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門隨類普現於五法自性識二種無

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THE LANKAVATARA SUTRA

TRANSLATION RED
AND COMMENTARY PINE



THE
LANKAVATARA SUTRA

A ZEN TEXT

Translation and Commentary by Red Pine



COUNTERPOINT
Berkeley

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Lao-tzu's Taoteching

The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain

The Zen Works of Stonehouse: Poems and

Talks of a 14th-Century Hermit

The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma

P'u Ming's Oxherding Pictures & Verses

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE



Zen traces its genesis to one day around 400 B.C. when the Buddha held up a flower and a monk named Kashyapa smiled. From that day on, this simplest yet most profound of teachings was handed down from one generation to the next. At least this is the story that was first recorded a thousand years later, but in China, not in India. Apparently Zen was too simple to be noticed in the land of its origin, where it remained an invisible teaching. It was not until an Indian monk named Bodhidharma brought it to the Middle Kingdom, that Zen finally made landfall. This bearded barbarian who became China's First Zen Patriarch was only slightly more perceptible than Kashyapa's smile, but he was perceptible, appearing in a brief biographical notice recorded by his disciple, T'an-lin (506–574), and in a more extensive biography by Tao-hsuan (596—667) in his *Hsukaosengchuan*. But the event that brought Bodhidharma to the attention of historians and hagiographers alike occurred in or around 534 when he chose Hui-k'o as his successor and handed him a copy of the *Lankavatara*. Bodhidharma told him everything he needed to know was in this book, and Zen and the *Lanka* have been linked ever since, if they were not already

linked in India.

The title of this book that contained everything Hui-k'o needed to know is a combination of the Sanskrit words *lanka* and *avatara*. Chinese commentators say *lanka* means "unreachable." Maybe it does, but I don't know what they base this on. The only definition I can find is that the word refers to the island we now call Sri Lanka or to its principal town. Perhaps the name was derived from the root *lankh* or *lang*, which mean "to go to" or "to go beyond" respectively. But if that were true, it would be "reachable." And according to Buddhist chronicles, it was, as the Buddha himself reached Lanka on three occasions, one of them being to transmit the teaching of this sutra. Such chronicles, however, were compiled centuries after the Buddha's reported visits. The earliest recorded appearance of Buddhism on the island did not occur until 150 years after the Buddha's Nirvana, when Mahinda, the son of King Ashoka (r. 250 B.C.), introduced the Dharma to the island's inhabitants. As for the second part of the title, *avatara*, this means "to alight or descend," and usually refers to the appearance of a deity upon earth—and from which we get the word *avatar*. Thus, the sutra's title could be translated as *Appearance on Lanka*, referring to the Buddha's reputed visit to the island.

Since the sutra first appeared in China in the form of a Sanskrit text at the beginning of the fifth century, it was probably composed in India in the middle of the previous century, give or take a decade or two. And since the first two monks who brought Sanskrit copies to China were both from what was then called Central India (the Ganges watershed of Uttar Pradesh), this would be a likely place for its origin. Also, unlike other

Mahayana sutras, which were written in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, the *Lankavatara* was written in Classical Sanskrit. Classical Sanskrit was the language of Brahmins and of the court. And in the middle of the fourth century, the court was located in the Central Indian city of Patna, on the banks of the Ganges. This was the court of Samudragupta the Great (r. 335–375).

Samudragupta was a devout Hindu, but he also respected other religious traditions and once granted permission to King Meghavarna, the ruler of Lanka, to construct a Buddhist monastery at Bodh Gaya, the place of the Buddha's Enlightenment. Perhaps it was such an event that inspired our author to locate his text on the island. And perhaps he composed his work hoping that it might reach the ears or eyes of this *cakravartin*, or universal monarch, which was how Samudragupta often referred to himself—and to whom the author of the *Lanka* also refers in a number of places. In addition to his military prowess, Samudragupta was also a skilled musician, and the detailed description of melodic modes near the beginning of Chapter One must have been written with someone in mind.

Another possibility for the sutra's place of origin would be Lanka itself or the nearby mainland. Although Theravada has been the dominant form of Buddhism on the island for the past thousand years, prior to that it was a stronghold of the Yogacara school. And this sutra was clearly addressed to an audience familiar with the formative concepts of this school of Buddhism. But what sets the *Lanka* apart is that it points readers beyond the teachings of the early Yogacara to their own minds. Pointing directly at the mind was and still is a hallmark of the Zen school

of Buddhism. And the man who brought Zen to China was from the area just north of Lanka near the seaport of Kanchipuram. Of course, most scholars doubt that Zen ever existed in India—and thus they necessarily see Bodhidharma as an invention of Chinese hagiographers. They contend that Zen was of Chinese origin, where it first appears in the sixth and seventh centuries and where it then conjures its Indian origin and the person of Bodhidharma to provide it with historical legitimacy.

This is an argument that has given rise to much debate and not one to which I have anything salutary to add, other than to ask: if Zen originated in China, where did this text come from? If there ever was a sutra that presented the underlying teaching of Zen, this is it. It is unrelenting in its insistence on the primacy of personal realization and is unlike any other teaching attributed to the Buddha in this regard. D. T. Suzuki, the previous translator of the *Lankavatara*, put it this way, “The reason why Bodhidharma handed this sutra to Hui-k’o as containing the essence of Zen Buddhism must be sought in this, that the constant refrain of the *Lankavatara* is the all-importance of an inner perception (*pratyamagati*) or self-realization (*svasiddhanta*).” (*Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, pg. 102)

Indeed, this is the constant refrain of the sutra. But it isn’t just about Zen; it is firmly rooted in what would later become known as Yogacara Buddhism as well. And it also focuses on the bodhisattva path that still dominates Mahayana Buddhism. But it does all this far beyond the normal venues of Mahayana discourse on the distant island of Lanka, where the sutra opens with the Buddha instructing one of ancient India’s serpent kings in the Dharma. As the Buddha reappears from the serpent king’s

watery realm, Ravana, ruler of Lanka, invites him to his nearby capital in hopes of a similar discourse. The Buddha agrees and proceeds to instruct the king in the illusory nature of what Buddhists call dharmas, all those things we think of as real, be they tangible, intangible, or merely imagined.

Following this introductory chapter, Mahamati then rises from among the assembled bodhisattvas and presents the Buddha with a gauntlet of questions, to which the Buddha responds by telling him that the very terms in which his questions are posed are projections of his own and others' imaginations and as such are tantamount to pie in the sky. A statement about pie thus becomes a statement about no pie.

Just as the *Diamond Sutra* teaches detachment from dharmas, and the *Heart Sutra* teaches the emptiness of dharmas, the *Lankavatara* teaches the non-projection of dharmas, that there would be no dharmas to be empty or to be detached from if we did not project them as existing or not existing in the first place. The Buddha tells Mahamati, "Because the various projections of people's minds appear before them as objects, they become attached to the existence of their projections." So how do they get free of such attachments? The Buddha continues, "By becoming aware that projections are nothing but mind. Thus, do they transform their body and mind and finally see clearly all the stages and realms of self-awareness of tathagatas and transcend views and projections regarding the five dharmas and modes of reality." (Chapter Two, LXIV)

Having proclaimed the illusory nature of projections, including such Yogacara categories as the five dharmas and the three modes of reality, the Buddha directs Mahamati to its source, namely, consciousness itself. He then explains how

consciousness works and how liberation consists in realizing that consciousness is a self-fabricated fiction, just another illusion, and how bodhisattvas transform their consciousness into the projectionless tathagata-garbha, or womb from which the buddhas arise. Such a teaching is not something everyone is prepared to hear. But Mahamati continues to ask questions, and the Buddha continues to answer, yet in a way that always leads his disciple back to the two teachings that underlie this sutra: the “nothing but mind” of Yogacara and the “self-realization” of Zen.

As the Buddha guides Mahamati through the conceptual categories of Mahayana Buddhism, and those of other paths as well, he tells him that these too are fabrications of the mind and that reaching the land of buddhas requires transcending all conjured landscapes, including that of the tathagata-garbha. Summarizing the process whereby practitioners follow such a teaching, the Buddha says, “Who sees that the habit-energy of projections of the beginningless past is the cause of the three realms, and who understands that the tathagata stage is free from projections or anything that arises, attains the personal realization of buddha knowledge and effortless mastery over their own minds.” (Chapter Two, Section VIII)

Thus, the sutra weaves together the threads of Yogacara and Zen, along with such unique Mahayana concepts as the no-self self of the tathagata-garbha, and it does this for three hundred pages, mostly in prose, and with occasional recapitulations in verse. Although it has long been revered as one of the six sacred texts of Yogacara Buddhism, it is also the text to which China’s early Zen masters turned for instruction. Whether or not it was the product of Indian Zen masters is a moot point, as neither the *Lanka* nor Zen appear in the historical record until both showed

up in China in the fifth century.

The first to appear was the sutra. It arrived in the baggage of a monk from central India named Dharmakshema. He arrived in the Silk Road oasis of Tunhuang in 414, if not a year or two earlier, and he either learned Chinese quickly, or he did so earlier at one of the other oases where he stayed on his way to China. Soon after settling in Tunhuang, he began working on a translation of the *Nirvana Sutra* and soon established a reputation as a skilled translator. In addition to his linguistic abilities, he was also known for his skill in prophecy and magic. And when Tunhuang was conquered by the neighboring Northern Liang state in 420, he was invited by its king to serve as an advisor and to continue his translation work at the Northern Liang capital of Kutsang (modern Wuwei), 500 miles to the southeast. Magic and prophecy were the major reasons why those in power financed sutra translation—the powers associated with sutras and mantras had political and military applications.

During the next twelve years, Dharmakshema distinguished himself as a counselor and also as a translator. And as the monk's reputation spread, the ruler of the Northern Wei state invited him to his capital of Pingcheng (modern Tatung). Although Pingcheng was another 800 miles to the east and across two major deserts, the continued survival of the Northern Liang depended on its good relations with its much larger and more powerful neighbor, and its ruler had no choice but to comply. However, Dharmakshema's patron feared his monk advisor might reveal state secrets or use his magic powers against him, and shortly after Dharmakshema left Kutsang, the Northern Liang ruler had him killed.

While the monk's assassination is accepted as occurring in 433, one account says he was not killed while traveling east to the Northern Wei capital. Rather, he was traveling west to the Silk Road kingdom of Khotan in search of a more complete copy of the *Nirvana Sutra* when the Northern Liang ruler learned his monk counselor had been secretly transmitting sexual techniques to members of the royal harem and became so enraged he had him killed. Of course, this account would have played to the advantage of the Northern Liang ruler and was probably invented to absolve him of his treachery. But it didn't work, as the Northern Wei soon put an end to the Northern Liang. Still, regardless of which account was correct, among the texts Dharmakshema left behind was the first known translation of the *Lankavatara*. According to a catalogue of the Buddhist Canon made by Tao-hsuan in 664, it was still extant more than two hundred years later. But by the time the next catalogue was made in 730, it had disappeared. And it has not been seen since.

This was often what happened to sutras, especially those like the *Lankavatara* that required a teacher to reveal their meaning. They were translated at imperial request or at the urging of wealthy patrons, and once translated, copies were made and distributed to major Buddhist monasteries around the country. But they often ended up in monastery libraries unread. This was the fate of hundreds of sutras translated during this period. A translator was lucky if half the texts he produced were actually used by practitioners, much less kept in circulation. In this regard, Dharmakshema did better than most. Of the two dozen works attributed to him, more than half have survived.

The second translation of the *Lankavatara* was more

fortunate. This translation was made by Gunabhadra, another monk from Central India. But unlike Dharmakshema, he traveled by sea instead of by the overland route. In 435, two years after Dharmakshema's assassination, Gunabhadra arrived in the southern seaport of Nanhai (Kuangchou), and he seems to have been expected. As soon as he reached China, he was invited by the ruler of the Liu Sung kingdom to his capital at Chienkang (Nanching). And once he reached Chienkang, Gunabhadra stayed in and around the Liu Sung capital for the next thirty years, while he worked on translations, assisted, it was said, by a staff of 700. One of the places he stayed was Chihuan Monastery in Tanyang. This was where he was living when he completed his translation of the *Lankavatara* in 443.

By the time Gunabhadra died in 468, in addition to the *Lankavatara*, he was credited with translating fifty other texts, including the *Sandhinirmocana Sutra*, which was the earliest known text of Yogacara Buddhism. Although we don't know if he lectured on the *Lankavatara* or if he was conversant with Zen, two hundred years later, the Northern School of Zen credited Gunabhadra with bringing Zen to China, such was the importance of the sutra he translated.

