to mutual rubbing. When this rubbing continues without cease, it produces a tremendous raging fire within which movement occurs. The light of fire arises between them and has a movement of its own, just as warmth arises between a person's hands when he rubs them together.
 **Sutra:

Because these two habits set each other ablaze, there come into being the iron bed, the copper pillar, and other such experiences.

Commentary:**

Because these two habits. The "two habits" refer to one's past habits of lust which combine with one's present habits of lust. These two habits set each other ablaze, there come into being the iron bed, the copper pillar, and other such experiences. These are the names of specific hells. They are brought into being because people have sexual desire which is too heavy. They have created too much karma involving lust and so they must undergo this retribution.
 **Sutra:

Therefore the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon the practice of lust and name it the 'fire of desire.' Bodhisattvas avoid desire as they would a fiery pit.

Commentary:**

Therefore the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon the practice of lust and name it the "fire of desire." They tell you that the fire of desire burns up the body. Bodhisattvas avoid desire as they would a fiery pit. They see that staying away from lustful activity is as important as avoiding a fiery pit. You don't want to see the fiery pit and deliberately jump into it. If you do, it's for sure you'll burn to death. So Bodhisattvas stay far away from lust and sexual desire. They do not give rise to thoughts of sexual desire.

J2 Habits of greed.
 **Sutra:

The second consists of habits of greed and intermingled scheming which give rise to a suction. When this suction becomes dominant and incessant, it produces intense cold and solid ice where freezing occurs, just as a sensation of cold is experienced when a person draws in a blast of wind through his
mouth.

Commentary:**

The second consists of habits of greed and intermingled scheming which give rise to a suction. Greed is like a magnet which attracts things to it. When this suction becomes dominant and incessant, people who experience insatiable greed are always trying to figure out how to get things and make them their own. When greed reaches this extreme, it produces intense cold and solid ice where freezing occurs. These habits produce a sensation of freezing cold, just as a sensation of cold is experienced when a person draws in a blast of wind through his mouth.
 **Sutra:

Because these two habits clash together, there come into being chattering, whimpering and shuddering; blue, red, and white lotuses; cold and ice; and other such experiences. Therefore the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon excessive seeking and name it "the water of greed". Bodhisattvas avoid greed as they would a sea of pestilence.

Commentary:**

Because these two habits, one's past greed and one's present greed, clash together, the habits of grabbing and seizing feed on one another until there come into being chattering, whimpering and shuddering. "Chattering, whimpering, and suffering" is "cha cha, bwo bwo, lwo lwo" in Chinese, which indicate the sounds made by beings suffering in these freezing hells when undergoing the tortures of extreme cold. Blue, red, and white lotuses indicate the shapes the ice freezes into in these hells. The beings undergo cold and ice; and other such experiences.

J3 Habits of arrogance.
 **Sutra:

The third consists of habits of arrogance and resulting friction which give rise to mutual intimidation. When it accelerates without cease, it produces torrents and rapids which create restless waves of water, just as water is produced when a person continuously works his tongue in an effort to taste flavors.

Commentary:**

The third consists of habits of arrogance and resulting friction. "Arrogance" refers to self-satisfaction. One is arrogant when one thinks one is better than others. Such thoughts give rise to mutual intimidation. One looks down on others. When it accelerates without cease, it produces torrents and rapids which create restless waves of water. This refers to the hell of boiling oil, the hell of rapids, the hell of scalding soup, and so forth. It is just as water is produced when a person continuously works his tongue in an effort to taste flavors. Someone keeps trying to taste the flavor of his own mouth. The effort will produce saliva.
 **Sutra:

Because these two habits incite one another, there come into being the river of blood, the river of ashes, the burning sand, the poisonous sea, the molten copper which is poured over one or which must be swallowed, and other such experiences.

Commentary:**

Because these two habits incite one another, arrogant attitudes from the past combine with one's self-satisfaction in the present, there come into being many kinds of hells: The hell of the river of blood, the hell of the river of ashes, the hell of the burning sand, the hell of the poisonous sea, the hell of the molten copper which is poured over one, the hell where molten copper must be swallowed, and other such experiences.
 **Sutra:

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon self-satisfaction and name it 'drinking the water of stupidity.' Bodhisattvas avoid arrogance as they would a huge deluge.

Commentary:**

It's as stinking as a place where a lot of people go to relieve themselves.

J4 Habits of hatred.
 **Sutra:

The fourth consists of habits of hatred which give rise to mutual defiance. When this defiance binds one without cease, one's heart becomes so hot that it catches fire, and the molten vapor turns into metal.

From it is produced the mountain of knives, the iron cudgel, the tree of swords, the wheel of swords, axes and halberds, and spears and saws. It is like the intent to kill surging forth when a person meets a mortal enemy, so that he is roused to action.

Commentary:**

The fourth consists of habits of hatred which give rise to mutual defiance. "Defiance" means that you have wronged me and I have wronged you. When this defiance binds one without cease, one's heart becomes so hot that it catches fire, and the molten vapor turns into metal. Your heart feels hot and you give rise to the fire of ignorance. That kind of energy is so violent that it turns into metal. From it is produced the mountain of knives. Because the molten energy from one's anger forms into metal, the hell of the mountain of knives, the hell of the iron cudgel, the hell of the tree of swords, the hell of the wheel of swords, the hell of axes and halberds, the hell of spears and saws, and the like all come into being. It is like the intent to kill surging forth when a person meets a mortal enemy, someone he bears a heavy grudge against, so that he is roused to action. His obsession to kill takes over.
 **Sutra:

Because these two habits clash with one another, there come into being castration and hacking, beheading and mutilation, filing and sticking, flogging and beating, and other such experiences.

Commentary:**

Because these two habits, past hatred and present hatred, clash with one another, there come into being castration and hacking. This is one kind of hell. Beheading, being killed; mutilation, having one's arms or legs chopped off or one's bones ground to powder: filing and sticking, being filed or being stuck with thorns; flogging and beating; and other such experiences are all further kinds of hells.
 **Sutra:

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon hatred and name it 'sharp knives and swords.' Bodhisattvas avoid hatred as they would their own execution.

Commentary:**

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon hatred and name it "sharp knives and swords." Anger is just like a keen knife or a sharp sword. Bodhisattvas avoid hatred as they would their own execution. Bodhisattvas regard anger and hatred as they would being killed by someone.

J5 Habits of deception.
 **Sutra:

The fifth consists of habits of deception and misleading involvements which give rise to mutual guile. When such maneuvering continues without cease, it produces the ropes and
wood of a gallows for hanging, like the grass and trees that grow when water saturates a field.

Commentary:**

The fifth consists of habits of deception and misleading involvements which give rise to mutual guile. "Deception" is a lack of honesty. "Misleading" means people getting involved in cheating and deceiving one another. You cheat me with some scheme and then I think up some trick to cheat you. When such maneuvering continues without cease, it produces the ropes and wood of a gallows for hanging. "Maneuvering" refers to the deceptive devices. The ropes and wood are used to construct a gallows to hang the person. This is a certain hell. It is like the grass and trees that grow when water saturates a field. Deception nourishes the hell of ropes and wood in the same way.
 **Sutra:

Because the two habits perpetuate one another, there come into being handcuffs and fetters, cangues and locks, whips and clubs, sticks and cudgels, and other such experiences.

Commentary:**

Because the two habits perpetuate one another, there come into being handcuffs and fetters. The habits of deception from the past combine with the habits of deception in the present to make a protracted pattern of deception. These "handcuffs and fetters" are implements of punishment, as are cangues and locks. When one is bound by this kind of thing, one cannot move about freely, much less escape. Or perhaps one is beaten with whips and clubs, sticks and cudgels, and other such experiences. What is the origin of these experiences? How do they come into being? They come from deception.
 **Sutra:

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon deception and name it a 'treacherous crook.' Bodhisattvas fear deception as they would a savage wolf.

Commentary:**

Being "treacherous" means that when one speaks, one doesn't tell the truth.

J6 Habits of lying.
 **Sutra:

The sixth consists of habits of lying and combined fraudulence which give rise to mutual cheating. When false accusations continue without cease, one becomes adept at corruption.

From this there come into being dust and dirt, excrement and urine, filth, stench, and impurities. It is like the obscuring of everyone's vision when the dust is stirred up by the wind.

Commentary:**

The sixth consists of habits of lying and combined fraudulence which give rise to mutual cheating. "Lying" means not telling the truth, saying things that are false. "Combined fraudulence' means that people lie in order to cheat one another. "Mutual cheating" means that people are not straight with one another. What they say is not true. When false accusations continue without cease, one becomes adept at corruption. People end up accusing each other in ways which are not justified. If they continue in this vein, they end up being masters of deception. Everything they do is against the law. From this there come into being the hell of dust and dirt, and the hell of excrement and urine. These hells are full of filth, stench, and impurities. It is like the obscuring of everyone's vision when the dust is stirred up by the wind. That's what this particular karmic obstacle is like. The dust is so thick you can't even see it clearly, let alone anything else.
 **Sutra:

Because these two habits augment one another, there come into being sinking and drowning, tossing and pitching, flying and falling, floating and submerging, and other such experiences.

Commentary:**
Because these two habits augment one another, there come into being sinking and drowning. The habits of lying from the past combine with the habits of lying in the present to bring about these various hells. Tossing and pitching means that one is tossed up high and then allowed to plummet down. Flying and falling is also a case of being rocketed off into space and then left to fall back down. Floating and submerging means one is left afloat at sea. These hells and other such experiences must be undergone.
 **Sutra:

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon lying and name it 'robbery and murder.' Bodhisattvas regard lying as they would treading on a venomous snake.

Commentary:**

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon lying and name it "robbery and murder." When they see people doing things to cheat others, they call it robbery and murder. Bodhisattvas regard lying as they would treading on a venomous snake. Lying, too, is undesirable.

J7 Habits of animosity.
 **Sutra:

The seventh consists of habits of animosity and interconnected enmity which give rise to grievances. From this there come into being flying rocks, thrown stones, caskets and closets, cages on wheels, jars and containers, and bags and rods. It is like someone harming others secretly, he harbors, cherishes, and nurtures evil.

Commentary:**

The seventh consists of habits of animosity and interconnected enmity which give rise to grievances. "Animosity" refers to resentment and can also mean the making of false accusations. False accusations cause suspicions to arise. In Chinese the word "grievances" (xian) has a character which literally means to hold in the beak as a bird holds food. Here, someone harbors grievances and ill-will in his mouth and refuses to let it go. From this there come into being flying rocks, and the hell of thrown stones, in which one is struck with pieces of rubble. Or one is closed up in a casket or in a closet, or put in a cage on wheels. Or the person is put into a jar and a fire is lit under it, so that the ghost gets cooked, bags and rods: the ghost is put in a big bag and then beaten down. Inside he both suffocates and suffers the pain of beating. This kind of karma is like someone harming others secretly, he harbors, cherishes, and nurtures evil. He's always brewing evil thoughts in his mind.
 **Sutra:

Because these two habits swallow one another up, there come into being tossing and pitching, seizing and apprehending, striking and shooting, casting away and pinching, and other such experiences.

Commentary:**
Because these two habits swallow one another up, there come into being tossing and pitching. The habit of animosity from the past combines with the habit of animosity in the present in such a way that they devour one another. That is, if the karmic power of one's habits from the past is stronger, one will undergo retribution for the past deeds. If the power of the karma in the present life is the stronger, one will undergo retribution for it in this very life. That's what's meant by swallowing each other up. The ghost is tossed about or thrown for a distance, so that when he lands he will undergo pain and suffering. Seizing and apprehending: after he's tossed away, he is seized and brought back. Striking and shooting, casting away and pinching, and other such experiences are all undergone as retribution.
 **Sutra:

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon animosity and name it a 'disobedient and harmful ghost.'

Bodhisattvas regard animosity as they would drinking poisonous wine.

Commentary:**

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon animosity and name it a "disobedient and harmful ghost." They regard conduct governed by animosity, resentment, and revenge as a disobedient and harmful ghost. Such conduct goes against the wishes of the person who is the object of the resentment and ends up by killing the person. Bodhisattvas regard animosity as they would drinking poisonous wine. The Chinese language uses an adjective which is the name of a bird, chen, a deadly species of falcon. If a feather from this particular variety of falcon is soaked in wine, the wine will be poisoned so thoroughly that a sip of it would be lethal, for there is no antidote for it.

J8 Habits of views.
 **Sutra:

The eighth consists of habits of views and the admixture of understandings, such as satkayadrishti, views, moral prohibitions, grasping, and deviant insight into various kinds of karma, which bring about opposition and produce mutual antagonism. From them there come into being court officials, deputies, certifiers, and registrars. They are like people traveling on a road, who meet each other coming and going.

Commentary:**

The eighth consists of habits of views and the admixture of understandings, such as satkayadrishti. These are habits which we all have. If you make proper use of views, they are an aid to your mind and nature. But if you use them incorrectly, if you have biases, then you can create bad karma. Satkayadrishti is a Sanskrit word which means "view of having a body." There are five kinds of views:

1. the view of having a body,
2. one-sided views,
3. the view of prohibitive morality,
4. views that grasp at views,
5. deviant views.

These have been explained in detail before. With the first view, people become attached to the view that their bodies are themselves and attached to the things around them as being their own. Onesided views are not in accord with the Middle Way. They fall into either the view of annihilationism or the view of externalism. With the former, one believes that death is like the extinguishment of a lamp, there is nothing that follows it. One doesn't believe in a soul or in rebirth. With the latter, one believes that if one is a person this life, one will be a person in every life. They think it is impossible for a person to undergo rebirth as an animal.

The third is an attachment to extremes of morality, like that found in some sects in India such as those that would follow the behavior of cows or dogs. The fourth, to have the view that grasps views, means being fraught with attachments. People with this view have very decided opinions and an overbearing view of self. There are also deviant views. Satkayadrishti, views, moral prohibitions, grasping, and deviant insight into various kinds of karma refer to these five views. One may have a bit of intelligence, but the principles one grasps at are deviant. Because they are not proper views, one creates karma, which bring about opposition and produce mutual antagonism. With this kind of karma, one is always opposing other people and disagreeing with them. From them there come into being court officials, deputies, certifiers, and registrars. They ask for certification and proof in writing; they insist upon records and the like. These views are like people traveling on a road, who meet each other coming and going.  **Sutra:

Because these two habits influence one another, there come into being official inquiries, baited questions, examinations, interrogations, public investigations, exposure, the youths who record good and evil, carrying the record books of the offenders' arguments and rationalizations, and other such experiences.

Commentary:**
Because these two habits influence one another, there come into being official inquiries. The two habits again refer to the habits involving the five views that one built up in former lives, coupled with the habits involving the five views which one continues to grasp hold of in this life. Official inquiries means one is thoroughly questioned. Baited questions are raised when an examiner uses expedients to get you to admit your wrongdoings. This kind of thing happens in courts and also happens in the hells. Examinations means that after you've stated your case, the officials set about to examine its accuracy, step-by-step. They send people out to verify everything you've said. Interrogations bring everything out in the open, just as if it were to appear in a mirror. Public investigations and exposure do the same. The youths who record good and evil, carrying the record books of the offenders' arguments and rationalizations. These youths are young employees of the hells who keep records on good and evil done in the world. When your turn comes, they read out your record. If you try to argue or rationalize, they just find the page and place and read it out just as it actually happened. They have unquestionable proof, and your protestations are useless. These and other such experiences are the lot of those with deep-seated views.
 **Sutra:

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon evil views and name them the 'pit of views.' Bodhisattvas regard having false and one-sided views as they would standing on the edge of a steep ravine full of poison.

Commentary:**

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon evil views and name them the "pit of views." To them, the habits of evil views are like a deep abyss. It's fine if you don't fall in it, but if you do, it's not at all easy to climb back out. Bodhisattvas regard having false and one-sided views as they would standing on the edge of a steep ravine full of poison. They are extremely dangerous, and it is very easy to slip and fall into them, so Bodhisattvas stay far away from them.

J9 Habits of injustice.
 **Sutra:

The ninth consists of the habits of injustice and their interconnected support of one another; they result in instigating false charges and libeling. From them are produced crushing between mountains, crushing between rocks, stone rollers, stone grinders, plowing, and pulverizing. It is like a slanderous villain who engages in persecuting good people unjustly.

Commentary:**
The ninth consists of the habits of injustice and their interconnected support of one another; they result in instigating false charges and libeling. "Injustice" means to accuse someone without cause, to frame him. The person in question is in fact innocent, but the government brings a case against him, or else some private individual sues him. It is biased and unfair. Included here are both the habits of being unjustly accused and of having done injustice to others. If you have unjustly accused others in the past, then those karmic obstacles will bind together with what goes on in this life. If you've never been unjustly accused, then perhaps the karma of it is being newly created in this lifetime. If you know that the person you are accusing did not actually commit the crime, and you are fully aware that you are bearing false witness, then you are being unjust. From them are produced crushing between mountains, crushing between rocks. This is the Hell of Squeezing Mountains, in which mountains on all four sides close in and crush the offender. The same kind of experience is undergone in the hell of crushing rocks. You are squeezed into a meat patty. Stone rollers is another hell, as are stone grinders, plowing, and pulverizing. If a person is a constant liar and bears false witness, if his speech is totally unreliable, then in this hell his tongue is cut out. Or it is grappled with an iron hook and pulled out, and then oxen drag plows back and forth across it. With "pulverizing" the offender is put into a grinder and ground to bits. It is like a slanderous villain who engages in persecuting good people unjustly. "Slanderous" refers to any kind of unreliable speech or accusation.
 **Sutra:

Because these two habits join ranks, there come into being pressing and pushing, bludgeons and compulsion, squeezing and straining, weighing and measuring, and other such experiences.

Commentary:**

The karmic obstacles from former lives combine with the karma from one's conduct in the last life to cause one to be pressed or pushed down or to be beaten with bludgeons or to be forcefully controlled. Sometimes the ghost is put into a bag and then the blood is squeezed out of it, just the way apple sauce is made. Or one's injustices are weighed and measured with precise accuracy. These are the kinds of experiences one has to undergo.
 **Sutra:

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon harmful accusations and name them 'a treacherous tiger.' Bodhisattvas regard injustice as they would a bolt of lightning.

Commentary:**

Therefore, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon harmful accusations and name them "a treacherous tiger," even more vicious than an ordinary tiger. Bodhisattvas regard injustice as they would a bolt of lightning. Bodhisattvas who cultivate the Way don't want to make any mistakes in cause and effect, and so they see that the habit of acting in unjust ways is as dangerous as encountering a bolt from the blue. It's just as frightening a situation and in the same way can strike people down dead on the spot.

J10 The habits of litigation.
 **Sutra:

The tenth consists of the habits of litigation and the mutual disputations which give rise to covering. From them there are produced a look in the mirror and illumination by the lamp. It is like being in direct sunlight: there is no way one can hide one's shadow.

Commentary:**

The tenth consists of the habits of litigation and the mutual disputations which give rise to covering. "Litigation" means taking someone to court. It involves attorneys for the plaintiff and the defense. The offense involved is one of covering. That means that the evidence brought out in court by either side is not the whole truth. Each person claims to be right. In divorce cases, for example, the husband says he is in the right and the wife claims she is in the right. Actually, neither one is in the right, for if even one of them were right, they would not be getting a divorce. The one in the right would simply forgive and forget if the other were being unreasonable, and no problems would arise. It's only when both parties refuse to yield that they have to get lawyers and go to court.

Probably they feel sorry for the lawyers and are afraid they will starve to death if they don't give them some business. And of course the lawyer advises them to go to court because it's his livelihood. His fee can range from hundreds of dollars to thousands of dollars; it depends on the kind of case involved. He names his own price. "Disputations" refers to the arguments that ensue. Each side claims to be sane and reasonable. Why do they go to court? Because they are not open and frank with one another. They put on masks and cover up the truth, They are actually wrong, but they cover up their mistakes and bring up the points where they appear to be in accord with principle. They talk about all the things they did that were legal and avoid mentioning the things they did which were not. That's covering.

From them there are produced a look in the mirror and illumination by the lamp. If you liked to get involved in litigations and to commit crimes when you were alive, then when you get to the hells, your crimes will be revealed in a mirror on a stand there. As you look into the mirror, every mistake you ever made in your entire life will appear in it. It's just like a movie: every frame shows up your actions quite vividly. With the "illumination by the lamp" you are left with no place to hide. Everything is clearly revealed. It is like being in direct sunlight: there is no way one can hide one's shadow.
 **Sutra:

Because these two habits bicker back and forth, there come into being evil companions, the mirror of karma, the fiery pearl, exposure of past karma, inquests, and other such experiences.

Commentary:**

Because these two habits bicker back and forth, there come into being evil companions. Not only companions, but relatives are included here. One's whole family may be bad. The mirror of karma is like the crime-revealing mirror mentioned above. The fiery pearl illuminates past offenses. Exposure of past karma reveals all the crimes you ever committed in whatever former life. Inquests happen when you don't admit what you've done. Then the evidence is brought out against you. It's proved for you to see.
 **Sutra:

Therefore, all the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon covering and name it a 'hidden villain.' Bodhisattvas regard covering as they would having to carry a mountain atop their heads while walking upon the sea.

Commentary:**
Therefore, all the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions look upon covering and name it a "hidden villain." Because of what's just been described, Thus Come Ones look upon the practice of covering and call it a "hidden" thief. Bodhisattvas regard covering as they would having to carry a mountain atop their heads while walking upon the sea. How could they ever stay up? It wouldn't be possible. So Bodhisattvas don't go to court.

I3 Explains the six retributions.
J1 A general introduction.
 **Sutra:

What are the six retributions? Ananda, living beings create karma with their six consciousnesses. The evil retributions they call down upon themselves come from the six sense organs.

Commentary:**

What are the six retributions? Ananda, living beings create karma with their six consciousnesses of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The evil retributions they call down upon themselves when they create the evil karma come from the six sense organs. They arise out of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

J2 Detailed explanation.
K1 Retribution of seeing.
L1 At the end of one's life, one sees one's own fall.
 **Sutra:

What are the evil retributions that arise from the six sense organs? The first is the retribution of seeing, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. The karma of seeing intermingles, so that at the time of death one first sees a raging conflagration which fills the ten directions. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness takes flight, but then falls. Riding on a wisp of smoke, it enters the Relentless Hell.

Commentary:**

Above were discussed the ten habitual causes which lead to six interconnected retributions. They are called "interconnected" because although one of the six may have been the predominant factor in an offense, the others are all involved to some extent. They act as accomplices. For instance, the eyes commit some offense with regard to objects they see. So the eyes are the major offender; however, the ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind also play their parts in the crime. The major offender is the first to commit the offense, while the others help it along in their turn.

But you will remember that earlier the Buddhas of the ten directions spoke directly and simultaneously to Ananda, saying that it is from the six sense organs that Buddhas are accomplished and it is from the six sense organs that one falls into the hells. So now that we have come to the six interconnected retributions, you should remember that originally these six are capable of accomplishing Buddhahood. It's just that people don't know how to use them properly, and so within the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One they give rise to the false from within the true. The falseness that arises goes from the three subtle appearances to the six coarse appearances to limitless boundless appearances. That's why it is said that there are eighty-four thousand kinds of karmic obstacles.

Why do we create so many karmic offenses? It's because we are not able to gain control. We can't keep ourselves from being turned by the experiences of the six sense objects. We are unable to return the hearing and listen to the self nature so that the nature can accomplish the Unsurpassed Way. Just because we don't return the hearing, we race out through the six sense organs to get at the six sense objects.

What are the evil retributions that arise from the six sense organs? The first is the retribution of seeing, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. Because the perceiving nature of the eye sees a form, one is influenced by that object of form. But in this process there are a lot of involvements and ramifications. From these appearances a lot of karmic offenses are created. A lot of karmic offenses result in a lot of evil retributions. The karma of seeing intermingles, so that at the time of death one first sees a raging conflagration which fills the ten directions. The "karma" referred to here is offense-karma. With what does it "intermingle?" With the other five sense organs. They exchange opinions, and their karma gets mixed up together. Being influenced by the objects of sight in this way, one chases after sounds and pursues forms.

For example, a man sees a beautiful woman and gives rise to greed and desire. Then he listens for her gentle voice. Once the eyes have seen the beautiful form, the ears want to follow and hear a beautiful sound. The nose wants a whiff of her powder and perfumes. If the eyes hadn't seen her, the ears wouldn't have been eager to hear her voice and the nose wouldn't have been enticed to smell the feminine fragrances. After that the tongue starts having ruinous false thoughts, maybe something like, "She's such a fine woman that I bet it wouldn't be bad to kiss her." In his heart this kind of ignorance arises. Then the body wants to come in contact with her and the mind relents. The mind is agreeable and goes along with the rest. At that point he goes ahead and creates the karma of lust. The result in the future will be an evil retribution such as hugging the copper pillar or sleeping on the iron bed. Or the male and female organs are infested with iron-beaked creatures. How did it come about? It all started with the first offender, the seeing. Seeing by itself is just seeing; what he should not have done was to pursue what he saw. Rather:

When the eyes see forms,
inside there is nothing.

Do you have that kind of skill? If so, then it doesn't matter if you look every day. The more you see, the less you will be moved. But if you don't have that skill, then you had better be a little bit more careful. With a little more care, you won t have to hug the copper pillar or fall into some other hell.

The text says, "at the time of death." Everyone will die. There isn't anyone who can say he or she will live forever, unless one cultivates and becomes a sage or an immortal, in which case one can live if one wants and die if one wants. Or, if you are a Bodhisattva or an Arhat, you have freedom over birth and death. If you're not at that level, then you too will have a "time of death." When death comes for this offender, he will first see a "raging conflagration." That's because of his "fire of desire", his sexual desire. And the conflagration is not limited to one place. To the ends of empty space and throughout the dharma-realm, everywhere is ablaze. At that time the deceased one's spiritual consciousness takes flight, but then falls. The "spiritual consciousness" refers to the eighth consciousness. It is also the soul, which has the potential to become a Buddha or a ghost. It is called the "intermediate skandha body," because at this stage the five skandhas have been severed from the former body and have not yet entered a new body. What happens to this offender's intermediate skandha body? It first flies up, but then falls. The spiritual consciousness has the power to fly through space, but in this case its spiritual penetrations are not very great, and so once it gets a little way into space, it falls. Riding on a wisp of smoke, it enters the Relentless Hell, a place which is no playground. I think that even jet-setters would not want to take in those sights. So everybody should avoid planting the causes which lead to the hells. It would be infinitely better to go to the Buddha-fruition than to go to the hells. Don't follow this poor soul.

L2 Two fundamental appearances.
 **Sutra:

There, it is aware of two appearances. One is a perception of brightness in which can be seen all sorts of evil things, and it gives rise to boundless fear. The other is a perception of darkness in which there is total stillness and no sight, and it experiences boundless terror.

Commentary:**
The person who has committed karmic offenses by pursuing defiling objects of form falls into the Relentless Hell. There, his intermediate skandha body, is aware of two appearances. One is a perception of brightness in which can be seen all sorts of evil things. With this perception of brightness, it can see absolutely everything. What is there to be seen? Evil things; every kind of terrible thing that you can possibly imagine. There are things like wolves and tigers and creatures with human bodies and ox heads or horse faces. The ghost of impermanence in his tall hat is also very much in evidence. There are also cruel and horrifying beasts. All he sees are these evil creatures, and so his skandha body gives rise to boundless fear. One experiences tremendous terror.

The other is a perception of darkness in which there is total stillness and no sight. It can't see anything at all, because there is not the least bit of light from the sun or moon or from stars or lamps. "Total stillness and no sight" means there is not a creature, not a thing, not a sound, and no visual perception. But it is not a quieting experience; rather, it experiences boundless terror. He experiences nothing but fear and terror. If he saw a beautiful woman then, I wonder if he'd be able to muster up any sexual desire. The only way to know for sure would be to ask him. He has to undergo fear and terror in this hell because he created the karma of lust.