ASIA c. 450 AD



Thus, by the middle of the fifth century, there were two translations of the *Lankavatara* available in China. But there was still no record of the sutra being taught or studied and no record of Zen until another monk arrived. This monk's name was Bodhidharma. He was from South India, and he also arrived by sea. No one knows exactly when, but Tao-hsuan's biography of him says he arrived in Nanhai sometime before 479. Following his arrival, he too traveled north, but he kept a low enough profile that we know nothing more about his life, other than what hagiographers added several centuries later, until he showed up in a cave near Shaolin Monastery. On his way there, perhaps he traveled to Chienkang, and perhaps that was where he learned about Gunabhadra's translation of the

Lankavatara. Perhaps he even arrived early enough that the two monks met. But regardless of his peregrinations, he eventually settled on the sacred mountain of Sungshan, forty miles southeast of Loyang. The cave where he is said to have meditated for nine years is still there on the mountain behind Shaolin. This was where he is also said to have transmitted the teaching of Zen and a copy of Gun-abhadra's translation of the *Lankavatara* to Hui-k'o.

Ironically, it was also in Loyang and about the same time that a third translation of the *Lankavatara* was made. Ever since the Northern Wei moved its capital from Pingcheng to Loyang in 494, this had become the greatest urban center of North China, with a half million residents, and thousands of foreign monks made it their home. Among them was a monk from North India named Bodhiruchi, who arrived there in 508 via the Silk Road.

The place where Bodhiruchi lived while he worked on translations was Yungning Monastery, and it was there that he completed his translation of the *Lankavatara* in 513. An account of Buddhist temples in Loyang published in 547 by Yang Hsuan-chih records an Indian monk named Dharma (presumably Bodhidharma) remarking that he had never seen anything so impressive as this temple's three-hundred-foot-high pagoda, which was built in 516 and which burned to the ground in 534. Whether or not Dharma was Bodhidharma, it still would have been strange if the two monks did not meet at some point during this period. Both Bodhiruchi and Bodhidharma are also said to have died in Loyang within a year or two of each other (circa 534 and 536, respectively) in the chaos that accompanied the division of the Northern Wei into a Western and an Eastern Wei. Some accounts even attribute Bodhidharma's death to

poisoning by jealous disciples of Bodhiruchi. Although it is very likely that Bodhidharma knew about Bodhiruchi's translation of the *Lanka* (and perhaps Dharmakshema's as well), it is clear that he and the early patriarchs of Zen preferred Gunabhadra's version. This was the text he handed to his successor, and his successor handed to his, and his successor handed to his.

Thus, both the teaching of Zen and the use of Gunabhadra's translation of the *Lankavatara* in its transmission began in the Loyang area in the first half of the sixth century. But Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o were not the only ones using the *Lanka*. Among the five hundred monks whose biographies are recorded in Tao-hsuan's *Hsukaosengchuan*, nearly a dozen are reported to have written commentaries or lectured on the *Lanka* in the second half of the sixth century or the first half of the seventh century. Although none of these early commentaries have survived, their mention attests to the importance of the *Lanka* among certain practitioners. And I should stress this point about certain practitioners. The *Lanka* is not a text that welcomes the casual reader. An understanding of its teaching requires a teacher, or incredibly good karma. And such teachers and karma have always been rare. There have been times when the *Lanka* achieved a certain amount of popularity, but it has never been a text whose readership was widespread—its reputation, yes, but not its readership.

It was also during the first half of the seventh century that we see a transition in the use of the *Lanka* by the early Zen masters themselves. Bodhidharma had a handful of disciples, as did the Second Patriarch Hui-k'o, and the Third Patriarch Seng-ts'an. However, the Fourth Patriarch Tao-hsin (d. 651) had over five hundred disciples, and the Fifth Patriarch Hung-jen (d. 675) had

more than a thousand. The cause of this sudden efflorescence was the establishment of the first Zen monasteries in China.

Up until the seventh century, the transmission of Zen was based on a private relationship between a teacher and a handful of students. Thus, it is not surprising that Zen remained such a hidden tradition. In such a setting, a text like the *Lankavatara* could be used to its advantage. But with the establishment of large-scale Zen communes, Zen masters looked for something better suited to larger audiences of varying degrees of comprehension. They found their text in the *Diamond Sutra*. This was the sutra the Fifth Patriarch transmitted to Hui-neng, the illiterate rice-pounder (or so he has been presented), who became the Sixth Patriarch in 672. Ironically, this transmission took place with the *Lankavatara* forming the backdrop. It was only after Shen-hsiu and Hui-neng, the two contenders to become the Fifth Patriarch's successor, had written their competing poems on the monastery wall previously scheduled for scenes from the *Lanka* that the patriarchship and the future direction of Zen was decided. For readers interested, the story of this event, putative or not, is laid out in detail at the beginning of the *Platform Sutra*.

Even though the *Diamond Sutra* replaced the *Lankavatara* in terms of making the teaching of Zen more accessible to larger audiences, the *Lankavatara* continued to attract those who appreciated the challenge and the rewards of the more difficult text. One such person was Shen-hsiu, the loser of the poetry contest that made Hui-neng the Sixth Patriarch. He was a great admirer of the *Lanka*. In fact, he asked to be buried beneath a small hillock he named Mount Lanka, and where his body has remained since his death in 706. And he wasn't the only one

interested in the sutra.

In 698, Empress Wu Tse-t'ien asked a monk from the Silk Road kingdom of Khotan to produce a new translation of the *Lanka*, one that she could read. The Khotanese monk's name was Shikshananda, and at the Empress' request he prepared a rough draft. But when he was done, he asked and was given permission to return home, and the task of revising his draft fell to Mi-t'uo-shan, a monk from the Silk Road kingdom of Tokhara, who was assisted by the Chinese monks Fu-li and Fa-tsang.

Their joint translation was completed in 704, and shortly thereafter Fa-tsang wrote a commentary on the sutra. Although it was only a summary, taking up but eight pages in the Taisho Canon (volume 39), it includes some interesting information. For example, Fa-tsang said that he and his fellow translators had five Sanskrit copies from which to work. He also noted that in the Silk Road kingdom of Khotan, where Shikshananda was from, the *Lankavatara* was said to exist in much larger versions, one consisting of 100,000 stanzas and another of 36,000, compared to the slightly more than 1,000 stanzas for the version he and his colleagues translated. Of course, similar statements were made about other sutras for which no such epic versions have ever been found. But even if this was just an account of someone's fantasy, it does suggest that someone thought highly enough of the *Lanka*, either in India or along the Silk Road, to have copies made and distributed and that someone elevated it to membership in that pantheon of scriptures too stupendous for human eyes, but not for the human imagination.

Another item of interest is an essay written in 708 by a monk named Ching-chueh entitled *Leng-ch'ieh-shih-tz'u-chi*

(“Records of the Masters of the *Lanka*”). In this essay, he lists the first Zen patriarchs beginning with Gunabhadra, followed by Bodhidharma, Hui-k’o, Seng-ts’an, Tao-hsin, Hung-jen, and then Shen-hsiu and other students of Hung-jen, instead of Hui-neng. This was the lineage of what became known as the Northern School of Zen that took exception to the selection of Hui-neng as the Sixth Patriarch, rather than Shen-hsiu. Although Ching-chueh’s account is somewhat biased—he was a disciple of Shen-hsiu—his essay is still noteworthy for honoring Gunabhadra as the man who established the teaching of Zen in China through his translation of the *Lanka*.

This status is also reflected in the commentarial tradition. Despite the more accessible Chinese of Shikshananda’s translation, whenever anyone wrote a commentary on the *Lankavatara*, he invariably based it on Gunabhadra’s version. Unfortunately, except for three pages of comments attributed to Aryadeva (according to most scholars, erroneously) that critique Hinayana doctrines in the *Lanka*, an eight-page summary by Fa-tsang, and surviving portions of a longer commentary by another Khotanese contemporary of Fa-tsang, no early commentaries have come down to us, except as quoted material in later commentaries. It is not until nearly six hundred years later that we get commentaries that have been passed down intact to the present day. Nowadays we have the good fortune to have more than twenty to choose from. But all are based on Gunabhadra’s translation.

As I have mentioned, the *Lankavatara* can appear forbidding, and Gunabhadra’s translation certainly is not inviting. In a preface by Su Tung-p’o written in 1085 for a new edition of Gunabhadra’s translation, China’s most famous poet of the day

wrote, “The meaning of the *Lankavatara* is so subtle and illusive and its language so unadorned and antiquated that the reader is often unable to read it, much less get past the words to the meaning or past the meaning to its heart.” What made it so difficult to read was that despite translating the text into Chinese, Gunabhadra was apparently concerned that he might misrepresent the meaning and often resorted to retaining the Sanskrit word order, rendering passages where he does this nearly incomprehensible. And yet, this is the version on which all commentaries are based, and it is the one I have chosen to translate. I am not sure how previous commentators have managed to understand as much of the text as they have. No doubt, they did what I did, which was to compare Gunabhadra’s translation with those of Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda and, when possible, the Sanskrit.

When Suzuki translated the *Lankavatara* into English eighty years ago, he decided to do just the opposite. He based himself on the recension of the Sanskrit text prepared by Bunyiu Nanjio in 1923. As a recension, it was a composite based on half a dozen copies that went back no earlier than the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that contained hundreds of errors. It almost appears as if these copies were not meant to be read, as if they were copied for merit and based on other copies copied for merit. Suzuki was aware of the problematic nature of Nanjio’s Sanskrit recension, but he felt that it brought him closer to the original. And whenever he couldn’t make sense of the Sanskrit, he turned to the Chinese of Shikshananda for help—and less frequently to that of Bodhiruchi, and hardly ever to that of Gunabhadra.

Unfortunately, the Sanskrit text at our disposal has not

improved. In 1963, the Indian scholar P. L. Vaidya produced a second recension, but it was only marginally different from Nanjio's, if only because it was based on the same flawed copies. More recently, the Japanese scholar Gishin Tokiwa has produced an entirely new Sanskrit text. But it is not a new recension, nor is it based on any newly discovered Sanskrit copies. Rather, it is the result of translating Gunabhadra's Chinese text back into Sanskrit. I should note that there are also two Tibetan translations. One is a translation made by Chosgrub around A.D. 840. But it, too, is a translation of Gunabhadra's Chinese text. The second is a translation of unknown date by an unknown translator based on what I am told is essentially the same Sanskrit text we have today.

In considering which text to use for my own translation, I really had no choice. My knowledge of Tibetan is non-existent, and my knowledge of Sanskrit amounts to little more than the ability to consult dictionaries and follow what others have already translated. I suppose I could have looked over Suzuki's shoulder and tried to improve on what he had done. But I saw no advantage in that, certainly no challenge. And so I turned to the Chinese. Feeling a bit like Goldilocks, I concluded Bodhiruchi's translation was too full of glosses and digressions. And Shikshananda's, despite being more or less readable, suffered from too many oversimplifications. For all its unusual syntax, Gunabhadra's translation, I decided, was the momma bear of texts.

Although making sense of it has been challenging, I am surprised how straightforward it became once I found the two threads that held this sutra together. Basically, the teaching of the *Lankavatara* is similar to the approach used by later Zen

masters who offered their disciples a cup of tea, then asked them to taste the tea. The cup of tea in this case is the Buddha's teaching that traces the universe of our awareness, be it mundane or metaphysical, back to our mind. This is the cup of tea into which this sutra is poured.

The Buddha expresses this teaching by describing the world we think of as real as *sva-citta-dryshya-matra*: "nothing but the perceptions of our own mind." By this, he does not mean that the mind sees or that something is seen by the mind, for any subject or object would be yet another projection of the mind. He simply means that whatever we see or think or feel is our own mind, which is, of course, a tautology. A=A. But then what Buddhist teaching isn't a tautology?

Having put this cup of tea into our hands, the Buddha then asks us to taste the tea, to experience the tautology for ourselves. The phrase he uses to express this is *pratyatma gati*: "personal/inner/self-realization," or he qualifies the nature of such realization as *sva-pratyatma arya-jnana*: "the self-realization of buddha knowledge." The importance of this, which is repeated over and over in these and similar words, was not lost on Suzuki, who noted, "The *Lankavatara* has come to see that the whole of the Buddhist life is not merely in seeing into the truth, but in living it, experiencing it." (*Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, pg. 105)

Of course, the *Lanka* consists in more than these two phrases. But if you keep these two in view, you won't be distracted by the attractions of the Buddha's teahouse. Written in language that would later become part of the Yogacara school of Buddhism, the *Lanka* provides a view of how the mind works and how the path to enlightenment works, but it uses

such devices to get our attention. They are not the teaching. Think of the *Lankavatara* as Zen tea in a Yogacara cup.