L3 A detailed explanation of the intermingled retributions.
 **Sutra:

When the fire that comes from seeing burns the sense of hearing, it becomes cauldrons of boiling water and molten copper. When it burns the breath, it becomes black smoke and purple fumes. When it burns the sense of taste, it becomes scorching hot pellets and molten iron gruel. When it burns the sense of touch, it becomes white-hot embers and glowing coals. When it burns the mind, it becomes stars of fire that shower everywhere and whip up and inflame the entire realm of space.

Commentary:**
Now the six interconnecting aspects are described. When the fire that comes from seeing burns the sense of hearing, it becomes cauldrons of boiling water and molten copper. When the fire reaches the ears and the hearing, it turns into the hell of cauldrons of boiling water and the hell of molten copper. The water is brought to a boil and the ghost is plunged into the pot. The "ghost" is just the spiritual consciousness of the deceased one. Do you remember what he did so that he now ends up in a pot of boiling water? His ears aided and abetted his seeing. When his eyes saw the beautiful form, his ears should have had sense enough to warn him not to listen to her voice. But instead his ears got right in there and enticed him to listen. He was all ears. And what he heard pleased him to no end. So now he's in the cauldron of boiling water and molten copper. When it burns the breath, it becomes black smoke and purple fumes. When the fire reaches the nose, he has to breathe black smoke and purple soot. This happens because he got caught up in smelling nice fragrances. But I believe that the black smoke is not as much fun to inhale. In fact, the stench of it is appalling. But that is the retribution he must undergo.

When it burns the sense of taste, it becomes scorching hot pellets and molten iron gruel. The "pellets" are little iron tablets, but when you put them in your mouth they burn your tongue to a crisp. He liked the "taste of women", he liked to kiss them, and so now he gets hot iron gruel for breakfast every day. When it burns the sense of touch, it becomes white-hot embers and glowing coals. When the fire from seeing burns through to the sense of touch, it becomes ashes, but the ashes aren't dead and cold; they still have fire in them.

When it burns the mind, that is, it becomes stars of fire that shower everywhere and whip up and inflame the entire realm of space. The fire that scatters to burn you is as plentiful as the stars in the sky. It creates a wall of heat that builds up and fills all of empty space.

K2 Retribution of hearing.
L1 At the end of one?s life one sees one?s own fall.
 **Sutra:

The second is the retribution of hearing, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. The karma of hearing intermingles, and thus at the time of death one first sees gigantic waves that drown heaven and earth. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness falls into the water and rides the current into the Relentless Hell.

Commentary:**

The second of the six interconnected retributions is the retribution of hearing. Originally, if one had returned the hearing to hear the self-nature, the hearing-nature could have accomplished the Unsurpassed Way. Instead, the person in question turned all his attention outside and listened to defiling sounds. He listened to sounds that gave him enjoyment. Perhaps he liked to listen to women sing. Perhaps he enjoyed listening to women talk. The same applies for men as for women. Women like to listen to men. It's not a one-way street. The sutra is talking about both sexes. You shouldn't think that if the sutra uses the masculine form, it just means that men are bad, while women are not included. The offenses the two sexes commit are the same. They are those which beckons one and leads one to evil ends.

This person's retribution beckons him just as if it were calling to him, "Come here! Come here!" in very persuasive tones. It entices him. The karma of hearing intermingles, and thus at the time of death one first sees gigantic waves that drown heaven and earth. The "intermingling" refers to the way in which the six organs are interconnected in their retribution. The ear gets involved with all the other five sense organs. The ghost, the inter-mediate skandha body, sees the entire universe filled up with billowing waves; but is it really that way? No. It is a manifestation which appears because of his karmic retribution. The same is true when we people see mountains, rivers, the earth, vegetation, buildings, San Francisco, New York, Japan, China, and everything else, it's all a manifestation due to the power of our karma. Without that power of karma, it is all empty space. If your karma is ended and your emotion is empty, then everything throughout the dharmarealm is void. It is all emptiness. There isn't anything at all. But because of attachment to appearances, you see all kinds of colors, shapes, and forms.

This ghost sees the entirety of heaven and earth as submerged in a vast expanse of billowing waves. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness falls into the water and rides the current into the Relentless Hell. He flows along with the stream and ends up at his brother's house. Where's that? The Relentless Hell. Who's his brother? His seeing. The six brothers race right after one another.

L2 Two fundamental appearances.
 **Sutra:

There, it is aware of two sensations. One is open hearing, in which it hears all sorts of noise and its essential spirit becomes confused. The other is closed hearing, in which there is total stillness and no hearing, and its soul sinks into oblivion.

Commentary:**

Such a graphic and sobering explanation, and yet people still willingly go ahead and create offenses. You talk about how fine it is to become a Buddha, but people aren't interested in becoming Buddhas. You tell about the horrors of the hells, and they decide to try them out. Becoming a Buddha is so fine, but they don't even give it a try. "We'll talk about it later," they procrastinate. They've been told that listening to defiling sounds creates karmic offenses, but as soon as they find themselves in such a situation they are compelled to listen. They think, "I hear about that in the sutra, but I'm not convinced it's right." So they try it out.

There, when the intermediate skandha body gets to the Relentless Hell, it is aware of two sensations. One is open hearing, in which it hears all sorts of noise and its essential spirit becomes confused. All pandemonium breaks loose.

"Confused" means that it cannot remember anything any more. The other is closed hearing, in which there is total stillness and no hearing, and its soul sinks into oblivion. It experiences total deafness. Then its soul goes one knows not where. It sinks into oblivion.

L3 A detailed explanation of the intermingled retributions.
 **Sutra:

When the waves from hearing flow into the hearing, they become scolding and interrogation. When they flow into the seeing, they become thunder and roaring and evil poisonous vapors. When they flow into the breath, they become rain and fog that is permeated with poisonous organisms that entirely fill up the body. When they flow into the sense of taste, they become pus and blood and every kind of filth. When they flow into the sense of touch, they become animals and ghosts, and excrement and urine. When they flow into the mind, they become lightning and hail which ravage the heart and soul.**
**Commentary:**

When the waves from hearing flow into the hearing, the organ of the ear, they become scolding and interrogation. When they flow into the seeing, they become thunder and roaring and evil poisonous vapors. There is a hell of thunder and roaring. One is saturated in poisonous vapors. When they flow into the breath, they become rain and fog that is permeated with poisonous organisms that entirely fill up the body. There's a hell where there's eternal rain and fog. The rain is polluted with poisonous organisms, and when they strike the skin, they bite into every pore and work their way in. Pretty soon one's whole body is covered with poisonous organisms. When they flow into the sense of taste, they become pus and blood and every kind of filth. It is utter muck and scum. When they flow into the sense of touch, they become animals and ghosts, and excrement and urine. He undergoes his punishment in the hell of excrement and urine. When they flow into the mind, they become lightning and hail which ravage the heart and soul. In the Hell of Lightning and Hail, there is an eternal storm, and one is struck by lightning and hailstones. It's a painful retribution. The ghost's very heart and soul are ripped to smithereens.

L1 At the end of one's life one sees one's own fall.
 **Sutra:

The third is the retribution of smelling, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. The karma of smelling intermingles, and thus at the time of death one first sees a poisonous smoke that permeates the atmosphere near and far. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness wells up out of the earth and enters the Relentless Hell.

Commentary:**

"The nose doesn't do anything but smell," you protest. "What karma can it create?" However, smelling can also create karma. That's because there is greed involved in the smelling. Because of its greed for fragrances, the nose sometimes ends up doing improper things, like pursuing the fragrances of women. With this kind of deviant view, all kinds of evil karma can be created. Then there are various kinds of interconnected evil retributions which must be borne. Therefore, the third is the retribution of smelling, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. The karma of smelling intermingles, and thus at the time of death one first sees a poisonous smoke that permeates the atmosphere near and far. When the person was alive he liked to smell fragrances, but now everything has turned into a poisonous vapor. You should realize that the fragrant things of this world, when inhaled to the ultimate, become poisonous vapors. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness wells up out of the earth and enters the Relentless Hell. When it sees that everything is permeated with poison, it tries to leap out of it, to bound up above the earth and escape it. Little does it realize that with that single bound it will end up in the Relentless Hell.

L2 The fundamental appearances.
 **Sutra:

There, it is aware of two sensations. One is unobstructed smelling, in which it is thoroughly infused with the evil vapors and its mind becomes distressed. The other is obstructed smelling, in which its breath is cut off and there is no passage, and it lies stifled and suffocating on the ground.

Commentary:**

There, the intermediate skandha body, is aware of two sensations. One is unobstructed smelling, in which it is thoroughly infused with the evil vapors and its mind becomes distressed. His mind is in total chaos and turmoil. The other is obstructed smelling, in which its breath is cut off and there is no passage. He can't breathe. It lies stifled and suffocating on the ground. He's in total despair and on the verge of death.

L3 A detailed explanation of the intermingled retributions.
 **Sutra:

When the vapor of smelling invades the breath, it becomes cross-examination and bearing witness. When it invades the seeing, it becomes fire and torches. When it invades the hearing, it becomes sinking and drowning, oceans, and bubbling cauldrons. When it invades the sense of taste, it becomes putrid or rancid foods. When it invades the sense of touch, it becomes ripping apart and beating to a pulp. It also becomes a huge mountain of flesh which has a hundred thousand eyes and which is sucked and fed upon by numberless worms. When it invades the mind, it becomes ashes, pestilent airs, and flying sand and gravel which cut the body to ribbons.

Commentary:**

When the vapor of smelling invades the breath, it becomes cross-examination and bearing witness. One undergoes constant questioning. Or one is obligated to do certain things. When it invades the seeing, it becomes fire and torches. This is the Hell of Fire and Torches. When it invades the hearing, it becomes sinking and drowning. There is a hell of sinking and drowning which contains blood and urine. Or it becomes oceans, and bubbling cauldrons. These are other hells. When it invades the sense of taste, it becomes putrid or rancid foods. "Putrid" describes rotten fish-flesh. "Rancid" describes spoiled candy. In general it means having to eat food that's gone bad. When it invades the sense of touch, it becomes ripping apart and beating to a pulp. It also becomes a huge mountain of flesh which has a hundred thousand eyes and which is sucked and fed upon by numberless worms. They devour one's flesh and blood. When it invades the mind, it becomes ashes, pestilent airs, and flying sand and gravel which cut the body to ribbons. When the vapors of the smelling invade the mind, one is saturated with foul air, with ashes and vapors carrying disease-ridden organisms. Or stones and clods of earth come hurtling at one unexpectedly and totally riddle one's body.

K4 Retribution of tasting.
L1 At the end of one's life one sees one's own fall.
 **Sutra:

The fourth is the retribution of tasting, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. This karma of tasting intermingles, and thus at the time of death one first sees an iron net ablaze with a raging fire that covers over the entire world. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness passes down through this hanging net, and suspended upside down it enters the Relentless Hell.

Commentary:**

When people nourish their own bodies with animal flesh, they become greedy for meat and investigate flavors. They are always investigating ways to come up with new and different combinations to make superb delicacies. Because of this, they end up creating a lot of bad karma. How do they make bad karma? In the study of flavors, Chinese people have decided that the most nourishment lies in living flesh. They have taken to eating live creatures, the "freshest" meat. Westerners put their meat in refrigerators for a while before they eat it. But Chinese people feel that cooling the meat robs it of its nutrients. They prefer to cut the flesh off living animals and eat that. For instance, there's one technique in which the cook sets a hog to running and forces it to run for a couple of hours by beating it. Eventually its heart is racing, and its circulation increases to the point that its flesh swells. At the strategic moment the cook slices off a big piece of flesh from the pig's hindquarters and roasts it. This is considered to be the tastiest meat.

The Chinese have another ingenious method: first they cut a hole in the center of the table and stick the monkey's head up through the hole, the monkey is still alive at this point. Then they smash the skull with a club and the people sit around and eat the monkey's brains. They say this is a most nutritious food. These are examples of creating karmic offenses because of the sense of taste. Because of a greed for fine flavors, people will go to all kinds of extremes and invent various strange methods of creating karmic offenses.

The fourth is the retribution of tasting, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. This karma of tasting intermingles, and thus at the time of death one first sees an iron net ablaze with a raging fire that covers over the entire world. The karma of tasting intermingles with the experiences of the other five sense organs. When the person is about to die, he sees a conflagration in an iron net that extends over the whole world. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness passes down through this hanging net, and suspended upside down it enters the Relentless Hell. His soul falls and gets hung up in the net. Head-first, upside down, he enters the Unspaced Hell.

L2 Two fundamental appearances.
 **Sutra:

There, it is aware of two sensations. One is a sucking air which congeals into ice so that it freezes the flesh of his body. The other is a spitting blast of air which spews out a raging fire that roasts his bones and marrow to a pulp.

Commentary:**

There, it is aware of two sensations. One is a sucking air which congeals into ice so that it freezes the flesh of his body. The sucking is an intake of breath, and it is cold. It becomes ice, bitter cold. It freezes the flesh of the body. The other is a spitting blast of air which spews out a raging fire that roasts his bones and marrow to a pulp. This is the exhalation. It's a spitting fire which burns up his bones and marrow.

L3 A detailed explanation of the intermingled retributions.
 **Sutra:

When the tasting of flavors passes through the sense of taste, it becomes what must be acknowledged and what must be endured. When it passes through the seeing, it becomes burning
metal and stones. When it passes through the hearing, it becomes sharp weapons and knives. When it passes through the sense of smell, it becomes a vast iron cage that encloses the entire land. When it passes through the sense of touch, it becomes bows and arrows, crossbows, and darts. When it passes through the mind, it becomes flying pieces of molten iron that rain down from out of space.