Buddhism is concerned with suffering, which is the inevitable result of desire. But the real issue is the self, which is the cause of the desire, which is the cause of the suffering. In the centuries following the Buddha's Nirvana, instruction centered around a trio of concepts designed to focus attention in such a way that the nonexistence of the self would become evident and the liberation from suffering would follow. These included the five skandhas (form, sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness), the twelve ayatanas (six powers and six domains of sensation) and the eighteen dhatus (the ayatanas with the addition of six forms of consciousness). These were three views of the same thing: our mind. They were simply different ways of dividing any given moment of awareness into a manageable matrix to demonstrate to anyone willing to wander around these matrices that they contained the universe of our awareness, its inside and its outside, and yet they contained no self. That was their function: to show practitioners that there was no self.

While these three schemes dealt with the problem of a self, they didn't help explain how we become attached to a self in the first place and how we go from attachment to detachment and thus liberation. Hence, to these were added three more schemes, all of which play a much larger role in the *Lankavatara* than the previous trio. The three new schemes are those of the five dharmas, the three modes of reality, and the eight forms of consciousness.

The five dharmas divide our world into name, appearance, projection, correct knowledge, and suchness; the three modes

of reality do the same with imagined reality, dependent reality, and perfected reality; and the eight forms of consciousness include the five forms of sensory consciousness, conceptual consciousness, the will or self-consciousness, and an eighth form, known as repository consciousness, where the seeds from our previous thoughts, words, and deeds are stored and from which they sprout and grow.

As with the earlier trio of concepts, these were designed to account for our awareness without introducing a self. But they had the advantage of also providing a look at how our worlds of self-delusion and self-liberation come about, how enlightenment works, how we go from projection of name and appearance to correct knowledge of suchness, how we go from an imagined reality to a perfected reality, how we transform our eightfold consciousness into buddhahood. These schemes were most likely developed separately among different groups of practitioners, but they eventually became the hallmarks of Yogacara Buddhism, with its emphasis on tracing everything back to the mind, back to that cup of tea. The *Lankavatara* operates within this universe of Yogacara discourse, and it likewise puts that cup of tea into our hands. But then the *Lanka* sets all of these schemes aside in the interest of urging us to taste the tea for ourselves.

The Buddha tells Mahamati to let all conceptions go, let the five dharmas go, let the three modes of reality go, let the eight forms of consciousness go, let the tathagatagarbha go, let everything go. The Buddha's advice in the *Lankavatara* is for us to drink that cup of tea and not to concern ourselves with where that experience fits into some previously constructed matrix of the mind. Of course, drinking the tea of the mind

doesn't take place in space, nor does it occur in a crowd. Hence, the Buddha offers this ancient advice: "If bodhisattvas wish to understand the realm of projection in which what grasps and what is grasped are nothing but perceptions of their own minds, they should avoid social intercourse and sleep and cultivate the discipline of mindfulness during the three periods of the night." (Chapter Two, X) Cup of tea or not, no one said it was going to be easy. It wasn't easy when this sutra was written, and it hasn't gotten any easier. The modern world is so full of distractions. Why would anyone want to meditate when they can watch TV, play video games, or surf the web? Just sitting down with a cup of tea can be so hard.

The first time I heard about the *Lanka* was during the seventies when I was living at Haiming Monastery in the hills south of Taipei. The abbot talked about the *Lanka* as if it was the holy grail of Zen. His name was Wu-ming, and in addition to being the head of the Taiwan Buddhist Association, he was also the head of the island's Linchi (Rinzai) Zen lineage. I took his estimate of the *Lanka's* significance seriously, and I bought a copy of Gunabhadra's translation on one of my weekly trips into the city. The sutra turned out to be impenetrable. So on a subsequent trip, I bought a copy of Suzuki's English translation. I thought if I read the English and Chinese side by side I would have no problem understanding the text. I was mistaken. Neither language helped. I gave up and moved on to other things, namely, the literary remains of Cold Mountain, Stonehouse, and Bodhidharma and the legacy of China's hermit tradition.

In the thirty-five years since then, I have periodically considered giving the *Lanka* another try. But I have gotten into the habit of translating Buddhist texts in order to understand

them—as my practice of the Dharma—and I was not convinced that the *Lanka* was such a text. Then ten years ago, on a visit to Sanmin Shuchu, my favorite bookstore in Taipei, I came across a volume (excerpted from the *Hsutsangching*, volume 1, pp 445-681) that compared all three Chinese translations of the *Lanka* paragraph by paragraph. It was just the sort of encouragement I needed. Now that I had all three Chinese versions in front of me, I did what comes natural and produced a composite rendering, choosing one line from one translation and another line from another. The result, though, was far from satisfactory. Even though I was putting words on the page, I still didn't understand what they meant.

While I was deciding how to proceed, the opportunity to work on the *Heart Sutra* presented itself. It was such a relief, like running barefoot after wearing army boots. Still, after I finished the *Heart Sutra*, I resumed work on the *Lanka*, this time basing my translation on that of Shikshananda, whose Chinese was the easiest to understand. But before I had gotten very far, I was rescued once more, this time by the *Platform Sutra*. Once again, it was an easy choice. And when the *Platform* was done, I had no trouble finding something else to work on. I was avoiding the *Lanka*.

Then one day in the spring of 2009, while talking about possible projects with Jack Shoemaker, the publisher of this book, my pressing need for a book advance, and his desire to publish a translation of the *Lankavatara* dovetailed into a book contract with a two-year deadline. I wonder how many other books have been born from such a conjunction. More than a few, I imagine. And so, several months later, I supplied myself with a set of Chinese commentaries on my next trip to Taiwan,

and I began work that summer.

Ever since then, I have worked on this translation with few interruptions and have actually gotten to like the *Lanka*. I have even gotten to like Gunabhadra's translation. Once I became accustomed to his syntax, most of it was not that difficult. But most of it does not mean all of it. Sometimes I felt like I was trying to see through a wall. Hence, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my gratitude to those who made it possible for me to understand what I thought was not possible to understand.

I doubt if I would have undertaken this work in the first place if not for D. T. Suzuki's pioneering work on this sutra—not only his translation of the text, but also his *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra* and his *Index to the Lankavatara Sutra*. These three books were of enormous help. I am also indebted to the monks whose commentaries provided me with insights into the meaning as well as the wording of the text: the Ming-dynasty monks T'ung-jun, Tseng-Feng-yi, and Te-ch'ing and the twentieth-century monks T'ai-hsu and Yin-shun. Without their help, I would have been lost.

In addition to translating the text of the sutra, I have also added summaries, comments, and notes, many of which are indebted to the monks whose commentaries I relied on. I have also noted any phrases or lines for which I have preferred the translations of Bodhiruchi or Shikshananda over that of Gunabhadra. Although I have already stated my reasons for not using the Sanskrit text itself, in the notes I have frequently listed the romanized Sanskrit for key terms (alas, without the usual diacritics) to give readers an opportunity to explore their wider range of meaning by themselves.

Finally, this translation and its commentary have also benefited immeasurably from the generosity of two of the world's most respected scholars of Buddhism, Dan Lusthaus and Paul Harrison, both of whom set aside their own work to read through earlier drafts. They have suggested numerous corrections and improvements, and my debt to them is so sufficiently great that I will have to wait for some future lifetime to balance accounts.

Before passing the results on to the reader, I should note that I have decided not to include the collection of verses that were appended to the *Lankavatara* sometime between Gunabhadra's translation (443), in which it is absent, and Bodhiruchi's (513), in which it is present. It was given the title of *Sagathakam* (Collection of Verses) by Nanjio and includes 884 four-line poems, among which 205 also appear in the main body of the *Lanka*. Whether one of them borrowed from the other or whether they shared a common source is impossible to say. In any case, the *Sagathakam* reads as if it was a selection meant to accompany oral instruction. And in the absence of such instruction or an understanding of the context of the poems, I have decided to forego the challenge a translation would have entailed. Still, it does include some worthwhile poems, and fortunately it has already been translated in its entirety as part of Suzuki's translation of this sutra.

In regard to my own work on the *Lanka*, I thought I would never get this far—to the point where I would be writing a preface. Admittedly, I'm glad to be passing it on. And naturally, I wish I could have done a better job. But I'm reminded of a comment Nan Huai-chin made to me during a five-hour dinner at his home in Shanghai five years ago. The ninety-year-old Zen

layman recounted when he was young asking Empty Cloud why the old master kept restoring Zen monasteries but never finished them. Empty Cloud slapped his young disciple on the back of the head and said, “Smart aleck. If I finished them, what would the next generation have to do?” Indeed, I have left plenty of work for those to come. Meanwhile, I think it’s time for that cup of tea.

RED PINE
APRIL 1, 2011
PORT TOWNSEND, WASHINGTON

CHAPTER ONE:¹

KING RAVANA'S REQUEST²



Thus have I heard.³ Once the Bhagavan was staying in the South Seas on the peaks of Lanka⁴ in a place adorned by countless jewels and flowers. In addition to an assembly of great monks, he was also joined by a host of great bodhisattvas from other buddhalands. Led by Mahamati Bodhisattva-Mahasattva,⁵ they were masters of every kind of samadhi, spiritual power and psychic ability and were the recipients of the blessings of countless buddhas. Skilled in the knowledge that external objects are perceptions of one's own mind,⁶ they had opened doors of liberation for beings of every mental and physical capacity and were thoroughly versed in the five dharmas, the modes of reality, the forms of consciousness, and the two kinds of no-self.⁷

At that time,⁸ the Bhagavan had been expounding the Dharma for seven days in the palace of Sagara, the Serpent King.⁹ Upon

reappearing, he was welcomed by Shakra and Brahma¹⁰ and a host of serpent maidens. Lifting his eyes and beholding Lanka's Mount Malaya,¹¹ he smiled and said, "On Lanka's Mount Malaya, the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones of the past have taught the self-realization of buddha knowledge,¹² which is beyond the comprehension of shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas¹³ or the mistaken knowledge of followers of other paths. Today, for the sake of Ravana, ruler of the yakshas,¹⁴ I, too, will teach this teaching."

By the power of the Tathagata, King Ravana heard these words of the Buddha and knew that the Bhagavan had reappeared from the Serpent King's palace accompanied by Shakra and Brahma and countless serpent maidens. And he saw the thoughts of those in that assembly stirred by the wind of externality and rising like so many waves in the oceans of their repository consciousness.¹⁵ Ravana shouted joyfully, "I will go and invite the Bhagavan to Lanka for the lasting happiness and welfare of humans and devas!"

King Ravana then mounted his flower-decked chariot and with his royal retinue went to see the Buddha. Upon arriving, they all dismounted and walked around the Bhagavan three times from left to right.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the king's musicians strummed lutes inlaid with aquamarine¹⁷ using picks of the bluest sapphire. Then hanging them at their sides from straps of the costliest cloth, they sang gathas¹⁸ in praise of the Buddha according to the grama and murchana¹⁹ modes and in the kaishika²⁰ melodic style accompanied by a chorus of flutes:

1. "To the Dharma treasury of the self-existent mind /
free from defilement or belief in a self / may the Buddha

teach us the path / to the knowledge found within ourselves

2. In his body of perfected merit / displaying the transformed and transforming / the joy of self-realization / may the Buddha come to Lanka today

3. Buddhas of the past have appeared on Lanka / accompanied by bodhisattvas of countless forms / pray honor us with the peerless Dharma / every yaksha is hoping to hear.”

Ravana, king of the yakshas, then sang gathas in the totaka meter:

4. “After seven nights the Buddha has risen / from the sea where leviathans dwell / from the palace of the Serpent King, Sagara / happily he has come to this shore

5. And now that the Buddha has risen / I have come with my apsara queen²² / with Shuka and Sarana²³ / with yakshas and learned men

6. Conveyed before the Buddha by an unseen force / we dismount our flower-decked carts and bow / present our names and offerings / and hope for the Bhagavan’s blessing

7. I am Ravana who comes before you / the ten-headed king of the yakshas / may the Buddha favor this Lanka of mine / and all who dwell in its towns

8. Buddhas of the past within its cities / upon its jewel-strewn peaks / spoke of what they themselves attained / the realm of self-realization²⁴

9. May the Bhagavan do so as well / together with these sons of victors²⁵ / the residents of Lanka and I would listen / to his teaching of the purest Dharma

10. To the *Lankavatara* praised by past buddhas /

to what they themselves attained / the realm of self-realization / unknown among other schools

11. I recall in previous ages / buddhas accompanied by the sons of victors / recited this sutra out loud / may the Bhagavan do so today

12. Buddhas in the future and the sons of victors / they too will pity this yaksha assembly / they too will ascend this jewel-decked summit / and teach this profoundest of teachings

13. The city of Lanka is a city of wonders / adorned with every known jewel / surrounded by lovely cool peaks / and shaded by canopies of pearls

14. The yakshas present today, Bhagavan / have transcended desire and anger / they have honored buddhas and looked within / and have urged each other to turn to the Mahayana

15. Yaksha boys and girls as well / thirst to hear the Mahayana / to the city of Lanka on Mount Malaya / Bhagavan, come be our teacher

16. Kumbhakarna and his rakshasas²⁶ / they also dwell in this city / devotees of the Mahayana / they too would learn about self-realization

17. Having honored buddhas with devotion in the past / they hope to do so again / out of compassion, please come / come with these sons of victors to Lanka

18. Mahamuni,²⁷ accept my palace / together with its apsara host / my crown and necklaces too / and my delightful ashoka groves²⁸

19. All I possess I give to the Buddha / and to these sons of victors / there is nothing I would not give /

Mahamuni, have compassion on me.”