Commentary:**

When the tasting of flavors and the evil karma it creates passes through the sense of taste, it becomes what must be acknowledged and what must be endured. "What must be acknowledged" means that, however unwilling, you are forced to admit to the evil karma you have created. "What must be endured" means that you must undergo what is basically unendurable. You can't evade your responsibility. When it passes through the seeing, it becomes burning metal and stones. There's a hell where the fire gets so hot that it melts the metal and rocks. When it passes through the hearing, it becomes sharp weapons and knives. In this hell a lot of keen weapons pierce your body. When it passes through the sense of smell, it becomes a vast iron cage that encloses the entire land. It extends over an area as large as an entire country. When it passes through the sense of touch, it becomes bows and arrows, crossbows, and darts. Arrows and darts pierce the offender's body. When it passes through the mind, it becomes flying pieces of molten iron that rain down from out of space. These red-hot bits of metal fall out of the sky and burn the body.

K5 Retribution of touching.
L1 At the end of one's life one sees one's own fall.
 **Sutra:

The fifth is the retribution of touching, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. The karma of touching intermingles, and thus at the time of death one first sees huge mountains closing in on one from four sides, leaving no path of escape. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness then sees a vast iron city. Fiery snakes and fiery dogs, wolves, lions, ox-headed jail keepers, and horse-headed rakshasas brandishing spears and lances drive it into the iron city toward the Relentless Hell.

Commentary:**

The fifth is the retribution of touching, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. If one is greedy for objects of touch, one gets drawn into an evil retribution. The karma of touching intermingles, and thus at the time of death one first sees huge mountains closing in on one from four sides, leaving no path of escape. The karma created from the sensation of touch combines with the karma of the other five sense organs. A person with this kind of karma will experience the karmic response of seeing gigantic mountains surrounding him and pushing in on him to crush him. There is no way for him to escape the position he's in. No road is open to him. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness then sees a vast iron city. At that point, when he's caught in the midst of these mountains that are moving in on him, he spies a big iron city.

Fiery snakes and fiery dogs, wolves, lions, ox-headed jail keepers, and horse-headed rakshasas brandishing spears and lances drive it into the iron city toward the Relentless Hell. These beasts are alive, but they are composed of fire. The oxheaded jail keepers are responsible for looking after the iron city. The horse-headed rakshasa ghosts and the jailers are heavily armed with various sorts of spears and other terrifying weapons. This vicious entourage compels the offender to enter the vast iron city. As soon as he gets inside the city, he falls into the Relentless Hells.

L2 Two fundamental appearances.
 **Sutra:

There, it is aware of two sensations. One is touch that involves coming together, in which mountains come together to squeeze its body until its flesh, bones, and blood are totally dispersed. The other is touch that involves separation, in which knives and swords attack the body, ripping the heart and liver to shreds.

Commentary:**
There, it is aware of two sensations. One is touch that involves coming together, in which mountains come together to squeeze its body until its flesh, bones, and blood are totally dispersed. From four sides, huge mountains close in to press one's body. Every part of the body is smashed to smithereens. The mountains squeeze one into a meat patty. At that point one dies, of course, but then the "clever wind" revives one. Replete with a new body, one has to go through the same experience again. In this way one gets squeezed to death and revived, again and again, birth after birth and death after death. This is touch that involves contact. The other is touch that involves separation, in which knives and swords attack the body, ripping the heart and liver to shreds. Knives, swords, lances and the like assault the body, and the internal organs are completely destroyed.

L3 A detailed explanation of the intermingled retributions.
 **Sutra:

When this touching passes through the sensation of touch, it becomes striking, binding, stabbing, and piercing. When it passes through the seeing, it becomes burning and scorching. When it passes through the hearing, it becomes questioning, investigating, court examinations, and interrogation. When it passes through the sense of smell, it becomes enclosures, bags, beating, and binding up. When it passes through the sense of taste, it becomes plowing, pinching, chopping, and severing. When it passes through the mind, it becomes falling, flying, frying, and broiling.

Commentary:**

When this touching passes through the sensation of touch, it becomes striking, binding, stabbing, and piercing. The text actually reads "questioning, investigating, court examinations, and interrogation" but these are more appropriate to the retribution for hearing, whereas "striking, binding, stabbing, and piercing," which appear in the text under hearing, are more appropriate to the sense of touch. "Striking" occurs when two things are hit together, "binding" is being tied up. "Stabbing" is being cut by knives, and "piercing" is what happens when arrows are shot at one. When it passes through the seeing, it becomes burning and scorching. When the sense of touch is influenced by seeing, then the retribution is burning and intense heat, like the hell of fiery soup and charcoals and the like. When it passes through the hearing, it becomes questioning, investigating, court examinations, and interrogation. "Questioning" means being brought before the courts of hell. "Investigating" means being examined by officials before passing through the gates. "Court examinations" are designed to cross-examine you about the offenses you have created.

When it passes through the sense of smell, it becomes enclosures, bags, beating, and binding up. "Enclosures" means one is put inside something and contained. "Bags" refers to being tied in a bag. "Beating" means that besides being contained, you are beaten up. "Binding" up means that you are tied down and restricted. When it passes through the sense of taste, it becomes plowing, pinching, chopping, and severing. "Plowing" refers to having one's tongue plowed through. First it is hooked and pulled out, and then it is plowed through. "Pinching" means that the tongue is seized with pincers and pulled out. "Cutting" refers to having the tongue cut through. "Severing" means chopping the tongue clear off. When it passes through the mind, it becomes falling, flying, frying, and broiling. "Falling" is when one is tossed into space and left to drop as one will. "Flying" also refers to being hurtled into space and then allowed to crash down to earth. "Frying" means the application of intense heat to burn one to a crisp, as if one were an oil cake. "Broiling" is another way one's body is burned.

K6 Retribution of thinking.
L1 At the end of one's life one sees one's own fall.
 **Sutra:

The sixth is the retribution of thinking, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. The karma of thinking intermingles, and thus at the time of death one first sees a foul wind which devastates the land. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness is blown up into space, and then, spiraling downward, it rides that wind straight into the Relentless Hell.

Commentary:**

The sixth is the retribution of thinking, which beckons one and leads one to evil ends. The bad retribution which thinking can create is extremely severe, and the evil karma it calls up is enormous. The karma of thinking intermingles, and thus at the time of death one first sees a foul wind which devastates the land. The karma of thinking intermingles with the karma of the other sense organs. It accumulates so that at the time of death all one sees is a horrendous wind which is blowing everything in the world to bits. The deceased one's spiritual consciousness is blown up into space, and then, spiraling downward, it rides that wind straight into the Relentless Hell. The dead person's soul is blown up into empty space, but then it takes a dive and spins into the unspaced hell.

L2 Two fundamental appearances.
 **Sutra:

There, it is aware of two sensations. One is extreme confusion, which causes it to be frantic and to race about ceaselessly. The other is not confusion, but rather an acute awareness which causes it to suffer from endless roasting and burning, the extreme pain of which is difficult to bear.

Commentary:**

There, it is aware of two sensations. One is extreme confusion, which causes it to be frantic and to race about ceaselessly. The first is a lack of awareness. One doesn't understand anything at all at that time. One is sunk into a stupor, like an idiot. In that deep confusion, one becomes incoherent and races about senselessly. One never stops to rest. Wouldn't you say that is a lot of suffering? The other is not confusion, but rather an acute awareness which causes it to suffer from endless roasting and burning, the extreme pain of which is difficult to bear. The other alternative is not to be confused, but to be clearly aware of what is going on. But this awareness allows one to experience intense suffering. Although one is not confused, everything one experiences is suffering. The suffering comes from the raging blaze that burns one. The pain is the worst one could know. It's like when our bodies itch; pretty soon we can't bear the itch, so we have to scratch. It's that way here, but what is felt is pain, ultimately intense and ceaseless pain.

L3 A detailed explanation of the intermingled retributions.
 **Sutra:

When this deviant thought combines with thinking, it becomes locations and places. When it combines with seeing, it becomes inspection and testimonies. When it combines with hearing, it becomes huge crushing rocks, ice and frost, dirt and fog. When it combines with smelling, it becomes a great fiery car, a fiery boat, and a fiery jail. When it combines with tasting, it becomes loud calling, wailing, and regretful crying. When it combines with touch, it becomes sensations of large and small, where ten thousand births and ten thousands deaths are endured every day, and of lying with one's face to the ground.

Commentary:**

When this deviant thought combines with thinking, it becomes locations and places. "Deviant thought" means that the things one thinks about are improper, and one indulges in fantasies, that is, one's thoughts dwell on strange and weird things. When the deviant thought receives a retribution directed at itself, it turns into evil places of inquisition and interrogation. When it combines with seeing, it becomes inspection and testimonies. "Inspection" refers to the offense-spotting mirror in the hells. When you arrive, you have to go before the mirror and watch all the offenses you created in your life appear there, just as if they were frames of a movie. They are all in vivid detail, and there's no way you can back out of them. You can't avoid owning up to them. If you refuse to admit them, you have to endure "testimonies," in which people prove what you did. When it combines with hearing, it becomes huge crushing rocks. They close in on the four sides surrounding you and crush you between them. And it's cold with ice and frost, and there is dirt and fog. This hell is polluted, a yellow haze defiles the atmosphere so that you can't see anything and you get dizzy and disoriented.

When it combines with smelling, it becomes a great fiery car. This does not refer to trains that take us on vacations here in the world, but rather to a car red-hot with fire that one is forced to sit in. A fiery boat means that the entire boat is ablaze and you must climb aboard. A fiery jail is a prison full of fire that you must enter. When it combines with tasting, it becomes loud calling, wailing, and regretful crying. The noise in this hell is tremendous. One experiences regret in this hell and one moans and weeps.

When it combines with touch, it becomes sensations of large and small, big hells and little hells, where ten thousand births and ten thousands deaths are endured every day. In the course of one single day, one dies a myriad times and is born a myriad times. And it becomes lying with one's face to the ground. Whether lying down, crawling, or standing up, one undergoes punishment. In general, this is not a pleasant place to be. It's not a likely spot to want to go, for the pain and suffering is tremendous.

I4 General conclusion: they are empty and false.
J1 Concludes that they are falsely created.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, these are called the ten causes and six retributions of the hells, which are all created by the confusion and falseness of living beings.

Commentary:**
Ananda, these are called the ten causes and six retributions of the hells. Many different hells have just been named, and all come from the ten habitual causes, which are these:

1. lust
2. greed
3. arrogance
4. hatred
5. deception
6. lying
7. animosity
8. views
9. injustice
10. litigation

They result in the six intermingling retributions that involve the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind as they react to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and dharmas. These hells are all created by the confusion and falseness of living beings. They come from giving rise to falseness within the one truth, Once ignorance arises, various karmic manifestations result from it. From the karma, various offenses are created. But if one returns the hearing to hear the self-nature and cultivates this path to enlightenment, then all this karma becomes empty. It disappears.

J2 Distinguishes the comparative weight of the offenses.
 **Sutra:

If living beings create this evil karma simultaneously, they enter the Avichi Hell and endure limitless suffering, passing through limitless kalpas.

Commentary:**

If living beings create this evil karma simultaneously, they enter the Avichi Hell. If they indulge in behavior that includes all ten causes and all six intermingling retributions, they go to the Avichi Hell. It is an Relentless Hell, but it is the most severe one, so here it is named specifically. Basically all the Relentless Hells can be called Avichi, but here the most severe one is specifically given that name. In that hell, they endure limitless suffering, passing through limitless kalpas.
 **Sutra:

If each of the six sense organs creates them and if what is done includes each state and each sense organ, then the person will enter the Eight Relentless Hells.

Commentary:**

If each of the six sense organs creates them: if the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind each create these offenses, the ten habitual causes, but not all at the same time as in the previous passage, and if what is done includes each state and each sense organ, then the person will enter the Eight Relentless Hells.

What's done means what the sense organs do in reaction to the states of the sense objects, the kind of karma they create. "Each state" refers to the sense objects and "each sense organ" to the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind individually. "What is done" is the offenses which are created from the habitual causes. Here, all the sense organs create all the habitual causes, but they do not do it simultaneously. A person who follows his six sense organs and six sense objects to create such offenses will undergo the retributions of the eight Relentless Hells. There are eight hot and eight cold hells, and this refers to the eight cold hells.
 **Sutra:

If the three karmas of body, mouth, and mind commit acts of killing, stealing, and lust, the person will enter the eighteen hells.

Commentary:**

If the three karmas of body, mouth, and mind commit acts of killing, stealing, and lust, there are three evils of the body.

1. killing
2. stealing
3. lust

There are four evils of the mouth.

1. loose speech
2. false speech
3. harsh speech
4. backbiting

There are three evils of the mind.

1. greed
2. hatred
3. stupidity

If the karmas of the body, mouth, and mind are not pure, then one creates these ten evils. The person will enter the eighteen hells. There are terrible punishments in these eighteen consecutive hells.
 **Sutra:

If the three karmas are not all involved, and there is perhaps just one act of killing and/or of stealing, then the person must enter the thirty-six hells.

Commentary:**
In the situation described above, the karma created was heavy. Now, the three karmas are not all involved in making offenses. If the three karmas are not all involved, and there is perhaps just one act of killing and/or of stealing: maybe the person commits one murder or one theft, or he commits murder and a theft, or he commits a murder and an act of lust or a theft. In short, he doesn't do them all, but some partial combination of them. The offense karma of a person in that situation is a bit lighter. Then the person must enter the thirty-six hells. Although he has to undergo more hells, the offenses are lighter and the suffering in these hells is not as severe.
 **Sutra:

If the sense organ of sight alone commits just one karmic offense, then the person must enter the one hundred and eight hells.

Commentary:**
If the sense organ of sight is the source of all offenses. It is said:

If the eyes didn't see it, the mouth would not be gluttonous for it.
If the ears didn't hear it, the mind would not make transgressions concerning it.

If you didn't see something good to eat, your mouth would not commit the offense of gluttony. If the ears did not hear lovely sounds, the mind would not give rise to thoughts of desire. Seeing them is the beginning of evil and the source of offenses. Therefore, the text says: If the sense organ of sight alone commits just one karmic offense, perhaps it commits only one of the three karmas of the body: killing, or stealing, or lust. Then the person must enter the one hundred and eight hells.

J3 Even the heavy offenses are clearly an arisal of falseness.
 **Sutra:

Because of this, living beings who do certain things create certain karma, and so in the world they enter collective hells, which arise from false thinking and which originally are not there at all.

Commentary:**

Because of this, because of the various circumstances described above, living beings who do certain things create certain karma. They do individual things, they create their own special offenses, and then they have to undergo a retribution. And so in the world they enter collective hells. All the people who create a particular kind of karma enter that collective hell. Each category of offense has its retribution, and all who create that offense collectively undergo the retribution in the hells, which arise from false thinking and which originally are not there at all. These hells arise from offenses. Offenses are created because of ignorance. They arise from false thinking. Originally, though, they don't exist at all. Originally there is purity and no defilemen, there isn't anything at all. But,

Just because you make one false move,
You blow the whole chess game.

As it is said:

If one is off by a hair in the beginning,
One will miss it by a thousand miles.

Destiny of Ghosts

H2 Destiny of ghosts.
I1 Concludes prior discussion and begins this.
 **Sutra:

And then, Ananda, after the living beings who have slandered and destroyed rules and deportment, violated the Bodhisattva precepts, slandered the Buddha's nirvana, and created various other kinds of karma, pass through many kalpas of being burned in the inferno, they finally finish paying for their offenses and are reborn as ghosts.

Commentary:**

Since the explanation of the ten habitual causes and the six intermingling retributions is not yet finished, Shakyamuni Buddha says: And then, Ananda, let me tell you some more about this principle. After the living beings who have created karmic offenses, who have slandered and destroyed rules and deportment, they said things like, "Those precepts and rules in your Buddhism are not necessary. People should be free to do as they please, especially in America. This is a democratic country, and everyone is free and independent. So there shouldn't be prohibitions in Buddhism, either." They denounce the idea of the Buddha's precepts. They say that one can be a left-home person, a member of the Sangha, whether one has taken precepts or not. They claim that the precepts and rules are unnecessary and that there is no need to abide by the three thousand modes of deportment and the eighty thousand subtle aspects of conduct. They violated the Bodhisattva precepts. They don't uphold the ten major and fortyeight minor Bodhisattva precepts. They violate them. They slandered the Buddha's nirvana. They say that the principle of nirvana is also incorrect. These kinds of people are steeped in offenses. They have and created various other kinds of karma as well, a lot of bad karma. After creating offenses such as these, they pass through many kalpas, a tremendously long time, of being burned in the inferno before they finally finish paying for their offenses. Eventually their offenses are gone and they no longer have to dwell in the hells undergoing bitter retributions. When their offenses are paid back, they are reborn as ghosts. True enough, they've finished being punished for their offenses, but then they get reborn as ghosts.

People who call themselves disciples of the Buddha and yet don't believe in ghosts should pay attention to the mention of ghosts in the Shurangama Sutra. There are many kinds of ghosts, not just one kind. In fact, I'll tell you something: the Shurangama Mantra for the most part consists of the names of ghosts. La She Pwo Ye, Ju La Bwo Ye are names of ghosts. The reason we recite the mantra is to call out the names of the ghost kings. When we recite names of the big ghosts, all the lesser ones don't dare make trouble, either. Mantras are the names of ghosts and spirits. The beings discussed here are reborn as ghosts. What kind ofghosts? Ten kinds of ghosts are now discussed in connection with the karma created from the ten habitual causes. But, in fact, there are many kinds of ghosts, not just ten. These are just representative.

J1 Strange ghosts result from the habit of greed and take form when they encounter material objects.
 **Sutra:

If greed for material objects was the original cause that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters material objects, and he is called a strange ghost.

Commentary:**

If greed for material objects was the original cause on his causal ground that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters material objects. What kind of objects was he greedy for? The greatest desire is the desire for sex. If he sought such things when he was on the causal ground, and if he committed crimes while doing so, then he has to fall into the hells. After his term in hell is finished, he takes shape when he encounters material objects. What kind of objects? Any kind; whatever kind it is, he can attach himself to it and take his form from it. He's called a strange ghost.

J2 Drought ghosts result from the habit of lust and take form when they encounter wind.
 **Sutra:

If it was greed for lust that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters the wind, and he is called a drought-ghost.

Commentary:**

If it was greed for lust that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters the wind. In China, someone who is lustful is said to be greedy for "the wind and the current." People who are like this end up as drought-ghosts. What are drought-ghosts like? Wherever they go, it doesn't rain, and this is due to the "tricks of desert and of drought-ghosts." If you encounter a place where the rain does not fall, where the sprouts in the fields dry up and die, you know now that such a place is inhabited by a drought-ghost. This is true: By listening to the Shurangama Sutra, you can unravel all the mysteries of the world. All the questions of physical science are clarified in this sutra. If you hadn't heard this sutra, you wouldn't understand the reason behind droughts and deserts. Basically, these are due to the tricks of the drought-ghost. This kind of person was greedy for "the wind and the current," and so now when his ghost encounters the wind it takes its shape and is called a drought-ghost. He causes drought wherever he goes. Pretty talented, huh?

J3 Mei ghosts result from the habit of lying and take form when they encounter animals.
 **Sutra:

If it was greed to lie that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters an animal, and he is called a mei ghost.

Commentary:**
This kind of ghost takes its shape when it encounters an animal, perhaps a fox spirit or a yellow wolf, or even a cat or a dog. It's possible for animals to have these weird essences attached to them. I've seen a cat that was possessed by a ghost. It could perform some great stunts. It could jump more than ten feet in the air and land on the top of the house. Then it would leap off the house and land on the ground; it would go through this routine over and over. It also howled and wailed. A fox that is possessed in this way can in turn possess a person. Although it's an animal, it can send out its soul and enter a person, and talk through him or her. A yellow wolf can also do this. It sends out its efficacious spirit and possesses someone. Then it can speak through the person it has possessed. There are a lot of these strange manifestations. This is called the mei ghost. When it possesses a person, the person's mind becomes totally confused by it, and he loses his sense of awareness. It's as if he were asleep.

J4 Poisonous ghosts result from the habit of hatred and take form when they encounter worms.
 **Sutra:

If it was greed for hatred that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters worms, and he is called a ku poison ghost.

Commentary:**

If it was greed for hatred that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters worms. All ten of these ghosts are described by means of their greed. Ultimately, it is greed that creates their forms as ghosts. This one was greedy for hatred. Full of hatred, he would attack people without reason, and so he committed offense-karma involving hatred. That caused him to fall into the Relentless Hell. When he finishes working out his punishments in the hells, he becomes a ghost, and he takes shape when he encounters worms. He is called a ku poison ghost. This ku poison is found in Canton province in China. People use it to put hexes on other people. They take the ku poison from these worms and make it into a medicine. If they slip a pill of this medicine into your tea, then ever after that you must obey their every instruction. If you don't, you'll die. That's to contract ku poisoning.

In the Southeast Asian countries like Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and so forth, ku poisoning is common. There is a ghost behind this kind of poisoning, it is his specialty. His potions are extremely potent. The only way to undo such a hex is for the person who put it on you to recite a mantra designed to release you from it. But if he won't do that, then you're in real trouble. You are forever in his control. One amusing use of it is by the southern women who hex the northern men from Canton province whom they take a fancy to. After they marry, the wife puts a hex on her northern husband so that if he ever gets the idea in his head to leave her, he will die. So those northern men are very faithful to their southern wives. A lot of people have this trick played on them. But you should be clear that this is a deviant trick.

J5 Pestilence ghosts result from the habit of resentment and take form when they encounter degeneration.
 **Sutra:

If it was greed for animosity that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters degeneration, and he is called a pestilence ghost.

Commentary:**
If it was greed for animosity that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters degeneration. "Animosity" means that he's always thinking about things that happened in the past and remembering them with resentment. Because he's always wanting to get even, he commits offenses. From these crimes, he is forced to fall into the Relentless Hells. After the offenses are paid for and disappear, the criminal is free. But his freedom is such that when he encounters degeneration he takes shape. It may be a debilitated person or any kind of animal that is feeble and old. He borrows the physical forms of such beings and becomes a pestilence ghost. Sometimes, rather than taking over a person who is debilitated, he possesses a person who then becomes debilitated. This kind of ghost is terrible and fierce. It can wipe out a human life as easily as it can pull something out of its pocket.

J6 Hungry ghosts result from the habit of arrogance and take form when they encounter gases.
 **Sutra:

If it was greed to be arrogant that made the person commit offenses, then after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters gases, and he is called a hungry ghost.

Commentary:**

If it was greed to be arrogant that made the person commit offenses, then after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters gases. He was a really haughty individual. Therefore, people should not look down on others. People should not be haughty and self-satisfied, or be totally lacking in courtesy toward others. A person like this doesn't even acknowledge others when he encounters them, he's downright rude.

During the Three Kingdoms period in China, there was a pedant named Ze Ce who went to see General Cao Cao. Cao Cao prepared everyone in advance of the visit, saying that when the pedant walked in, no one should look at him. When the pedant arrived for his appointment with Cao Cao, none of the several dozen attendants who surrounded the General stood up. It was just as if they hadn't even noticed that he had come in. So what do you suppose Ze Ce did? He started to cry. Cao Cao asked, "What are you crying about?"

He replied, "How could you expect me not to weep when I encounter a whole group of dead people? They are all dead, aren't they? That's why they can't speak or move, isn't it?" After that scolding, Cao Cao was at a loss. This happened at the time when Cao Cao was in his greatest days of power. That's why he was rude to Ze Ce. And what he displayed was the kind of arrogance being discussed here.

A person who is arrogant will commit offenses, and after his term in the unspaced hells, he will take shape when he encounters gases. The kind of gas doesn't matter, any kind will do for him to use to make his appearance. This kind of ghost is called a hungry ghost. "Hungry ghosts" are just what their name implies, ghosts that don't have anything to eat. Their necks are as skinny as needles, and their bellies are as big as barrels. Since their throats are so thin, they can't swallow any food. If you were to see such a ghost, wouldn't you consider it to be ugly?

J7 Paralysis ghosts result from the habit of injustice and form when they encounter darkness.
 **Sutra:

If it was greed to be unjust to others that made the person commit offenses, then after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters darkness, and he is called a paralysis ghost.

Commentary:**

If it was greed to be unjust to others, to hurt other people, that made the person commit offenses, then after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters darkness. Being greedy to oppress and prone to being unfair, one creates offenses. These offenses will cause one to fall into the unspaced hells. After hundreds of thousands of millions of kalpas, one's karmic offenses are wiped away and one is free to go, but one's left-over habits still remain and have not been changed, and so one is still unjust and greedy to oppress others. The habits persist. So he takes his form when he encounters darkness. He appears in dingy, shadowy places, and he is called a paralysis ghost. Do you remember the kumbhanda ghost that was discussed before? This is he. One of my disciples tells me that he has met this type of ghost dozens of times. He fought them off each time and didn't lose his life, however.

It's dangerous business to get mixed up with them, though, because it's possible for a paralysis ghost to kill you with his techniques. But now that this disciple believes in the Buddha, I believe that this type of ghost won't have the audacity to bother him anymore.

J8 Wang-liang ghosts result from the habit of views and take form when they encounter essential energy.
 **Sutra:

If it was greed for views that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters essential energy, and he is called a wang-liang ghost.

Commentary:**

"Views" refers to opinions, to one's own viewpoint. With the habit of views, one considers oneself to be extremely intelligent. In actual fact, such a person as this is thoroughly confused in what he does. He may be smart, but he ends up outsmarting himself. He clearly knows that murder is not a good thing to do, but he goes out and kills people. He knows that one should not steal but he commits robbery. Sure, he's smart, all right, and he's an effective speaker, but his own actions are a total mess. Someone like this has greed for views, he's intelligent, but his conduct is disreputable, and he commit offenses. Because of the offenses, he falls into the Relentless Hells and there passes through hundreds of thousands of millions of aeons. After his term is served, he's free, but when he gets out of the hells, what do you suppose happens to him? Well, he doesn't change his old habits. He's still endowed with worldly intelligence that goes awry and so he takes shape when he encounters essential energy, and he is called a wang-liang ghost.

If he encounters a person who is robust and full of energy, or if he encounters some weird essence, he will make his appearance. What do wang liang ghosts look like? Sometimes they will turn into a child. But whereas most children have two legs, this ghost will have one. Sometimes it will appear as an adult, but whereas people's heads are between their shoulders, its head will grow out from between its legs. Have you ever seen anything like that? If you do, you'll know that it's what's called a wang liang ghost. It's always just a little off in its appearance, weird looking.

It also acts as an "accomplice for tigers." How does it do that? Say, for example, that a certain mountain region is infested with tigers, so that no one dares to traverse that area for fear of being attacked and eaten. What this ghost does in such a place is to transform himself into the appearance of a person and go walking along the road there. When an actual person sees that there appears to be a person on the road ahead of him, he is not afraid, and he follows along into the dangerous area. Who would have guessed that the wang liang would lead the person right to the tiger's den? That's his game, to help tigers get their meals. He cheats animals this way just as he does people; he turns into one of their kind and leads them to their doom. Those who profess not to believe that there are ghosts should pay attention to these descriptions.

J9 Servant ghosts result from the habit of deceit and take form when they encounter brightness.
 **Sutra:

If it was greed for deception that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters brightness, and he is called a servant ghost.**
**Commentary:**

If it was greed for deception that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters brightness. This refers to the habit of deception. Since he wants accomplishments, he gets them by deceiving other people, acting in underhanded ways. By doing this, he commits many offenses and falls into the Relentless Hells. After passing through hundreds of thousands of aeons, he finally gets free, but he still hasn't gotten rid of his left-over habits, and so he still wants to cheat people. Therefore, he takes his shape when he meets brightness. "Brightness" refers to people with wisdom who know how to recite mantras. Or you could say it refers to a "bright teacher."