20. To this, the Lord of the Three Realms replied,²⁹ /
”Ruler of the Yakshas / to this jeweled peak / the teachers
of the past have come

21. Out of compassion for you they have taught / the
way of self-realization / and on this jewel-adorned peak /
so shall they teach in the future

22. For this is where practitioners dwell³⁰ / who
delight in that which is present³¹ / King of the Yakshas, you
have known / the compassion of sugatas and now shall
know mine.³²

23. Accepting this invitation / the Bhagavan stood
without speaking / Ravana then offered his chariot of
flowers / which the Buddha mounted and rode inside.

24. With his retinue Ravana followed / along with the
bodhisattvas / as the Buddha advanced toward the city /
apsaras sang and danced in his honor

25. Once the Buddha had passed through its gates /
to the reverent bows of the yaksha throng / joined by
Ravana and the yaksha men / and also the yaksha women

26. A group of yaksha boys and girls / presented the
Bhagavan with a net of pearls / while Ravana placed
strands of jewels / around the necks of the Victor and the
Victor’s sons

27. As the Buddha and the wise bodhisattvas /
acknowledged these offerings of jewels / each in turn
spoke in praise / of the fathomless realm of self-realization

28. Then Ravana and the yaksha throng / having
honored the best of teachers / asked and beseeched
Mahamati / who was known for requesting the Dharma

29. "You have asked the Buddha before / concerning the realm of self-realization / we yakshas and the bodhisattvas present / come before you with this request

30. You are the most eloquent speaker / a devoted practitioner too / thus we sincerely beseech the Master / to ask the Buddha for this teaching

31. Free from the faults of other paths / of pratyekabuddhas and shravakas / the immaculate teaching realized within / the teaching that leads to buddhahood."

32. The Buddha thereupon conjured mountains / peaks covered with jewels / beautiful scenes of every sort / adorned with countless gems

33. And on each jewel-covered peak / the Buddha could also be seen / and standing at his side / Ravana the yaksha appeared

34. Also the entire assembly / was visible on each summit / and in every land / another buddha was present

35. And together with the king of Lanka / its residents appeared as well / inside their conjured cities / gazing upon each other

36. Other things also appeared / the products of the Buddha's power / ashoka groves and sunlit forests / and nothing in anyway different

37. And Mahamati on each peak / was asking on behalf of the yaksha king / for the teaching of self-realization / which the buddhas spoke in countless voices

38. And after they had spoken³³ / these buddhas and bodhisattvas vanished / only Ravana the yaksha remained / standing inside his palace

39. He wondered what really happened / who spoke

just now and who listened / who saw and what was seen /
and where did those cities and buddhas go:

40. "Where did those cities go / those radiant
buddhas, those sugatas / were they a dream or an illusion /
or were they the work of gandharvas³⁴

41. Were they the result of cataract eyes / or was
what I saw a mirage / dream children of a barren woman /
the smoke and flames from a wheel of fire?

42. Such is the nature of things / the realm of nothing
but mind³⁵ / this is something the foolish don't know /
bewildered by false projections

43. There is no seer or anything seen / no speaker or
anything spoken / the appearance of buddhas and also
their teachings / are merely what we imagine

44. Those who view such things as real / they don't
see the Buddha / nor do those who imagine nothing / only
those who transform their existence. "³⁶

With this, the Lord of Lanka felt an awakening and transformation of his consciousness, as he realized what appeared was nothing but the perceptions of his own mind,³⁷ and he found himself in a realm free from such projections. Due to the stockpile of good karma from previous lives, he suddenly gained an understanding of all teachings, the ability to see things as they really are and not how others see them, how to examine things with his own wisdom while remaining free from discursive views, and all the abilities of a great yogin³⁸ no longer dependent on others: namely, how to manifest himself in various auspicious forms, how to master all skillful means, how to know the nature and characteristics of the stages of advancement, how to delight in detachment from the self-existence of mind, will, and

conceptual consciousness,³⁹ how to liberate himself from views involving the three continuities,⁴⁰ how to refute the arguments of followers of other paths concerning causation, how to understand buddhahood, self-realization, and the tathagata-garbha,⁴¹ and how to live with the knowledge of a buddha.

Then from the sky and from within himself⁴² he heard a voice say, “Well done, Lord of Lanka, well done. Practitioners should practice as you have practiced. They should see tathagatas and dharmas as you have seen them—any other way would be nihilistic. They should examine things while remaining free from the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness. They should look within and not be misled by external appearances or fall prey to the doctrines, views, or meditations of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, or followers of other paths. They should not delight in idle or frivolous talk, or cling to the views of the *Vedas*,⁴³ or become attached to exercising power over others, or indulge in such meditations as the six dhyanas.⁴⁴

“This, Lord of Lanka, is the understanding of all great practitioners, who thereby overcome false doctrines and refute mistaken views, who eliminate attachment to a self, and who make use of the subtlest wisdom to transform their consciousness.⁴⁵ This is the Mahayana path that leads to the stage attained by buddhas. You should therefore devote yourself to such an understanding.

“Lord of Lanka, this teaching will become clearer as you become adept at cultivating samadhi and samapatti.⁴⁶ But don’t become attached to the realms cultivated by lesser practitioners and followers of other paths or consider the states they imagine as blissful. Followers of other paths cling to the belief in a self

and the view that the world is real and that material elements, substances, and tendencies exist.⁴⁷ Or they insist that ignorance and the chain of causation are real. They make distinctions where there is only emptiness. Lost in projections, they become captives of the actors and actions of their own minds.

“Lord of Lanka, this teaching is the pinnacle of Mahayana understanding, for it enables practitioners to achieve self-realization and to enjoy higher levels of existence. Lord of Lanka, through such understanding one removes obstructions and calms the myriad waves of consciousness and no longer falls prey to the views and practices of other paths. Lord of Lanka, because followers of other paths cling to their belief in a self, they become lost in dualistic views concerning the nature of consciousness. Well done, Lord of Lanka. As you reflected just now upon the meaning of seeing the tathagatas, this is how you should view the Buddha.”

Ravana then thought to himself,⁴⁸ “I wish I could see the Bhagavan again. For the Bhagavan is the master of all those forms of yoga that give rise to an inner realization free from fabricator or fabrication and beyond the understanding of followers of other paths. His is the knowledge realized by yogins, and his is the experience of the bliss of samadhi, the great bliss only attained through meditation.

“I wish by means of his miraculous powers I could see the Compassionate One again, the one in whom the fuel of passion and projection has been burned up, the one surrounded by the sons of buddhas who is able to penetrate the thoughts of all beings and travel to all places and know all dharmas without showing any sign of effort. I wish I could see him so that I might attain what I have not yet attained and not relinquish what I have

already attained and might advance to that realm marked by the absence of projection and the great bliss of samadhi where tathagatas dwell.”

Knowing that the Lord of Lanka had already attained the forbearance of non-arising,⁴⁹ out of compassion for the ten-headed king, the Bhagavan once more appeared on the jewel-adorned, pearl-shaded summit. And the Lord of Lanka once more beheld all the glorious scenes that appeared earlier on the peaks, including the buddhas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones with their thirty-two inspiring attributes,⁵⁰ and with himself and Mahamati standing before them on each peak while the buddhas discoursed on the inner realization experienced by tathagatas and while the yakshas surrounding them discussed the language used to express this teaching. All this was witnessed by the King.

The Bhagavan, too, saw all those assembled there, but by means of his inner awareness, not his physical eye. Like a yawning lion, he smiled a great smile. And he emitted rays of light from the curl between his brows, from his sides and his waist, from the swastika⁵¹ on his chest, and from every hair and pore, a blazing radiance that resembled a world-destroying conflagration, rainbows in the sky, or the sun at dawn.⁵² From afar, Shakra and Brahma and the Four Guardians⁵³ beheld the Bhagavan sitting and smiling at the summit of Lanka, as if it were Mount Sumeru.⁵⁴ Together with the bodhisattvas in the assembly, they all asked themselves: “Why is the Bhagavan, the master of all dharmas, smiling like this and radiating light from his body? And why is he sitting there without speaking, unmoved by the bliss of samadhi or the self-realization of buddha knowledge, and gazing like the king of beasts upon Ravana and concerned

with the progress of his practice?”

Mahamati Bodhisattva had previously agreed to Ravana’s request out of compassion and knew the thoughts of the bodhisattvas in the assembly. And he knew that because of their delight in verbal instruction, beings in future ages might become confused by their preference for words over meaning or by their attachment to the practices of lesser paths or other teachings, and they might wonder since the Tathagata had already transcended the realm of consciousness why he was smiling such a great smile. In anticipation of their curiosity, Mahamati asked the Buddha, “What is the cause of such a smile?”⁵⁵

The Buddha replied, “Excellent, Mahamati. It is excellent that upon considering the true nature of the world and hoping to awaken beings of the past, the present, and the future from mistaken views, you have asked me about this. For a wise man should ask questions, not only for his own benefit but also for the benefit of others. Mahamati, Ravana, the Lord of Lanka, has asked the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones of the past, a twofold question,⁵⁶ which he now wishes to ask me.⁵⁷ And because this teaching is not something those who follow lesser paths or other teachings can understand, this ten-headed yaksha shall also ask buddhas in the future.”

Aware that Ravana wished to question him, the Bhagavan said, “Lord of Lanka, whatever you would ask, ask now, and I will put an end to your doubts and replace them with joy, and you will be able to see by means of wisdom, Lord of Lanka, instead of projection. And you will be able to know the practices appropriate for each stage and the way to attain the truth of self-realization and the bliss of samadhi. And while in samadhi, you will be protected by buddhas and will avoid the

mistakes cultivated by those of lesser paths. And while dwelling in the unshakeable stage, the wisdom stage, and the dharma cloud stage⁵⁸ of the bodhisattva path, you will penetrate the truth that all dharmas are without self-existence,⁵⁹ and you will find yourself seated upon a giant, jeweled lotus flower, where you will enter countless samadhis and be instructed by buddhas.

“Lord of Lanka, as you see yourself seated upon this giant, jeweled lotus flower supported by the power of the buddhas, you will be surrounded by countless bodhisattvas also seated on lotus flowers, and all of them will be gazing upon you. This is an indescribable realm. And it is by cultivating the efficacious practices of the various stages of this path that you will be able to see this indescribable realm and thereby experience the infinite characteristics of the tathagata stage, which is something that has never been witnessed by followers of lesser paths or other teachings, not even by Brahma, Shakra, or the Four Guardians.”

As the Buddha spoke, the Lord of Lanka rose to his feet and proceeded to cover the peak with a myriad of flawless jeweled lotuses, while a host of celestial maidens accompanied him bearing multicolored garlands, flowers of every kind and hue, incense and fragrances of every sort, jeweled banners, flowered umbrellas, and colored flags and wearing necklaces of varying lengths, jeweled caps, and filigreed tiaras and all sorts of beautiful attire, the splendor and rarity of which had never been known, much less seen. He also conjured a canopy of pearls and countless jeweled banners above the Buddha and the bodhisattvas and musical instruments surpassing anything that existed among the devas, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, kinnaras, mahoragas,⁶⁰ humans and non-humans in the realm of desire as well as instruments from buddhalands throughout the

ten directions.

After he had done all this, King Ravana suddenly rose in the air to a height equal to more than seven palm trees.⁶¹ And as he stood there in space, all kinds of musical instruments, flowers, perfumes, and garments rained down and filled the sky, which he then used as offerings to the Buddha and the bodhisattvas. And once he had presented his offerings, he descended from the sky and seated himself upon an adjacent jewel-covered peak that was also adorned with giant, jeweled lotuses as bright as the sun or lightning.

Once the Buddha saw that Ravana was seated, he smiled and waited for him to present his twofold question. King Ravana then asked: “Bhagavan, I have asked the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones in the past about the two kinds of dharmas, and they have answered. I am now asking again in hopes that the Bhagavan might explain the meaning of their words.”⁶²

“Bhagavan, I have been instructed in the two kinds of dharmas by apparition buddhas but not by the primordial buddhas.”⁶³ The primordial buddhas cultivate the bliss of samadhi and do not speak about realms imagined by the mind. Most Honored One, as the Tathagata is a master of all dharmas, I hope the Bhagavan, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One will now explain these two kinds of dharmas about which these sons of buddhas and I wish to hear.”

The Buddha replied, “Then ask, Lord of Lanka, about these two kinds of dharmas.”

The king of the yakshas then rearranged the jeweled crown and necklaces and other ornaments that graced his body and said, “The Tathagata has said that dharmas should be

abandoned, and non-dharmas even more so.⁶⁴ Bhagavan, what do you mean when you say we should abandon these two kinds of dharmas? Bhagavan, what constitutes a dharma? And what constitutes a non-dharma? And if we should abandon something, why these two? Wouldn't this result in projecting the existence of something or the nonexistence of something, something that is real and something that is not real? If all we do is give rise to projections, instead of the undifferentiated characteristics of our repository consciousness,⁶⁵ we will behold strands of hair in the sky⁶⁶ and realms of impure knowledge. Bhagavan, if this is the nature of dharmas, how are we to abandon them?"

The Buddha replied, "Lord of Lanka, you see how ignorant people distinguish things, things as fragile and impermanent as a clay pot, do you not? The distinctions among dharmas and non-dharmas⁶⁷ are the projections of foolish people and not how things are viewed according to buddha knowledge.⁶⁸ Lord of Lanka, foolish people see things in terms of characteristics, not the wise.

"Lord of Lanka, fire is seen as something uniform, but when it destroys such things as buildings or trees, its flames are distinguished depending on the shape and size of the material that burns. Why don't you see that dharmas and non-dharmas are distinguished the same way—just as a fire is seen as a singular continuity or as a diversity of flames?⁶⁹ Or consider the continuity of a seed, Lord of Lanka, as it gives rise to such varying forms as sprouts, stems, joints, branches, leaves, buds, flowers, and fruits.⁷⁰ And as with external objects, the same is true of internal objects, whereby ignorance gives rise to such

dharmas as skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas⁷¹ as well as to the varieties of existence in the three realms and to differences in terms of suffering and joy, good and evil, speech and silence. So, too, consciousness and its objects are the same but differ depending on distinctions as to which is superior, neutral or inferior, defiled or pure, good or bad. Not only are there distinctions among such things as these, Lord of Lanka, when yogins practice meditation, the characteristics of their internal realms are also marked by differences. How much more then are dharmas and non-dharmas marked by a multitude of distinctions? Thus, Lord of Lanka, the different characteristics of dharmas and non-dharmas are the result of projection.⁷²

“What, then, Lord of Lanka, is a dharma? A dharma is whatever ordinary people and followers of lesser and heterodox paths imagine. Basically, they think a dharma has existence and substance and arises from causes. Such things must be abandoned and avoided.⁷³ Don’t engage in the projection of appearances or become attached to what are perceptions of your own mind. The things people grasp, such as clay pots, lack any real substance. To view dharmas like this is to abandon them.

“And what, Lord of Lanka, is a non-dharma?⁷⁴ This refers to what has no discernible body of its own, what has no distinguishable characteristics, what is not subject to causation, and what offers no basis for views of its existence or nonexistence. Therefore, it is also to be abandoned. Non-dharmas are things like horns on a rabbit, an ass, a camel, or a horse or the offspring of a barren woman. Such things lack any form or appearance and cannot be perceived. They are merely names talked about according to convention. They are not things

that can be grasped, like a clay pot. And just as what is discriminated as existing should be abandoned, what cannot be known by any form of consciousness should also be abandoned. This is why I say to abandon dharmas and non-dharmas. Lord of Lanka, I have answered what you have asked.

“Lord of Lanka, you say you have asked the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones about this in the past, and they have also answered you. Lord of Lanka, what you call the past is, by another name, a projection. And just as the past is a projection, so are the future and the present. Lord of Lanka, the tathagatas do not project what amounts to reality.⁷⁵ They transcend projection and fabrication⁷⁶ and do not go along with distinguishing forms, except to instruct or to pacify the ignorant. It is by means of such wisdom that tathagatas practice a formless practice. Thus, tathagatas consider knowledge as their real body. And because they consider knowledge as their real body, they are free from projection or anything that projects, such as a self, a life, or a person or any kind of consciousness that gives rise to forms dependent on an objective world. Thus, they are free from what projects and what is projected.

“Lord of Lanka, the appearances of beings are like paintings: they are not conscious and not subject to karma.⁷⁷ The same is true of dharmas and non-dharmas. There is no one who speaks, nor is there anyone who hears. Lord of Lanka, everything in the world is like an illusion. This is beyond the understanding of ignorant beings and the followers of other paths. Lord of Lanka, to see things like this is to see them as they really are. To see otherwise is to see them as they are not, to engage in projection, and to become attached to these two kinds of dharmas. Lord of Lanka, this is like seeing an image in a mirror or a reflection in

water or like seeing a figure in the moonlight or a shadow on a wall or like hearing an echo in a valley. People attached to the images of their own projections cling to dharmas and non-dharmas. Unable to abandon them, they continue to engage in projection and fail to attain tranquility. Tranquility means oneness,⁷⁸ and oneness means the tathagata-garbha, the realm of self-realization of buddha knowledge, from which the supreme samadhi arises.⁷⁹

1 Although we have no early copies of the Sanskrit text of this sutra, those that we do have divide the text into ten chapters—with the tenth chapter being a collection of gathas to which Nanjio Bunyiu gave the title: *Sagathakam* (Verse Anthology). The same ten-chapter division was also used by Shikshananda but not by Bodhiruchi, who divided his translation into eighteen chapters, and not by Gunabhadra, who divided his translation (minus this first chapter, the *Dharani*, and the *Sagathakam*) into four parts, all with the title: “The Heart of the Teaching of Buddhas.” The further division into sections was the work of subsequent commentators, and a number of variations exist. Rather than introduce a new set of section divisions and in order to make comparisons easier, I have followed those of Suzuki, whose sections were based on those of the Japanese monk, Kokan Shiren (1278–1346). However, I have combined chapters Four through Eight into a single chapter, and, unlike Suzuki, I have numbered verses separately for each section rather than for each chapter.

2 Chapter One. In this first chapter, as the Buddha reappears from the palace of the serpent king, Ravana asks for instruction about dharmas, the constituents of reality as perceived and understood by those who divide the world or their own

awareness into parts, and non-dharmas, the creations of our imagination. The Buddha responds with the manifestation of a fun house of illusion, a monumental smile and light, and finally a few words to point Ravana past dharmas and non-dharmas back to his own undifferentiated and undifferentiating mind.

3 As in other Buddhist sutras, the presumed speaker is Ananda, the Buddha's cousin and personal attendant, whose unflinching memory formed the basis for the initial compilation of Shakyamuni's sermons at the First Council, held in 383 B.C. shortly after the Buddha's Nirvana.

4 Lanka refers to the island of Sri Lanka (Holy Lanka).

5 *Maha* means "great," and *mati* (from the root *man*) means "mind." Thus, *maha-mati* means "great-minded" or "wise," and the term was applied to those noted for their wisdom. Thus, Mahamati represents all those who cultivate wisdom. Mahamati is also the name for the planet Jupiter. The appellation "mahasattva" was applied to lions and also to human heroes who shared the fearlessness of lions. It is usually translated as "great being," but "fearless" comes closer. In the interests of simplicity, I have decided to omit mahasattva from its subsequent appearances, but readers can assume its presence after most instances of the word "bodhisattva."

6 The Sanskrit is *sva-citta-drshya* (perceptions of one's own mind). This is one of the two main threads that runs through this sutra, the other being variations of *pratyatma-gati* (personal realization).

7 Among the concepts used in this sutra to explain how the mind works and how we (mis-)perceive reality are the five dharmas: appearance, name, projection, correct knowledge, and suchness; the three modes of reality: imagined, dependent, and

perfected; the eight forms of consciousness: one for each of the six senses—the sixth being conceptual consciousness, a seventh for self-identity and reasoning, and an eighth for storing and distributing the seeds from the habit-energy left behind by the operations of the sixth and seventh forms of consciousness; and two kinds of no-self: the denial of self-existence concerning animate and inanimate objects. For the last phrase, (and I have followed Gunabhadra’s Chinese translation up to the end of this paragraph) the Sanskrit has *nairatmya-advaya*, “non-self and non-duality.” For the relationships among these various concepts, see sections LXXXIII & LXXXIV.

8 With this paragraph, extant Sanskrit texts and the Chinese translations of Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda begin a chapter-long account of the Buddha’s discourse to Ravana, the ruler of Lanka and chief of the yakshas who inhabited this island. None of this appears in Gunabhadra’s translation. But rather than place it in an appendix, I’ve decided it fits better here, especially as it serves to introduce the teaching that follows. Although my translation of the rest of this chapter is based for the most part on the Sanskrit, I have sometimes chosen to follow the Chinese of Bodhiruchi and/or Shikshananda. In cases where such a choice results in a significantly different reading, I have mentioned this in my notes.

9 The Sanskrit for “serpent-king” is *naga-rajā*. In ancient India, as in other early civilizations, serpents were viewed as guardians of knowledge, and buddha knowledge, or *arya-jnana*, is the goal of the practice taught in this sutra. Sagara was one of eight serpent kings who acted as protectors of the Dharma in ancient India. His residence was at the bottom of the ocean, and there are two sutras in the Tripitaka addressed to

him (Taisho 598 and 599), the first of which was extant as early as A.D. 300.

10 Shakra is chief among gods. Brahma is creator of the universe.

11 Malaya is a not-so-veiled reference to the eighth form of consciousness, or *alaya-vijnana*.

12 The Sanskrit is *sva-pratyatma-arya-jnana*. The personal experience of what buddhas know is the second of this sutra's principle teachings. This phrase also appears at the very end of this chapter.

13 Two categories of Hinayana Buddhists devoted to self-liberation and the attainment of nirvana, as opposed to the liberation of all beings and the attainment of enlightenment that characterizes Mahayana Buddhism.

14 Ravana was the ten-headed king of Lanka. His name means "He of the Terrifying Roar," referring to his screams of agony while pinned under a mountain by Shiva. He is still reviled in India for his abduction of the wife of Rama. The yakshas were one of the tribes of ancient India and were demonized along with their king.

15 In this sutra, the mind is viewed as the repository of what remains from all the images we have previously projected upon an "external" world as well as upon an "internal" world and also the source of subsequent projections. Bodhiruchi alone attributes the perception of thoughts here to the Buddha, rather than to Ravana. Still, it is by the power of the Buddha that Ravana sees such thoughts and sees them in a way that agrees with the underlying metaphor of the mind as an ocean and thoughts as its waves.

16 The clockwise circumambulation of a holy person or place

was an ancient way of showing respect in India.

[17](#) *Vaidurya*, aquamarine, a blue form of beryl. After gold and silver, this was the most precious of the *sapta-ratna*, or “seven jewels.” It was later replaced by lapis lazuli, which was far cheaper and easier to obtain.

[18](#) A poetic form usually consisting of quatrains.

[19](#) Grama and murchana are the names of the two earliest known modes or scales of Indian music. The Sanskrit text includes the names of six of their seven keys: saharshya, rishabha, gandhara, dhavata, nishada, and madhyama. That level of detail, however, is only present in the Sanskrit, hence I’ve decided to follow the Chinese in this case.

[20](#) A raga played in the morning in praise of deities.

[21](#) A poetic form of twelve-syllable lines consisting of four identical three-syllable feet. However, the Sanskrit text of the gathas that follow is no longer in the totaka meter, assuming it was originally.

[22](#) Celestial females known for their beauty and grace and also their skill as dancers.

[23](#) Counselors of Ravana who once disguised themselves as monkeys to spy on Rama.

[24](#) The Sanskrit is *pratyatma-gati-gocaram*, where *gocara* (pasture) refers to a perceptual field and/or the objects within that field, while *pratyatma-gati* means “personally realized.”

[25](#) Here and elsewhere, this expression refers to bodhisattvas. The Sanskrit is *jina-putra*.

[26](#) Brother of Ravana. Like the yakshas, the rakshasas were among the ancient tribes of India. The two were related and often confused.

[27](#) An epithet of the Buddha meaning “Great Sage.”