When this ghost meets with that kind of a wise person, it makes its appearance. What does it do? It attends upon such people so is called a servant ghost. It helps such people do the things they want to do. In China there was a man named Ji Xiao Tang who had five servant ghosts that helped him out. One went about gathering news, keeping up on the latest goings-on. Another ghost helped Ji Xiao Tang listen to things. Since ghosts have five penetrations, they could see things that the ordinary eyes cannot see. Ghosts lack the penetration of the extinction of outflows, but they can possess the other five.

1. the penetration of the heavenly eye
2. the penetration of the heavenly ear
3. the penetration of others' thought
4. the penetration of past lives
5. the penetration of the complete spirit

These kinds of ghosts have a little cultivation, some practice the Way, and so they are endowed with these spiritual penetrations. The ghosts that attended on Ji Xiao Tang could know what people were talking about and could see what was happening at great distances to find out what was happening round and about, and then he would use that information to go and rescue people from difficulty. For example, he would find out that at such and such a place there were some weird creatures out to harm people, and he would immediately go to that place and subdue the weird beings and exorcise the strange creatures. These five servant ghosts helped him in that way. They got to be servant ghosts because in the past they were greedy to deceive others.

J10 Messenger ghosts result from the habit of litigiousness and take form when they encounter people.
 **Sutra:

If it was greed to be litigious that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters people, and he is called a messenger ghost.

Commentary:**

If it was greed to be litigious that made the person commit offenses, then, after he has finished paying for his crimes, he takes shape when he encounters people. "Litigious" refers to getting involved in court cases. Sometimes when people go to court, they get together a party or faction to support their case. These people offer testimony on the instigator's behalf, but they tell stories and invent evidence. What really isn't true, they say is true; what is actually not so, they say is so. They argue their case when there is really no principle behind it. Often they are lawyers and the like. They challenge the people who are not of their faction, and they win their cases.

A person who does this kind of thing commits offenses. When he has finished paying for his wrongdoing, he takes his shape when he encounters a person, and he is called a messenger ghost. This kind of ghost possesses a person and speaks through him, saying such things as, "I am such and such a Buddha," or "I am such and such a Bodhisattva" or "I am God. I am also Jesus." A person who is so possessed will be restless and have a lot of nervous mannerisms. He's called a "messenger" because he can predict lucky and unlucky events. He may say, "There's going to be an earthquake at such and such a place, and it will kill more than ten thousand people." When the time comes, his prediction is completely accurate. He can foretell the future.

Someone doubts that such predictions are really accurate. But in fact they are often extremely accurate. It's right at this place that you need to know how to distinguish between the proper and the deviant. The proper is recognized as having come from cultivation of the Way. It's not that you rely on a ghost or spirit or a Bodhisattva or a Buddha to tell you such things. Be sure to recognize this clearly. In China, such people who are possessed by a ghost are called mediums or shamans. They are able to heal people. But it is not the person who does the healing. What does it is the ghost or the spirit which is possessing the person. It's like those people I described earlier who can stick knives into their skulls and swords into their shoulders. They are examples of possession by messenger ghosts.

I3 Probes the source and shows it to be non-existent.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, such a person's fall is due to his totally emotional level of functioning. When his karmic fire has burned out, he will rise up to be reborn as a ghost. This is occasioned by his own karma of false thinking. If he awakens to Bodhi, then in the wonderful perfect brightness there isn't anything at all.

Commentary:**
The Buddha calls out again: Ananda, do you understand? Such a person's fall is due to his totally emotional level of functioning. It's because this person is totally immersed in emotion. Whatever he does is based on emotional desire. Because he's totally emotional, without any power of reason, without any discursive thought, he acts out of emotion, he functions out of desire, and that causes him to fall. Emotion belongs to yin, and discursive thought belongs to yang. After he falls and his karmic fire has burned out, after he goes to the hells and burns until there is nothing left to burn, he can come out, but he will then rise up to be reborn as a ghost. He's released, but he still cannot become a person. Where does he "rise up" from? The evil hells. He gets out and comes to the world. But although he's out of the hells, his residual habits are still not cut off. Although the offenses from his karma have been eradicated, he still has the same old habits of thinking. He's not completely pure. So he has to become a ghost.

His predicament is occasioned by his own karma of false thinking. In the one truth, he himself gave rise to falseness and produced ignorance. This ignorance arises in the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One, and with it comes false thinking. It is false thinking that creates these kinds of karma. Because of it, the person in question must undergo this bitter retribution. He gave rise to delusion, created karma, and underwent retribution. If he awakens to Bodhi, then in the wonderful perfect brightness there isn't anything at all. If he could fathom the wonderful path to enlightenment, then there would be nothing at all in the mind, which is perfect and bright in the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One. There's none of this trouble. There are no such problems; there isn't any of this pain and suffering. There is no distress.

Destiny of Animals

H3 Destiny of animals.
I1 Concludes prior discussion and begins this.
 **Sutra:

Moreover, Ananda, when his karma as a ghost is ended, the problem of emotion as opposed to discursive thought is resolved. At that point he must pay back in kind what he borrowed from others to resolve those grievances. He is born into the body of an animal to repay his debts from past lives.

Commentary:**
Moreover, Ananda, let me continue to explain this principle lest you fail to understand it completely. When his karma as a ghost is ended, the problem of emotion as opposed to discursive thought is resolved. He's wiped the slate clean of emotion and thought. At that point he must pay back in kind what he borrowed from others to resolve those grievances. He has to pay back what he owes others. If he ate the flesh of other animals in the past, he will now be eaten by others. If he took others' lives in the past, then in this life he will be killed. He is born into the body of an animal to repay his debts from past lives. He will pay back the debts amassed for limitless kalpas in the past. They have to be paid back in kind. If you killed and harmed others, then the same thing will happen to you as repayment. If you owe someone a pig, then you become his pig to repay him. If you owe someone a dog, then you become his dog to repay him. If you owe someone a cow, you repay by being his cow. If you owe someone a horse, you become his horse to repay him. If you owe someone a chicken, then you go lay eggs for him. You lay a few eggs every day and in that way you gradually repay your debt. So it's not easy to act in this world's play. If you make a mistake, a lot of trouble results. If you do it correctly, then everything is clear and pure.

I2 Specifically lists ten categories.
J1 Owl category.
 **Sutra:

The retribution of the strange ghost of material objects is finished when the object is destroyed and it is reborn in the world, usually as a species of owl.

Commentary:**
Because strange ghosts were greedy for material objects, they took their shape when they encountered material objects. "When the object is destroyed" means that the particular material object they were possessing wears out, and their karmic retribution has come to an end. The majority of the strange ghosts are then reborn as owls. That's what usually happens, but it's not a totally fixed principle. There's a line in the Book of Poetry: "The owl, the owl, the unfilial bird." Some owls can incubate a clod of dirt and hatch it. How do you explain this? Well, it's just the strange way that they are. When the owlets hatch, they eat the parent bird. A child that eats its parents is a manifestation of a weird being. This kind of bird is considered to be inauspicious. Species means that they are born as one kind of owl or another.

J2 Inauspicious category.
 **Sutra:

The retribution of the drought ghost of the wind is finished when the wind subsides, and it is reborn in the world, usually as a species of weird creature which gives inauspicious prognostications.

Commentary:**

Wherever drought ghosts happen to be, there will be no rain. Wherever they go, the land is arid. They were greedy for lustful experiences. Through lust they created karma, and eventually they became drought ghosts when they met with the wind. When they are finished with that retribution, they are reborn in the world, but they cannot become people. Instead they become weird beings that foretell evil. Why do they have to go through this? After creating the karma of lust, enduring the hells, and being reborn as drought ghosts, their residual habits are still not completely severed, and so they become such strange creatures as these. They may be reborn as birds that are extremely colorful, but have the habit of excessive lust, or they may be reborn as beasts that are fond of lust.

J3 Fox category.
 **Sutra:

The retribution of the mei ghost of an animal is finished when the animal dies, and it is reborn in the world, usually as a species of fox.

Commentary:**

For the most part, these mei ghosts are reborn as foxes after they have finished their karma as ghosts.

J4 Poisonous category.
 **Sutra:

The retribution of the ku ghost in the form of worms is finished when the ku is exhausted, and it is reborn in the world, usually as a species of venomous creature.

Commentary:**

A ku poison ghost takes its shape when it encounters worms. When the ku poison finally wears out and the ghost's retribution is ended, it is reborn in the world as a venomous creature, as a scorpion, cobra, or the like.

J5 Tapeworm category.
 **Sutra:

The retribution of a pestilence ghost found in degeneration is finished when the degeneration is complete, and it is reborn in the world, usually as a species of tapeworm.

Commentary:**

The retribution of a pestilence ghost found in degeneration is finished when the degeneration is complete. Whoever encounters this kind of ghost will waste away. These ghosts are really terrible; their demonic power is tremendous. When its retribution is ended, and it is reborn in the world, usually as a species of tapeworm. These are the bugs in your intestines. I don't know if this kind of sickness exists in the West, but in China, these tapeworms can communicate; they can talk. They can talk to the person whose stomach they are occupying. There's no way to cure this kind of sickness with medicine, unless the person who has the sickness does not know that he is being given medicine. If the sick person knows it is medicine designed to eliminate the tapeworm, the tapeworm also knows. From this comes the expression, "You're not a tapeworm in my stomach, so how do you know what I'm thinking?"

Not only can tapeworms do this, but other kinds of weird beings can get into one's stomach and then carry on conversations. I've told you about the elder disciple I had in Hong Kong; she's probably more than eighty years old by now. She was about sixty when she took refuge with me. At that time she was deaf. Regardless of the fact that she couldn't hear, she came faithfully every time I gave a sutra lecture. She only understood Cantonese to begin with, and I was lecturing in Mandarin, and though there was a translator, she couldn't hear the translation. But she came anyway. It was more than three hundred steps up to the temple. I lectured from seven to nine at night, and she would come up and go down all those stairs. There was no light on the path. Despite her age, she was not afraid of falling. She was very sincere. One day she heard the recitation of "Homage to the Lotus Pool Assembly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas," and thereafter her deafness was cured. She could hear again. That made her even more sincere, of course.

Whenever I lectured and whatever sutra it was on, she would come to hear. Wind and rain did not keep her away. But when you cultivate, if you are sincere, there will be demonic obstacles. As I've said before, if you want to cultivate well, your sins will catch up with you. Ties of resentment from your past lives will come to get you. If you want to become a Buddha, you have to endure the demons that come to test you. One night, then, this woman had a dream, or what seemed to be a dream and yet not to be one. In it she saw three plump children between the ages of two and three. After the dream she got sick. What was the nature of her illness? She had to eat all day long. She had to eat a meal every hour. She ate more than ten meals a day. Thinking it was a disease, she went to Western and Chinese doctors, but they told her she was not sick. This went on for two or three years. Finally one evening, on the seventh day of the second lunar month, the day before the celebration of Shakyamuni Buddha's accomplishment of the Way, when I'd come back from Ze Xing monastery on Da Yu mountain, she said to me, "Shih Fu, how is it that there's someone in my stomach talking to me?"

"What did it say?" I asked her.

She said, 'Today I made some cakes with coarse rice. When I ate them, something in my stomach said to me, 'I don't like to eat that stuff.' "

"What did you say?" I asked.

She replied, "I said, 'You get full, that's good enough. If you don't eat that, what are you going to eat?' " She talked back to her stomach like that.

I said, "Don't worry, tonight I'll make you well. Go back home, and light a stick of incense at your altar at midnight and recite the Buddha's name."

She went back and did as I said. As she did it, she saw three children come out of her stomach. They were the three plump ones she had seen in the dream. Then she saw Wei Tuo Bodhisattva set down two bowls of noodles, and the three children fought over the food. When they finished eating, Wei Tuo Bodhisattva pinched the three of them by the ear and dragged them away. After they were gone, she felt that her stomach was totally empty. From then on her sickness of liking to eat was cured.

Tapeworms, too, can talk in a person's stomach. But what the old woman had were not tapeworms. They were three weird goblins; two were frogs, and one was a lizard. They were a kind of hungry ghost. Why did she have to endure this sickness? I looked into her causes and conditions, it became clear later that in a former life she was a Buddhist, and she knew someone who had this very same kind of sickness. He was already over the illness when she met him, but he told her about it. Her reaction was, "I don't believe that. Who ever heard of someone having a hungry ghost in their stomach, a hungry ghost that could talk to them?" Because she said she didn't believe it, she had to go through the personal experience in this life of having that same kind of illness. When she had it, there were a lot of people in Hong Kong who didn't believe it either. They said, "Whoever heard of such a thing? It's ridiculous." These were Chinese people who didn't believe, it's not just Westerners who have a hard time believing it. And I believe that the people in Hong Kong who expressed disbelief will also get this kind of illness in some future life. The cycle of cause and effect is fierce.

J6 Food category.
 **Sutra:

The retribution of the ghost which takes shape in gases is finished when the gases are gone, and it is then reborn in the world, usually as a species of eating animal.

Commentary:**

Since in the past it was greedy to be arrogant, it committed offenses. Now these offenses are paid for, and it can enter the world of people, but for the most part it gets reborn as an eating animal. There are two ways to explain "eating" here. First, the animal can't do anything but eat. That's all it's good for, like a pig or a sheep. Second, it is eaten by people. People eat the flesh of the pigs and sheep, and of cattle and chickens. This ghost, then, gets reborn as an animal which people consume. These kinds of animals are often domesticated so that they can be fattened up and then slaughtered and eaten.

J7 Clothing category.
 **Sutra:

The retribution of the ghost of prolonged darkness is finished when the darkness ends, and it is then reborn in the world, usually as a species of animal used for clothing or service.

Commentary:**
This is the paralysis ghost. When it takes rebirth, it is usually as an animal used for clothing or service. Animals used for clothing would include silkworms and animals whose fur or hide is used to make clothes. "Service" refers to dogs and cats which spend their lives in the households of humans, being obedient to them and of same service to them.

J8 Migratory category.
 **Sutra:

The retribution of the ghost which unites with energy is finished when the union dissolves, and it is then reborn in the world, usually as a species of migratory creature.

Commentary:**
The retribution of the ghost which unites with energy is finished when the union dissolves. These are the wang liang ghosts who take shape when they encounter essential energy. The text reads "when the union dissolves," but actually it should say "when the energy is dissolved." It is then reborn in the world, usually as a species of migratory creature. These kinds of creatures have an instinct about time. They include the wild geese that, flying in formation, migrate north in the spring and south in the autumn. In the spring the swallows come and nest in the eaves. After they have reared their young they fly away again. They are another example of creatures that have an instinct for time and know when to migrate.

J9 Auspicious category.
 **Sutra:

The retribution of the ghost of brightness and intellect is finished when the brightness disappears, and it is then reborn in the world, usually as a species of auspicious creature.

Commentary:**
These are the servant ghosts. When they are reborn they become auspicious creatures like the unicorn, the phoenix, and such. They become animals and birds which are considered lucky.

J10 Domestic category.
 **Sutra:

The retribution of the ghost that relies on a person is finished when the person dies, and it is then reborn in the world, usually as a species of domestic animal.

Commentary:**

These kinds of animals are docile and obedient. Dogs, cats, horses, and the like are examples of this kind of rebirth.

I3 Probes the source and shows it to be non-existent.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, all this is due to the burning out of his karmic fire in payment for his debts from past lives. The rebirth as an animal is also occasioned by his own false and empty karma. If he awakens to Bodhi, then fundamentally none of these false conditions will exist at all.

Commentary:**

Ananda, all the various kinds of rebirth just discussed are due to the burning out of his karmic fire in payment for his debts from past lives. The rebirth as an animal is also occasioned by his own false and empty karma. It's due to the karma he created in the past. If he awakens to Bodhi, then fundamentally none of these false conditions will exist at all. If he awakens to the enlightened path, then all these false conditions will disappear. They are all empty.

I4 Repeats answer to prior question.
 **Sutra:

You mentioned Precious Lotus Fragrance, King Crystal, and bhikshu Good Stars. Evil karma such as theirs was created by them alone. It did not fall down out of the heavens or well up from the earth, nor did some person impose it upon them. Their own falseness brought it into being, and so they themselves have to undergo it. In the Bodhi mind, it is empty and false, a cohesion of false thoughts.

Commentary:**

You mentioned Precious Lotus Fragrance. You remember what kind of a bhikshuni she was? Do you remember how she acted? King Crystal, and bhikshu Good Stars were the others that you brought up. Evil karma such as theirs was created by them alone. They fell into the hells alive. But they brought it down on themselves. It did not fall down out of the heavens or well up from the earth, nor did some person impose it upon them. That is not how their evil karma came about. Their own falseness brought it into being, and so they themselves have to undergo it. In the Bodhi mind, it is empty and false. In the Bodhi mind, karma such as this is ephemeral and imaginary. It's not real; it is just a cohesion of false thoughts. The solidification of false thinking is what brings this karma into being.

Destiny of People

H4 Destiny of people.
I1 Traces prior teaching and the alarming result.
J1 The burden of debts must be repaid.
 **Sutra:

Moreover, Ananda, if while repaying his past debts by undergoing rebirth as an animal, such a living being pays back more than he owed, he will then be reborn as a human to rectify the excess.

Commentary:**
He lives out a life as an animal in order to pay back the debts he made in the past. If in the process he pays back more than he needed to, he then gets reborn as a person again to make up the difference.
 **Sutra:

If he is a person with strength, blessings, and virtue, then once he is in the human realm, he will not have to lose his human rebirth after what is owed him is restored. But if he lacks blessings, then he will return to the animal realm to continue repaying his debts.

Commentary:**

If he is a person with strength, blessings, and virtue, then once he is in the human realm, he will not have to lose his human. "Strength" means that he has the power of good karma. If on top of that he accumulates blessings and virtue, then he won't have to lose a human body after what is owed him is restored, after he's been paid back for the overpayment of debts he made while he was in the animal realm. But if he lacks blessings, then he will return to the animal realm to continue repaying his debts. He'll get reborn as an animal again to go on paying what he owes. There is no way to get off easy or cheat anyone out of anything. It must be just. Although there isn't any actual person controlling the whole process, the power of one's own karma is such that it does not allow any injustice. No one takes a loss unfairly.

J2 The burden of life: killing to eat is endless.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, you should know that once the debt is paid, whether with money, material goods, or manual labor, the process of repayment naturally comes to an end.

Commentary:**

Ananda, you should know that, while in the human realm, once the debt is paid, whether with money, material goods, or manual labor, the process of repayment naturally comes to an end. When the repayment is sufficient, the work naturally stops.
 **Sutra:

But if in the process he took the lives of other beings or ate their flesh, then he continues in the same way, passing through kalpas as many as motes of fine dust, taking turns devouring and being slaughtered in a cycle that sends him up and down endlessly.

Commentary:**

But if in the process, when he is tying up conditions with other beings, he took the lives of other beings or ate their flesh, then he continues in the same way, passing through kalpas as many as motes of fine dust, taking turns devouring and being slaughtered in a cycle that sends him up and down endlessly. He gets caught in a cycle that goes on for aeons and aeons, a cycle of eating and being eaten, killing and being killed. It goes on and on like the turning of a whee, you eat me, and I eat you, one doesn't know how long it lasts. He goes up and down, depending on whether he ate more or was eaten more. But it never stops. It is ceaseless. It's extremely dangerous.
 **Sutra:

There is no way to put a stop to it, except through shamatha or through a Buddha's coming to the world.

Commentary:**

"Shamatha" is the Buddha's "still and illumining' samadhi; except through cultivating it and through upholding the durable Shurangama Samadhi, to obtain the great Shurangama Samadhi, there's no respite from this karmic obstacle, unless a Buddha comes into the world to release one from the appearance of these karmic offenses. Then both parties will know that they should not continue creating such karma. Only in that way can the cycle be stopped.

I2 A detailed listing of the ten categories.
J1 The category of corrupt and obstinate people.
 **Sutra:

You should know that when owls and their kind have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are born as people, but among those who are corrupt and obstinate.

Commentary:**

"Their kind" refers to any other birds that are evil like owls are. Once they have undergone their karmic retribution, they return to their original form as human beings. But, although they are born again as people, they are corrupt and obstinate. When these creatures take birth again in the human realm, they become people who are totally perverse and hardheaded. They are stubborn and refuse to yield. They are totally unreasonable and unprincipled. Quite often they become robbers. They don't listen to reason. If you tried to explain some Buddhadharma to them, they would run away. "Among those who are corrupt and obstinate" means that they get together with such people, people like themselves. So it is said:

People join up with those who are like them,
Creatures divide into their various species.
The good get together,
The bad form gangs,
People find people who are of their own kind.

Students spend their time with other students. Workmen join together with other workmen. Gamblers get together with gamblers. Opium smokers mingle with other opium smokers. Hippies form communes with other hippies. It's all a manifestation of this principle, people find their own kind.

J2 The category of abnormal people.
 **Sutra:

When creatures that are inauspicious have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are born as people, but among those who are abnormal.

Commentary:**

After they undergo their karmic retribution, they can be born in the human realm again, but as freaks. You see mention of this type of rebirth in the newspapers all the time. A woman gives birth to a child with two heads or a child that has two bodies but only one head. Or the infant's six sense organs will be out of place. Perhaps the eyes will be where the ears should be and the ears where the eyes belong. The nose may be where the mouth should be. The mouth may be where the nose should be. The sense organs exchange places. For the six sense-organs to be irregular is what is meant by "abnormal." Often such people die as soon as they are born, but even so they are counted as freaks. In general, "abnormal" means that there is something not right about them.

J3 The category of simple people.
 **Sutra:

When foxes have paid back their debts, they regain their original forms and are born as people, but among those who are simpletons.

Commentary:**

The fox is extremely intelligent. But his intelligence is of a ghostly kind. That is, it is false, and so when he gets rebirth as a person again, he has to be a simpleton. He becomes a very dense kind of person. You can say something to him over and over and he still won't understand. If you leave him alone, he gets along all right, but as soon as you try to reason with him or explain something, it becomes obvious that he's completely out of it. He can't understand at all.

J4 The category of hateful people.
 **Sutra:

When creatures of the venomous category have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are born as people, but among those who are hateful.

Commentary:**

When creatures of the venomous category, including things like poisonous snakes and vicious beasts, have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are born as people, but among those who are hateful. When they finish out their retribution, they come back in the world as people, but although they manage to get reborn in the human realm, they still have not changed their bad habits. They are extremely cruel and fierce. They are obstinate and angry. If they say they are going to kill someone, they do just that. That's because they are still like poisonous snakes who take no heed of whether their actions are justifiable or not; if you get in their way, they will bite and kill you and talk about it later. As people, they continue along in that same kind of evil habit of killing people. They are terribly cruel and unreasonable. Their poisonous habits haven't changed since their lives as snakes. The Shurangama Sutra discussion of human nature and the nature of all creatures is an extremely detailed one. If you investigate it carefully, you see that it is all minutely set forth.

J5 The category of lowly people.
 **Sutra:

When tapeworms and their like have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are born as people, but among those who are lowly.

Commentary:**

When tapeworms and their like have paid back their debts, they regain their original form. Do you remember that tapeworms are able to talk? Pretty strange, wouldn't you say? When this kind of creature has paid back its debts from former lives, then it can become a person again. Although it becomes a person, it lives out that human life among those who are lowly. Very worthless people, they are, who must work for others and do menial tasks. They are inferior, unimportant, and insignificant people.

J6 The category of weak people.
 **Sutra:

When the edible types of creatures have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are reborn as people, but among those who are weak.

Commentary:**

When the edible types of creatures, who have been reborn as animals that people like to eat, have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are reborn as people, but among those who are weak. When their karmic obstacle dissolves, they go back to being people again, but they must be reborn among the weak, because they have not changed their bad habits from the past. They are very manipulable. They cannot manage on their own in the world. In all that they do they have to rely on others for support. They are cowardly and meek to a fault.

J7 The category of laborers.
 **Sutra:

When creatures that are used for clothing or service have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are reborn as people, but among those who do hard labor.

Commentary:**

When creatures that are used for clothing or service have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are reborn as people. Living beings whose bodies or by-products are used for people's apparel or who must live a life of obedience and service to a human being eventually pay back their debts and can be reborn as people. But when they get born in the human realm it is among those who do hard labor. That's their lot in life.

J8 The category of literate people.
 **Sutra:

When creatures that migrate have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are reborn as people among those who are literate.

Commentary:**

When creatures that migrate, wild geese and ducks, migratory birds and beasts, have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are reborn as people among those who are literate. But their literary skills are not great. They have a little ability, that's all. They appear to be cultured, but they don't have exceptional talent.

J9 The category of intelligent people.
 **Sutra:

When auspicious creatures have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are reborn as people among those who are intelligent.

Commentary:**

Their intelligence is not profound, however; it is a worldly intelligence which is skilled in argument.

J10 The category of well-informed people.
 **Sutra:

When domestic animals have paid back their debts, they regain their original form and are reborn as people among those who are well-informed.

Commentary:**

People like this comprehend what's going on. They understand social graces. But they do not have a genuine and comprehensive understanding that penetrates the past and present. They are not that well-educated. They simply attain a superficial kind of success in dealing with the world.

I3 Concludes with an expression of pity.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, these are all beings that have finished paying back former debts and are born again in the human realm. They are involved in a beginningless scheme of karma and being upside down in which their lives are spent killing one another and being killed by one another. They do not get to meet the Thus Come One or hear the proper dharma. They just abide in the wearisome dust, passing through a repetitive cycle. Such people can truly be called pitiful.

Commentary:**

Ananda, these are all beings that have finished paying back former debts and are born again in the human realm. Eventually they finished repaying the karmic debts they had to pay, and they get to become people. But they are involved in a beginningless scheme of karma and being upside down in which their lives are spent killing one another and being killed by one another. They keep creating the same kind of upside-down evil karma by killing and being killed. They do not get to meet the Thus Come One, they never encounter a Buddha, or hear the proper dharma. They just abide in the wearisome dust, passing through a repetitive cycle. They remain forever in the wearisome mundane world. The "repetitive cycle" means that it's exactly the same over and over again. That's just how it always is for them. Such people can truly be called pitiful. The Buddha says that beings like these are very pathetic.

Destiny of Immortals

H5 The destiny of immortals.
I1 Concludes prior passage and begins this.
 **Sutra:

Furthermore, Ananda, there are people who do not rely on Proper Enlightenment to cultivate samadhi, but cultivate in some special way that is based on their false thinking. Holding to the idea of perpetuating their physical bodies, they roam in the mountains and forests in places people do not go and become ten kinds of immortals.

Commentary:**

Furthermore, Ananda, there are people who do not rely on Proper Enlightenment to cultivate samadhi. They do not rely on the great enlightened way of Bodhi. They do not rely on the great Shurangama Samadhi, and they do not cultivate the skill of turning back their hearing to hear the self-nature. What they cultivate is a deviant samadhi of the externalist paths. It is based on false thinking and on the urge to climb on conditions, to take advantage of situations. They think like this: "I'll cultivate now, and when I accomplish some karma in the Way I'll display my spiritual penetrations for everyone to see. I'll get them to believe in me, respect me, make obeisance to me, and make offerings to me." That's what's meant by taking advantage of situations. It's not for the sake of becoming a Buddha or for the sake of practicing and upholding the Buddhadharma and causing it to spread and grow that they cultivate. They develop their skill with the idea of getting offerings for themselves. They display both greed and stupidity in that way. So they cultivate in some special way that is based on their false thinking. What do they have in mind? Holding to the idea of perpetuating their physical bodies, they roam in the mountains and forests in places people do not go and become ten kinds of immortals. They have the false thought that they will make their bodies strong and enduring, that they will become as solid as rock, that their bodies will never go bad. They go deep into the mountains or perhaps find an isolated island.