28 In Sanskrit *ashoka* means “free from sorrow.” It is also the name of the *Sac-raca asoca*, known for its dense green foliage and for its fragrant orange flowers that bloom in March and April.

29 The three realms are those of desire, form, and formlessness.

30 The reference here is both to those who dwell on Lanka as well as to those who practice self-realization.

31 The Sanskrit is *drshta-dharma-sukha*. This phrase will make its appearance again, but not until sections LXXXII and LXXXIII.

32 Another epithet of buddhas, *sugata* means “well gone.”

33 According to both Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda.

34 The male counterparts of apsaras, gandharvas were guardians of soma, a hallucinogenic concoction used by priests. They were also skilled musicians who lived in the sky. Hence, to refer to their cloud homes was tantamount to referring to an illusion.

35 It should be clear from this and the foregoing that the teaching Ravana would hear is not that of “mind-only,” which he already understands, or thinks he understands, but that of personal realization, which distinguishes this sutra from all others.

36 The Sanskrit is *paravrtti-bhave*, where *paravrtti* means “to overturn” and *bhave* means “existence.” In the *Diamond Sutra* (5), the Buddha says: “Since the possession of attributes is an illusion, Subhuti, and no possession of attributes is no illusion, by means of attributes that are no attributes the Tathagata can, indeed, be seen.” The third line refers to those whose meditative state is such that it no longer gives rise to thoughts.

37 Along with the personal realization of buddha knowledge,

this is the other thread that runs through this sutra, the teaching known as “mind-only,” that what we perceive is nothing but our own minds: *sva-citta-drshya-matra*.

[38](#) This sutra is clearly addressed to an audience familiar with the yoga teachings of the time, as can be inferred by the appearance of such terms as this. Elsewhere, I have tended to translate this term as “practitioner” to avoid association with any specific tradition.

[39](#) This is my standard rendering for *citta-manas-mano-vijnana*. By *citta* (mind) is meant the eighth, or repository, consciousness; by *manas* (will) is meant the seventh consciousness, which is also called “self-consciousness;” and by *mano-vijnana* (conceptual consciousness) is meant the sixth consciousness, which reifies the five sensory-based forms of consciousness into conceptual constructs. In the *Lankavatara*, conceptual consciousness is viewed as the root of misunderstanding. In other texts, the will is its source. It should be noted, however, that in the *Lankavatara*, this compound sometimes means simply “mind and consciousness.”

[40](#) In Section LXVIII, the Buddha lists the three continuities, or *tri-samtati*, as greed, anger, and delusion, which elsewhere are known as the “three poisons.”

[41](#) The womb of buddhas. The mind purified. The repository consciousness (*alaya-vijnana*) transformed.

[42](#) I’ve followed Bodhiruchi. Shikshananda has “from the sky and from within the palace,” and the Sanskrit has simply “from the sky.”

[43](#) The *Vedas* refer to the scriptures of the Brahmins. This is not present in the Sanskrit, which has instead: “Do not accept views concerning self-existence.” It is, however, present in Bodhiruchi

and Shikshananda.

[44](#) The reference is to meditations aimed at acquiring the six powers.

[45](#) Again, *paravrtti* (overturning/transforming). But here the object is *vijnana* (consciousness), instead of *bhave* (existence) or *ashrya* (basis).

[46](#) These two terms are often used synonymously for the deeper states of meditation. When they are distinguished, *samadhi* refers to a wide range of specific meditations, while *samapatti* refers to the four formless meditations or to the combination of stillness and contemplation.

[47](#) The Lokayatas believed the world was composed of the four material elements of solidity (earth), moisture (water), warmth (fire), and movement (wind); the Sarvastivadins believed in an underlying substance that survived change; and the Samkhyas believed in the tendencies (*gunas*) of creation, stasis, and destruction that combined to form reality.

[48](#) Ravana hears the foregoing and knows it is spoken by the Buddha but does not see him.

[49](#) The Sanskrit is *anutpattika–dharma–kshanti*. The attainment of this realization—that nothing has arisen, now arises, or will arise—marks the eighth and essentially final stage of the bodhisattva path, as the ninth and tenth stages are “where tathagatas dwell.” While the Sanskrit specifies that Ravana had already attained such a realization, both Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda have variations of “would soon attain.” However, in the following pages, the Buddha describes Ravana’s future ascent from the unshakeable (eighth) stage to the dharma cloud or tathagata (tenth) stage. Hence, it would seem reasonable that he had already reached the eighth stage.

[50](#) The bodies of buddhas are said to be marked by thirty-two attributes, such as long arms and ear lobes, a curl in the middle of the forehead, a swastika in the middle of the chest, etc.

[51](#) This ancient symbol of unknown origin is also referred to as a *shrivatsa*. It often appears as a white curl in the middle of the chest of a buddha or one of the Hindu gods, such as Vishnu.

[52](#) A similar display of light coming from the Buddha's body occurred prior to his ascension to the Tryantrinsha Heaven to teach his mother the abhidharma. Added to this display, the Buddha's smile distinguishes this teaching with one of the hallmarks of Zen.

[53](#) The Four Guardians are protectors of the Dharma. Their statues line the entryway to most Buddhist monasteries in East Asia.

[54](#) Mount Sumeru (or Mount Meru) occupies the center of the Buddhist universe. This is not an idle comparison. According to early Hindu legends, Sumeru's summit was blown off and fell into the sea to form the island of Lanka.

[55](#) The traditional genesis of Zen goes back to the day when the Buddha held up a flower, and Kashyapa smiled. Here, though, the Buddha smiles.

[56](#) The Sanskrit is *prashnadvayam prshtavan* (to ask a pair of questions). From what follows, we can see that these refer to dharmas and non-dharmas (*adharmas*), both of which, as the Buddha explains below, are projections or fabrications and should be abandoned.

[57](#) To this, the Sanskrit adds, "for he wants to know how they differ, how they are constituted, and what they determine."

[58](#) These are the eighth, ninth, and tenth *bhumis*, or stages, of the bodhisattva path: the *acala*, *sadhu-mati*, and *dharma-*

megha bhumi. In addition, the *Lankavatara* also mentions a *tathagata bhumi*, or tathagata stage. Some commentators think this is meant as an eleventh stage. I suggest it is simply another name for the tenth stage.

[59](#) The remaining lines of this paragraph and the entirety of the next are absent in Shikshananda and are not clear in the Sanskrit. I have followed Bodhiruchi.

[60](#) Kinnaras were half-human and half-horse, while mahoragas were serpents.

[61](#) The *tala*, or palmyra palm, grows to heights of more than sixty feet. In ancient India, its fan-shaped leaves supplied early Buddhists with the material on which their scriptures were first written.

[62](#) This reminds me of *Groundhog Day*. Ravana has asked before, and the buddhas of the past have explained that all dharmas are fictions—be they dharmas or non-dharmas. And apparently he will be asking about this in the future.

[63](#) Both Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda have *ken-pen-ju-lai* (primordial buddhas), a term unique to this sutra. Elsewhere, this sutra presents an early version of the three bodies of every buddha: the body in which a buddha appears to others, the body in which a buddha attains and enjoys the bliss of realization, and a buddha's real body, which is the teaching—or, as this sutra would have it, the knowledge of this teaching. Instead of “primordial buddhas,” Suzuki has “tathagatas of silence,” which apparently stems from reading the Sanskrit *mauna* (silent) instead of *maula* (ancient).

[64](#) The Buddha says this in Chapter Seven of the *Diamond Sutra*, among other places.

[65](#) In its undifferentiated state, the repository consciousness, or

alaya-vijnana, is known as the *tathagata-garbha*, or womb of buddhas. The former represents the defiled mind, the latter the mind purified. For buddhas, they are one and the same. For the rest of us, they are different.

[66](#) The Sanskrit is *kesha-undaka*, or what we call “floaters,” which are visible when the eyes are closed. This is one of the Buddha’s standard similes for our misperception of what is real.

[67](#) Before proceeding, the Buddha establishes the non-difference between dharmas and non-dharmas. Although this doesn’t seem important, it will become so as non-dharmas turn out to have the same characteristics as dharmas, and dharmas are thus no more real than non-dharmas.

[68](#) The Sanskrit is *arya-jnana*, where *arya* refers to “the noble ones,” namely, buddhas.

[69](#) Dharmas and non-dharmas are likened here to the flames, among which any distinction must be arbitrary and not based on anything real.

[70](#) As with flames, distinctions of an object’s development are likewise arbitrary. Everything is in constant flux in time, just as everything is indivisible in space.

[71](#) Matrices of abhidharma categories such as these were used in early Buddhism for analysis of awareness according to variations of the basic internal-external (*nama-rupa*) division. The *skandhas* include form (external), sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness (internal). The *ayatanas* included the five powers of sensation (external) and their respective domains (external) along with the sixth power of the mind and its domain of thought (internal). The *dhatu*s added the six forms of consciousness (internal) that arise from the conjunction of the twelve *ayatanas*.

[72](#) That is, they possess no characteristics themselves.

[73](#) Dharmas aren't the problem. The problem is attachment to the distinctions on which dharmas are based. In this chapter, dharmas and non-dharmas are treated as equivalent to what in subsequent chapters are name and appearance, the first two of the five dharmas, which are the objects of projection.

[74](#) According to the doctrine of *prajnapiti-matra* (mere designation/fabrication) taught by Yogacara teachers, everything turns out to be a non-dharma, or made-up reality. Since all dharmas are non-dharmas, to talk about one is to talk about the other, and there is no need to talk about both. Hence, throughout the rest of this sutra, the term “non-dharma” is not mentioned again. See Section XIX in Chapter Two.

[75](#) The Sanskrit for “reality” here is *dharmata*.

[76](#) The projection (*vikalpa*) of dharmas and the fabrication (*prajnapiti*) of non-dharmas.

[77](#) The Buddha's comment here refers to the projection of beings not to the beings themselves.

[78](#) The Sanskrit is *ekagra*.

[79](#) The Buddha waits until the very end of this chapter to provide a list of rubrics that he will use throughout the rest of the sutra to represent the moon toward which he points: the tathagata-garbha in contrast to the alaya-vijnana, self-realization of buddha knowledge in contrast to projection of dharmas and non-dharmas, tranquility in contrast to nirvana, oneness in contrast to multiplicity. Of course, “oneness” for the Buddha is neither oneness nor multiplicity. This is why the Buddha smiles. Bodhiruchi alone specifies “the samadhi of the forbearance of non-arising.”

CHAPTER TWO:

MAHAMATI'S QUESTIONS



I¹

Mahamati had previously visited other buddhalands together with the other wise bodhisattvas. Now, by means of the Buddha's power, he rose from his seat, uncovered his right shoulder, and touched his right knee to the ground. Pressing his hands together and bowing in reverence, he praised the Buddha in verse:

1. "Like a flower in the sky / the world neither ceases
nor arises / in the light of your wisdom and compassion³ / it
neither is nor isn't⁴

2. Transcending mind and consciousness / all things
are like illusions / in the light of your wisdom and
compassion / they neither are nor aren't⁵

3. The world is but a dream / neither permanent nor
transient / in the light of your wisdom and compassion / it
neither is nor isn't⁶

4. There is no self in beings or things / no barriers of
passion or knowledge / in the light of your wisdom and
compassion / they neither are nor aren't

5. The Buddha doesn't dwell in nirvana / nor does
nirvana dwell in him / free from knowing and the known /
he neither is nor isn't⁷

6. Who thus beholds Shakyamuni / serene and not

arising⁸ / dwells without attachments / this life and the
next.”

II⁹

After he had finished his verses in praise of the Buddha, Mahamati introduced himself:

1. “My name is Mahamati / to plumb the depths of the Mahayana / I come before the Peerless One / with 108 questions.”¹⁰

2. On hearing this request / the Knower of All Worlds / gazed upon the assembly / and told this son of buddhas

3. “Ask your questions / Son of Victors / ask and I will explain / the realm of personal realization.”¹¹

Acknowledging the Bhagavan’s approval, Mahamati Bodhisattva touched his head to the Buddha’s feet, put his palms together in reverence, and asked in verse:

4. “How is thinking purified / where does it come from / how should we regard delusion / where does it come from?

5. Why are there lands and apparitions / attributes and other paths¹² / stages of practice and freedom from projection¹³ / and what does ‘son of victor’ mean?¹⁴

6. Where does liberation lead / who is bound and who is freed / what are the realms of meditation / why are there three paths?¹⁵

7. How does causation work / what is a cause or an

effect / why say they are different¹⁶ / and where do they come from?