I2 Lists the immortals.
J1 Earth-traveling immortals.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, some living beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong with doses of medicine. When they have perfected this method of ingestion, they are known as earth-traveling immortals.

Commentary:**

Ananda, some living beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong with doses of medicine. They take this medicine with one aim in mind, to become an immortal "Unflagging resolution" means that they are consistent in their practice. All the people to be discussed in this section are extremely faithful when it comes to their practice. It's not that they do it today and neglect it tomorrow. Every day, day after day, they develop their particular kind of skill. In this case it's ingesting drugs. By this they hope to gain immortality so that they don't have to die. When they have perfected this method of ingestion, they are known as earth-traveling immortals. The result of their efforts is that they are very light when they walk. Their bodies are buoyant. They can run very swiftly over the ground. They get to higher speeds than the emu in Australia, which can run as much as forty miles an hour. This immortal travels over the ground as if he were flying; that's how he gets his name.

J2 Flying immortals.
 **Sutra:

Some of these beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through the use of grasses and herbs. When they have perfected this method of taking herbs, they are known as flying immortals.

Commentary:**
Some of these beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through the use of grasses and herbs. They pursue this practice with firm determination. If someone were to tell them to discontinue it, they could not do it. Their minds are like rock or iron. They are tougher than nails when it comes to perfecting their method of practice. In this case it is the use of grasses and herbs. They concoct a pill out of certain herbs and trees. They eat it every single day without fail. And due to their determination and to their wish to succeed, the method eventually starts to work. When they have perfected this method of taking herbs, they are known as flying immortals. Their bodies are as light as a wisp of smoke, and they can mount the clouds and drive the fog.

J3 Roaming immortals.
 **Sutra:

Some of these beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through the use of metal and stone. When they have perfected this method of transformation, they are known as roaming immortals.

Commentary:**

Some of these beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through the use of metal and stone. Their minds are determined, extremely strong and steadfast. They make a stove for concocting pills. They mix mercury and lead together, heating and reheating it, smelting and re-smelting it. They may smelt it for forty-nine days or for twenty-one days. It depends on the prescription they are taught. They combine gold and silver and when these too are sufficiently smelted they put all the ingredients together and eat the result. They're called pills of immortality; it's wonderful medicine. If one takes a pill of immortality one can "cast off the womb and transform one's bones." This is just a brief mention of the secret prescriptions for forging immortality. If they are successful, when they have perfected this method of transformation, they are known as roaming immortals. "Method of transformation" refers to the changes that take place as a result of the pills they concoct. The pills have a special ability to create change. As roaming immortals, they can go wherever they want.

J4 Space-traveling immortals.
 **Sutra:

Some of these beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through movement and cessation. When they have perfected their breath and essence, they are known as space-traveling immortals.

Commentary:**

Some of these beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through movement and cessation. These beings work with determination on movement and cessation. "Movement" can refer to the time that they work on developing their skill. "Cessation," then, is when they stop working. "Movement" can also refer to exercise such as tai ji chuan.

"Cessation," then, is when they cultivate stillness. That is, they sit there and smelt the essence until it transforms into energy, they smelt the energy until it transforms into spirit, and they smelt the spirit until it returns to emptiness. How do they smelt the essence into energy? They sit in meditation and do not allow their essence to escape. They don't go near women. When their essence doesn't escape, it reverts inward. In that way it turns into energy, into prana. This energy becomes fused throughout the body. They manage to do it by concentrating their thoughts on it, just the way a chicken hatches an egg. They think about how their essence is being transformed into energy, how the energy is pervading their body, and then how it is being transformed into spirit. Then they smelt the spirit until it returns to emptiness, until it becomes like emptiness itself. They then smelt the emptiness until it returns to nothing. They go to the point that there's nothing at all. At that point they feel very free and at ease. They can "go out esoterically and enter the female." That's the way the Taoists phrase it. That means they can go out from the top of their heads.

The Taoists in China practiced exactly the methods that Shakyamuni Buddha describes here. They have a book called Wu Shang You Huang Xin Yin Miao Jing. They consider this book a real treasure. It tells how to smelt the essence to transform it into energy, smelt the energy to transform it into spirit, smelt the spirit to transform it into emptiness, and smelt the emptiness to transform it into nothing. These immortals can walk around in space. They can go out from the top of their heads. There are a lot of strange and esoteric things in this world. There's another Taoist book for sale called Wa Lia Xian Zong. In it there are pictures of a man sending a small person out the top of his head, and that small person sending out another small person, and so forth until there are lots of small people. That's supposed to be "millions of transformation bodies." But I'll tell you, making millions of transformation bodies is not as much trouble as all that. These Taoist books are just totally involved in attachment to appearances. Making transformation bodies can be done at will. There's no fixed formula for creating them. When they have perfected their breath and essence, they are known as space-traveling immortals.

J5 Heaven-traveling immortals.
 **Sutra:

Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong by using the flow of saliva. When they have perfected the
virtues of this moisture, they are known as heaven-traveling immortals.

Commentary:**

The previous immortal could roam in space. This one can go up to the heavens. Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong by using the flow of saliva. When the tongue is placed on the roof of the mouth, the saliva flows down from above. Adherents of externalist paths call this "sweet dew," "heavenly drinking water," and a lot of other names. The process is complete when the saliva flows down and is swallowed into the stomach. Taoists call this the elixir of immortality. They have a saying;

If you want to live forever and not grow old,
You must return the essence to nurture the brain.

They contemplate having their essence form a cluster on top of their heads; in this way they strengthen their brains. These particular immortals continually swallow the saliva and internalize the breath in a regularly scheduled practice. When they have perfected the virtues of this moisture, they are known as heaven-traveling immortals. Eventually their faces take on a glow. Although they are very old, their faces are like children's. They are red cheeked and fresh like a young boy's. These are the heaven-traveling immortals.

J6 Immortals of penetrating conduct.
 **Sutra:

Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong with the essence of sun and moon. When they have perfected the inhalation of this purity, they are known as immortals of penetrating conduct.

Commentary:**
Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong with the essence of sun and moon. Their minds are firm and resolved. These immortals make a practice of breathing in the essence of the sun and the secretions of the moon. They convert the sunlight and moonlight. When they have perfected the inhalation of this purity, they are known as immortals of penetrating conduct. They can travel to the heavens or anywhere else they want to go. How do they go about this practice? For example, in the morning they face the sun and make three hundred and sixty inhalations. In the evening they face the moon and make three hundred and sixty inhalations. They put all their time into smelting their stinking skin bags. That's what our bodies are, stinking skin bags.

The Venerable Master Hsu Yun wrote the Song of a Skin Bag in expression of this fact. But this type of immortal puts all his energy into developing this kind of skill. They don't know that they should put that effort into developing the self-nature. So the difference between Taoism and Buddhism is that the former uses effort on what is apparent and the latter uses effort on what is not apparent. So one has an attachment and the other doesn't. That's the difference. Actually, the way of the immortals and the Buddhist Way are similar. The point is that one is involved in attachments and the other is not. The kind of skill these immortals develop is basically all right, but they get attached to it. They become totally engrossed in appearances. Because of that they have a hindrance. They feel they have to do things in a certain way. Because they have this hang-up, they cannot get completely out of the cycle of rebirth. They don't gain ultimate understanding and release. These are called immortals with penetrating conduct.

The first five immortals described previously were said to have one sort of "travel" or another because they are basically bound to the earth and cannot roam in the higher realms. The latter five, now being described, are said to have one kind of "conduct" or another, because they are more advanced and can roam in the higher regions.

J7 Immortals with way-conduct.
 **Sutra:

Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through mantras and prohibitions. When they have perfected these spells and dharmas, they are known as immortals with Way-conduct.

Commentary:**
These beings have a firm determination to recite mantras. The Tibetan Lamas are an example of this category, provided that they perfect their skills. Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through mantras and prohibitions. They recite mantras and always hold prohibitive precepts. When they have perfected these spells and dharmas, they are known as immortals with Way-conduct.

J8 Immortals with illumining conduct.
 **Sutra:

Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through the use of thought-processes. When they have perfected thought and memory, they are known as immortals with illumining conduct.

Commentary:**
Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through the use of thought-processes. They turn their determination to their thoughts, without resting, they develop total thought. When they have perfected thought and memory, they are known as immortals with illumining conduct. When they perfect this practice, they have a bit of light. In their thoughts they imagine that they are transformed into golden light. When they cherish this thought for a long time, eventually it's just like the old mother hen on her eggs, or the cat stalking the mouse: there's some success. That's why they are called immortals with illumining conduct. They have some light.

J9 Immortals with essential conduct.
 **Sutra:

Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through intercourse. When they have perfected the response, they are known as immortals with essential conduct.

Commentary:**
Usually "intercourse" refers to the sexual act between men and women. But that is definitely not the meaning here. Rather, the intercourse takes place within oneself. The Taoists call this the "young boy and girl." Each individual is capable of it. It?s not a matter of seeking outside oneself. Everyone has a young boy and girl in his or her own body. The young boy refers to the trigram li ) and the young girl refers to the trigram kan. This is an allusion to the trigrams. The trigram li is "empty in the middle."

The trigram kan is "full in the middle." The eight trigrams are:



They begin with the trigram qian , which consists of three unbroken lines. Qian represents the male element. Kun is three broken lines and represents the female element. At age thirtysix a man's qian trigram is at its peak. Thereafter it will decline, and it turns into the trigram li. The li trigram has two outer yang lines and an inner yin line. Where did the yang line from the middle of the li go? It went over to the kun trigram, which subsequently turns into kan, which consists of two yin outer lines with a middle yang line.

The li trigram belongs to the mind and the kan trigram belongs to the body. So the "intercourse" referred to in this passage is the intercourse of "body" and "mind" as described here. The "intercourse" is simply an analogy for a union of body and mind. The entire process takes place in one individual's body. The li trigram belongs to yang, but within the yang is yin. The kan trigram belongs to yin, but within the yin is yang.

The infant boy and girl meet
at the yellow courtyard.

What is the yellow courtyard? It's the mind, the sixth consciousness. And the mind belongs to the hexagram pi. It would get tremendously involved if we were to go into this doctrine in detail. Time simply does not permit me to explain it further. In any event, the Taoists cultivate the dharma-door of this kind of intercourse. When people with deviant knowledge and deviant views see this passage of the Shurangama Sutra, they surmise that it says it's all right for men and women to mess around together, that cultivators of the Way can get away with that. So they get all mixed up together and don't hold the precepts at all.

J10 Immortals of absolute conduct.
 **Sutra:

Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through transformations and changes. When they have perfected their awakening, they are known as immortals of absolute conduct.

Commentary:**

Some beings with unflagging resolution make themselves strong through transformations and changes. Here it says that with firm resolve a cultivator investigates various kinds of dharma Destiny tricks. When he's succeeded in developing them, he has some ability to function by means of them. Then his skill of cultivation is perfected. When they have perfected their awakening, they are known as immortals of absolute conduct. They understand the doctrine of creation. This kind of immortal can move mountains and turn over seas. It's possible for them to exchange the mountains in the north for the mountains in the south. They can move seas around in the same way, replacing the ocean in the west with the ocean in the east and vice versa. They have the power to change the seasons. For example, when it's cold in the winter so that things won't grow, they can make it so that the things they have planted will grow and won't freeze. They can make the hottest places cool and the coldest places warm. They can turn spring into winter and summer into winter at will: they can turn spring, when things should be blossoming, into autumn, when things are dying. How can they do it? They have fathomed the doctrine of creation of heaven and earth and they can function by means of that understanding.

They become capable of creation itself. They're called immortals of absolute conduct.

I3 Determines this is the same as the turning wheel.
 **Sutra:

Ananda, these are all people who smelt their minds but do not cultivate proper enlightenment. They obtain some special principle of life and can live for thousands or tens of thousands of years. They retire deep into the mountains or onto islands in the sea and cut themselves off from the human realm. However, they are still part of the turning wheel, because they flow and turn according to their false thinking and do not cultivate samadhi. When their reward is finished, they must still return and enter the various destinies.

Commentary:**

Ananda, these are all people who smelt their minds but do not cultivate proper enlightenment. When they were people, they smelted their bodies and minds. They did not cultivate the Shurangama Samadhi of the treasury of the Thus Come One, which is neither produced nor extinguished. They didn't cultivate proper enlightenment. They obtain some special principle of life and can live for thousands or tens of thousands of years. The various dharma doors described above are all ways they found which could extend the measure of their lifespans. Their gods of the externalist paths transmitted to them these externalist dharmas which preserve life. So they have very long lifespans. They retire deep into the mountains or onto islands in the sea and cut themselves off from the human realm. They go to places where people cannot go. There is a Mount Sumeru in this world system, and surrounding it are seven golden mountains and seven seas of fragrant waters. Out beyond those mountains and seas there is a vast expanse of soft water. This water is such that if a bird's feather lands on the surface, it will sink to the bottom. The feather would float on ordinary water, but this water is so soft that it does not have the power to support anything on its surface. Obviously, if a bird's feather sinks, any other thing like a boat or raft would certainly sink, too. Only flying immortals can cross it. So these people who cultivate and become immortals fly over this water to isolated islands where people can never go. However, they are still part of the turning wheel, because they flow and turn according to their false thinking and do not cultivate samadhi. Although they may live for thousands of years, they are still within the cycle of rebirth. They have not been able to end birth and death entirely. The reason they still must transmigrate is because they still have things they are attached to. Specifically, they want immortality, they want to live long and not grow old. That's their false thinking, and so they don't cultivate proper concentration power. When their reward is finished, they must still return and enter the various destinies. When their lifespan finally ends, they will go to rebirth, and they might become people or asuras or gods, or they might end up in the hells or as hungry ghosts or animals. It's not for sure where they'll end up.