8. What are the formless meditations / what is cessation of perception / after all perceptions cease / how does awareness arise from trance?¹⁷

9. How do effects come about / how do we control our body / how do we see what we see / where do stages come from?¹⁸

10. Who breaks through all three realms¹⁹ / in what place and body / where are they then born / and why are there bodhisattvas?

11. How are higher powers gained / masteries and samadhis / tell us, Victor of Victors / what is the mind in samadhi like?

12. What is repository consciousness / the will and conceptual consciousness²⁰ / how do they arise and cease / what makes sensation stop?

13. What constitutes a lineage / no lineage or nothing but mind²¹ / how are attributes acquired / what does 'no self' mean?

14. How could there be no beings / why teach conventional truths / how do we put an end to views / of eternity or annihilation?²²

15. Why do the Buddha and other teachers / not look different from each other / why in future ages / will there be different sects?²³

16. What is the cause of emptiness / what does 'momentary' mean²⁴ / where does a womb come from / why does the world not shake?²⁵

17. How is the world like a dream or illusion / a city of gandharvas²⁶ / a seasonal mirage / moonlight on the water?

18. Why speak of aids to enlightenment²⁷ / or elements of awareness²⁸ / what causes chaos in a kingdom / why does belief in existence exist?

19. Why does the world not arise or cease / how is it like a flower in the sky²⁹ / how do we know about the world / if you say it transcends language?

20. What is freedom from projection like³⁰ / how is it like the sky / how many kinds of suchness are there / consciousness or paramitas?³¹

21. How do we progress through stages / who gets free from projection³² / what are the two kinds of no-self / how do we purify knowledge?³³

22. How many kinds of knowledge are there / moral codes or beings / who created precious things / such things as gems and pearls?

23. Who invented languages / the different kinds of beings / who was it who revealed / fields of knowledge and technique?³⁴

24. How many forms of poetry are there / what about prose and meter / how many kinds of logic are there / what constitutes an explanation?

25. Where do food and drink come from / what gives rise to sexual desire / what constitutes a king / a minor regent or cakravartin?³⁵

26. How do they protect their realms / how many kinds of deities are there / what is meant by earth / the sun

and moon and stars?

27. How many kinds of liberation are there³⁶ / how many kinds of practitioners / how many kinds of disciples / what constitutes a master?

28. How many kinds of buddhas are there / how many lives do they live³⁷ / how many kinds of demons exist / how many heterodox teachings?³⁸

29. How many modes of reality are there³⁹ / how many kinds of mind⁴⁰ / please tell me, Best of Speakers / what does 'mere designation' mean?⁴¹

30. Why are there wind and clouds in the sky / why do memory and insight exist / why are there trees and forests / why are there grasses and vines?⁴²

31. Why are elephants, horses, and deer / trapped and caught by men / O, Charioteer of the Mind⁴³ / why are some people despised?

32. Why do we observe six seasons⁴⁴ / why are there icchantikas⁴⁵ / how do males and females / and androgynes come to be?⁴⁶

33. Why do some adepts regress / why do some advance / how do meditation masters teach / what kind of people do they train?⁴⁷

34. What are the marks and attributes / of beings born in different realms⁴⁸ / what constitutes material wealth / how is it acquired?⁴⁹

35. How did the Shakyas come to be / the lineage of the Ikshvakus / who was the ascetic sage / what was it that he taught?⁵⁰

36. How does the Tathagata appear / in every time and place / surrounded by sons of victors / of different names and likenesses?⁵¹

37. Why shouldn't we eat meat / why is meat proscribed / why are there carnivorous beings / why do they eat meat?⁵²

38. Why are lands and kingdoms / shaped like the sun or moon / Sumeru or a lotus flower⁵³ / a swastika or lion?⁵⁴

39. Why are lands and kingdoms / shaped like Indra's net⁵⁵ / overturned above us / composed of countless jewels?

40. Why are lands and kingdoms / shaped like a drum or lute / or like some kind of flower / or bereft of the sun and moon?⁵⁶

41. What is an apparition buddha / a buddha of fruition / what is a buddha of suchness / a buddha of true knowledge?⁵⁷

42. Why in the realm of desire / is enlightenment not attained / why is it found beyond desire / in the highest heaven of form?⁵⁸

43. After the Sugata enters Nirvana⁵⁹ / who will uphold the Dharma / how long will the Teacher teach / how long will his teaching last?⁶⁰

44. How many kinds of attainment are there ⁶¹ / how many doctrinal views / what is the cause and purpose / of a code of ethics or monks?

45. Why do sons of victors⁶² / pratyeka-buddhas and shravakas / experience a hundred transformations / a

hundred projectionless realms?⁶³

46. Which powers are mundane / which ones are transcendent / could you please explain / what are the seven stages?⁶⁴

47. How many kinds of sangha are there / what brings about dissension / what are the texts on medicine / what led to their creation?⁶⁵

48. Why does Mahamuni / speak such words as these / 'I am Kashyapa Buddha / Krakucchanda and Kanakamuni?'⁶⁶

49. Why do you speak of a self and no self / of eternity and annihilation / why not teach the truth / 'everything is made of mind?'⁶⁷

50. Why are there male and female trees / karitaki and amali groves / Mount Kailash and the Iron Ring / Diamond Summit and the other peaks?⁶⁸

51. And why are all these mountains / adorned with countless jewels / rishis and gandharvas⁶⁹ / please tell us why this is."

52. After hearing all these gathas / on the teachings of the Mahayana / on the heart of every buddha / the Knower of Worlds then answered:

53. "Well and ably asked / now listen, Mahamati / the questions you have raised / I will answer one by one."⁷⁰

54. As for birth and no birth / nirvana, emptiness, and moments / rebirth and no self-existence⁷¹ / buddhas and paramitas

55. Shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, and bodhisattvas / the formless practices of other schools / Sumeru and seas

and mountains / continents and other lands⁷²

56. The sun and moon and constellations / asuras⁷³
and gods of other paths / liberations, masteries, and
powers⁷⁴ / meditations and samadhis

57. Extinction and psychic travel / aids and elements
of enlightenment / meditations and boundless states /
transmigration and the skandhas⁷⁵

58. Cessation of perception in meditation / thinking
and talking during samadhi / conceptual consciousness,
will, and mind / the five dharmas and no self⁷⁶

59. Modes of reality, projecting, and projection / the
duality of seeing and seen / spiritual paths and lineages /
gold and silver and gems

60. Material elements and icchantikas / chaos and a
single buddha / knowing, the known, and instruction / the
existence or not of beings⁷⁷

61. And as for why such animals / as elephants and
horses are caught / how reason and illustration work / or
how they give rise to proofs⁷⁸

62. And as for cause and effect / penetrating a forest
of doubt / nothing but mind and no visible world / and no
sequence of stages⁷⁹

63. And as for transformations and the end of
projections⁸⁰ / medical treatments and crafts / sciences and
arts / and why you ask about these⁸¹

64. And as for how to measure / lands and mountains
and Sumeru / oceans and the sun and moon / and why you
ask about these⁸²

65. And as for the number of dust motes / in beings

of different sizes / the dust motes in a realm / or how many in a bow-length⁸³

66. And as for forearms or feet in a krosha / in a yojana or half a yojana / the rabbit hairs in a dust mote or louse egg / the sheep hairs in a barley grain⁸⁴

67. And as for barley grains in a quart / in a pint or in a peck / in a bushel or ten or a hundred thousand / in a million or a billion⁸⁵

68. And as for dust motes in a mustard seed / or mustard seeds in a grass grain / or grass grains in a pea / or how many peas in a gram⁸⁶

69. And as for how many grams in an ounce / or ounces in a pound / or counting on like this / how many of these in Sumeru⁸⁷

70. As for what you rightly ask / and why should you ask otherwise / but why not ask instead / the number of dust motes in a shravaka / the number in a pratyekabuddha / in a bodhisattva or tathagata⁸⁸

71. The dust motes in the tip of a flame / or in a gust of wind / the number in an organ of sense / a skin pore or an eyelash

72. But as for men of wealth and power / kings and cakravartins / and how they protect their realms / and how they obtain liberation

73. And as for poetry and prose / or why beings want different things / like different foods and drinks / or why there are male and female trees⁸⁹

74. And as for the diamond-hard mountain / about which you ask / why it resembles a dream or illusion / or a

seasonal mirage⁹⁰

75. And as for why there are clouds / or why there are six seasons / or why there are different flavors / or men and women and androgynes⁹¹

76. And as for the wearing of jewelry / and why, Son of Buddhas, you ask about this / or why rishis and gandharvas / adorn these sacred peaks⁹²

77. And as for where liberation leads / or who is bound and who is freed / or the realms of meditation / apparitions and other paths

78. And as for if causation exists / or if causation doesn't / or how perceptions vanish / or how thoughts are purified⁹³

79. And as for how to transform your thoughts⁹⁴ / or how to transform your actions / how to put an end to projections / or how to rise from samadhi

80. And as for who breaks through the three realms / and in what place or body / or if beings have no self / why accept the conventional view⁹⁵

81. And as for asking about my marks / or if I have no self / or if my other bodies / are the product of a womb⁹⁶

82. And as for views of annihilation or eternity / or how to settle the mind / or language and knowledge / lineages, precepts, and bodhisattvas

83. And as for logic and explanation / masters and disciples / the different kinds of beings / and why you ask about these / and what they eat and drink / and demons, insight, and designation⁹⁷

84. And as for trees and vines / regarding which, Son of Victors, you ask / and why there are different lands / or who Dirghatapas was⁹⁸

85. And as for my clan and family / or who my teachers were / and why some people are despised / or why some people meditate / and why there is no enlightenment / in the realm of desire⁹⁹

86. And as for why it happens / in Akanishtha Heaven¹⁰⁰ / or which powers are mundane / or what constitutes a monk

87. And as for apparition buddhas / or buddhas of fruition / or buddhas of true suchness / or buddhas of impartial knowledge / or the nature of the sangha / concerning which, Son of Victors, you ask¹⁰¹

88. And as for lands shaped like a drum, a lute, or a flower / and why some lands are bereft of light / and what the mind is like / during the seven stages¹⁰²

89. All such things and more you ask / proper for a son of buddhas / in accord with relevant forms / and free from erroneous views¹⁰³

90. Today I will reveal / truths that transcend words / while I list them one by one / listen well, you bodhisattvas / to these 108 statements.¹⁰⁴ / as spoken by buddhas of the past

III 105

“A statement about birth is about no birth. A statement about permanence is about no permanence. A statement about characteristics is about no characteristics. A statement about duration and differentiation is about no duration or differentiation. A statement about moments is about no moments. A statement about modes of reality is about no modes of reality.¹⁰⁶ A statement about emptiness is about no emptiness. A statement about annihilation is about no annihilation. A statement about extremes is about no extremes.¹⁰⁷ A statement about the middle is about no middle. A statement about eternity is about no eternity. A statement about conditions is about no conditions. A statement about cause is about no cause. A statement about passion is about no passion. A statement about desire is about no desire. A statement about expedience is about no expedience. A statement about skill is about no skill.¹⁰⁸ A statement about purity is about no purity. A statement about reasoning is about no reasoning. A statement about illustration is about no illustration. A statement about disciples is about no disciples. A statement about masters is about no masters. A statement about lineage is about no lineage. A statement about the three paths is about no three paths.¹⁰⁹ A statement about freedom from projections is about no freedom from

projections.¹¹⁰ A statement about vows is about no vows. A statement about the three turnings is about no three turnings.¹¹¹ A statement about appearances is about no appearances. A statement about existence is about no existence.¹¹² A statement about inclusion is about no inclusion.¹¹³ A statement about the personal realization of buddha knowledge is a statement about no personal realization of buddha knowledge. A statement about delight in whatever is present is about no delight in whatever is present.¹¹⁴ A statement about lands is about no lands. A statement about dust motes is about no dust motes. A statement about water is about no water. A statement about bow-lengths is about no bow-lengths. A statement about elements is about no elements.¹¹⁵ A statement about enumeration is about no enumeration.¹¹⁶ A statement about higher knowledge is about no higher knowledge. A statement about the sky is about no sky. A statement about clouds is about no clouds. A statement about crafts is about no crafts.¹¹⁷ A statement about wind is about no wind. A statement about earth is about no earth. A statement about reflection is about no reflection. A statement about designation is about no designation.¹¹⁸ A statement about self-existence is about no self-existence. A statement about skandhas is about no skandhas. A statement about beings is about no beings. A statement about intellect is about no intellect. A statement about nirvana is about no nirvana. A statement about knowledge is about no knowledge. A statement about other paths is about no other paths. A statement about confusion is about no confusion. A statement about illusions is about no illusions. A statement about dreams is about no dreams. A statement about mirages is about no mirages. A statement about

images is about no images. A statement about wheels is about no wheels.¹¹⁹ A statement about gandharvas is about no gandharvas. A statement about devas is about no devas. A statement about food or drink is about no food or drink. A statement about sexual desire is about no sexual desire. A statement about views is about no views. A statement about paramitas is about no paramitas. A statement about precepts is about no precepts. A statement about suns and moons and constellations is about no suns or moons or constellations. A statement about truths is about no truths. A statement about effects is about no effects. A statement about arising from cessation is about no arising from cessation.¹²⁰ A statement about medical treatment is about no medical treatment. A statement about attributes is about no attributes. A statement about aids is about no aids.¹²¹ A statement about arts is about no arts. A statement about meditation is about no meditation. A statement about delusion is about no delusion. A statement about visible objects is about no visible objects. A statement about protection is about no protection. A statement about genealogy is about no genealogy. A statement about rishis is about no rishis. A statement about kings is about no kings. A statement about grasping is about no grasping. A statement about jewels is about no jewels. A statement about assurances is about no assurances.¹²² A statement about icchantikas is about no icchantikas. A statement about men and women and androgynes is about no men or women or androgynes. A statement about taste is about no taste. A statement about effort is about no effort. A statement about bodies is about no bodies. A statement about thinking is about no thinking. A statement about movement is about no movement. A statement about

sense organs is about no sense organs. A statement about conditioned things is about no conditioned things. A statement about unconditioned things is a statement about no unconditioned things.¹²³ A statement about causation is about no causation. A statement about Akanishtha Heaven is about no Akanishtha Heaven. A statement about seasons is about no seasons. A statement about trees and vines is about no trees or vines. A statement about variety is about no variety. A statement about instruction is about no instruction. A statement about moral codes is about no moral codes. A statement about monks is about no monks.¹²⁴ A statement about support is about no support.¹²⁵ A statement about words is about no words. Mahamati, these 108 answers¹²⁶ were spoken by the buddhas of the past. These are what you and the other bodhisattvas should study.¹²⁷

IV 128

Mahamati Bodhisattva again asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, in how many ways do the various forms of consciousness arise, persist, and cease?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “There are two ways in which the various forms of consciousness arise, persist, and cease, both of which are beyond the understanding of logicians. The two ways in which the forms of consciousness arise are as a continuity or as a characteristic.¹²⁹ The two ways in which they persist are as a continuity or as a characteristic. And the two ways in which they cease are as a continuity or as a characteristic.¹³⁰ And the different forms of consciousness, Mahamati, have three aspects: an unfolding aspect, a karmic aspect, and an intrinsic aspect.¹³¹

“Mahamati, what we generally speak of as eight forms of consciousness can be summarized under three headings: true consciousness, perceiving consciousness, and object-projecting consciousness.¹³² Mahamati, our perceiving consciousness functions like a clear mirror in which shapes and images appear. Mahamati, although perceiving consciousness and object-projecting consciousness are the cause of whether they are separate from each other or not, perceiving consciousness, Mahamati, is the result of imperceptible habit-energy and

imperceptible transformations, while object-projecting consciousness is the result of grasping different phenomena and the habit-energy of beginningless projections.¹³³

“Mahamati, when all the false projections obscuring our true consciousness ¹³⁴ cease, all forms of sensory consciousness cease. This, Mahamati, is what is meant by the ‘cessation of characteristics.’ Mahamati, as for the ‘cessation of continuity,’ when the cause of continuity ceases, continuity itself ceases. It ceases when what it depends upon and what supports it cease. Mahamati, why is this so? This is because it is dependent. What it depends upon is the habit-energy of beginningless projections. And what supports it are the projections of the objects of consciousness perceived by one’s own mind.¹³⁵

“Mahamati, take for example a lump of clay and particles of dust. They are neither separate, nor are they not separate. The same is true of gold and ornaments. Mahamati, if the lump of clay and particles of dust were separate, the latter could not comprise the former. But they do. Hence, they are not separate. And yet if they were not separate, the lump of clay could not be distinguished from the particles of dust.

“Thus, Mahamati, if the intrinsic aspect¹³⁶ of our repository consciousness and the unfolding aspect of consciousness were separate, the repository consciousness could not be its cause. But if they were not separate, the cessation of the unfolding aspect of consciousness would also mean the cessation of repository consciousness. And yet, its intrinsic aspect does not cease. Thus, Mahamati, what ceases is not the intrinsic aspect of consciousness, only its karmic aspect. For if the intrinsic aspect of consciousness ceased, repository consciousness would cease. And if repository consciousness ceased, Mahamati, that

would be no different from the nihilistic views proposed by followers of other paths.

“Mahamati, the followers of other paths claim that when the grasping of an external world ceases, the continuity of consciousness also ceases. But if the continuity of consciousness ceased, that continuity which has no beginning would end. Mahamati, followers of still other paths say the arising of continuity is not caused by the conjunction of visual consciousness with form and light¹³⁷ but is caused by something else. And that cause, Mahamati, they say is an ineffable force or primal being or supreme lord or minute particles or time.¹³⁸

“Furthermore, Mahamati, there are seven kinds of self-existence:¹⁴⁰ the self-existence of origination, the self-existence of existence, the self-existence of characteristics, the self-existence of material elements, the self-existence of causes, the self-existence of conditions, and the self-existence of completion.

VI¹⁴¹

“Furthermore, Mahamati, there are seven kinds of higher truths:¹⁴² those regarding the realm of mind, the realm of wisdom, the realm of knowledge, the realm of views, the realm beyond dualistic views, the realm beyond bodhisattva stages, and the realm of a tathagata’s personal attainment, which, Mahamati, is the mind of the self-existent, higher truth of all tathagatas, arhats, and fully enlightened ones of the past, the present, and the future. It is by means of this mind of the self-existent, higher truth that the mundane, metaphysical, and transcendent teachings of tathagatas are formed, while it is by means of their wisdom eye¹⁴³ that their individual and shared characteristics are established. However, what are thereby established are not the same as the doctrines and erroneous views of other schools.

“And what are the same, Mahamati, as the doctrines and erroneous views of other schools? These refer to projections and views of one’s own realm without realizing they are perceptions of one’s own mind. Due to their obliviousness, Mahamati, such foolish people maintain dualistic views and doctrines of existence and nonexistence as their self-existent, higher truth.

“Moreover, Mahamati, the cessation of the suffering that

comes from giving rise to projections of the three realms¹⁴⁴ and the cessation of ignorance, desire, and karma that result from seeing that the perceptions of one's own mind are realms of illusion, this is what I will now teach.¹⁴⁵

VII 146

“Mahamati, to account for how something that doesn’t exist comes to exist due to the presence of causation and how it persists in time in connection with the skandhas, the dhatus, and the ayatanas, some monks and priests say once it arises, it ceases. Mahamati, whether it is in regard to a continuity, a function, a birth, an existence, nirvana, a path, karma, attainment, or truth, they argue that it is destroyed and ceases to exist. And why is this so? Because it cannot be found in the present, nor can its beginning be discerned.

“Mahamati, just as a shattered jug no longer functions as a jug or a burnt seed no longer functions as a seed, likewise, Mahamati, if the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas exist then cease to exist in the present or the future, this is due to the projection or view of one’s own mind, not to a cause. This is why they don’t continue to arise.¹⁴⁷

“Mahamati, if someone says the existence of consciousness from its nonexistence is due to the threefold conjunction of conditions, then hair could grow on a tortoise or cooking oil could be produced from sand.¹⁴⁸ Such a thesis falls apart because it is contrary to established truth. And statements about the existence then nonexistence of something contain this defect: they render whatever we might do as empty and meaningless.

“Mahamati, when followers of other paths claim something arises because of the threefold conjunction of conditions, they are referring to the operation of cause and effect and to whether their individual characteristics exist then do not exist in the past, the present, or the future. But such claims are essentially the result of logic or speculation or views based on one’s habit-energy from the past. Thus, Mahamati, despite being infected by mistaken conceptions and misled by distorted beliefs, and despite their lack of knowledge, fools claim to be wise.

“But there are other monks and priests, Mahamati, who see things as devoid of self-existence, as clouds in the sky or wheels of fire or cities of gandharvas and as not arising, as illusions or mirages or dreams or moonlight on the water, and—regardless of whether they appear to be inside or outside the mind—as projections from the beginningless past and as not existing apart from one’s own mind. And when the causes of such projections cease, and the repository consciousness becomes free from projections of a body, its possessions and the world around it, and from what speaks and what is spoken, and from what sees and what is seen, they accordingly see what grasps and what is grasped as no longer interacting in the realm of consciousness and whatever the mind gives rise to as existing in a projection-free realm devoid of origination, duration, and cessation.

“Mahamati, such bodhisattvas soon realize the identity of samsara¹⁴⁹ and nirvana. With effortless compassion and skillful means, Mahamati, they view the realms of all beings as illusions and not subject to causation. Transcending internal and external realms, and seeing nothing outside the mind, they accordingly proceed from one stage to the next in samadhis that are free from appearances. And upon examining the three realms and

finding them illusory, they attain the Samadhi of the Illusory.¹⁵⁰ And once the perceptions of their own minds are free of projections, they are able to dwell in the perfection of wisdom and to let go of their life and their practice and to enter the Diamond Samadhi that accompanies a tathagata's body and that accompanies the transformation of suchness. Thus endowed with higher powers and masteries as well as compassion and skillful means, they enter the sanctuaries of other paths in every buddhaland. And transcending the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness, these bodhisattvas gradually transform their body into the body of a tathagata.¹⁵¹

“Therefore, Mahamati, those who seek the body that accompanies a tathagata should avoid the fabricated projections of origination, duration, or cessation regarding the skandhas, dhatus, ayatanas, consciousness, causation, or forms of practice.”¹⁵²

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“Who sees that the habit-energy of projections of the beginningless past is the cause of the three realms and who understands that the tathagata stage is free from projections or anything that arises, attains the personal realization of buddha knowledge and effortless mastery over their own minds. And like gems capable of reflecting every color, they enter the subtlest thoughts of other beings and in their apparition bodies teach them ‘nothing but mind’ while establishing them in the sequence of stages. Therefore, Mahamati, you should devote yourself to the cultivation of personal attainment.”

IX 154

At that time, Mahamati Bodhisattva said, “May¹⁵⁵ the Bhagavan teach us about the characteristics of the mind, the will and conceptual consciousness,¹⁵⁶ the five dharmas, and the modes of reality cultivated by buddhas and bodhisattvas that differ from the external realms perceived by our mind. And may the Tathagata reveal all the teachings marked by suchness that comprise the heart of the words of every buddha. And may he explain for the great bodhisattvas gathered here on Mount Malaya in the island kingdom of Lanka the ocean and waves of repository consciousness and the realm of the dharma body¹⁵⁷ praised by all tathagatas.”

The Bhagavan then told Mahamati, “There are four causes that result in the functioning of visual consciousness. And what are the four? They are: a lack of awareness that what is grasped is a perception of one’s own mind, attachment to the habit-energy of erroneous fabrications of the beginningless past, the existence of consciousness, and the desire to see a multiplicity of forms. Mahamati, these are the four causes that give rise to the waves of consciousness in the ever-rolling sea of repository consciousness.¹⁵⁸

“Mahamati, as with its visual form, consciousness arises together with the minutest sensory objects and sensory material

of the various sense organs, and with it arise external realms as well like so many images in a clear mirror or like the ocean when a strong wind blows. And as the wind of externality stirs the sea of the mind, its waves of consciousness never cease.¹⁵⁹ Whether there is any difference or not among the characteristics of causes and effects is due to a deep attachment to what arises from karma. Because people cannot understand the nature of such things as form, the five kinds of sensory consciousness function. And due to the differentiation of appearances, Mahamati, you should know that these five kinds of sensory consciousness serve as the cause of conceptual consciousness. But as they function, they do not think that they are the cause of changes in appearances, which change as a result of attachment to projections that are perceptions of one's own mind. And as every appearance changes and disappears, the different realms that are distinguished themselves change.¹⁶⁰

“Those practitioners who enter dhyana or samadhi but who remain unaware of the changes of the subtler forms of habit-energy think they enter dhyana or samadhi only after consciousness ceases. But in fact their consciousness does not cease when they enter samadhi. It doesn't cease because the seeds of habit-energy are not destroyed. It ceases when they no longer grasp changes among objective realms.

“Mahamati, except for tathagatas and those well along the bodhisattva path, the full extent of the subtlety of the repository consciousness remains completely beyond the ken of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, and practitioners of other paths, despite their powers of meditation and wisdom—likewise how to distinguish the characteristics of the remaining stages, or the meaning of words about wisdom and skillful means, or how to bring to

maturity the limitless good roots planted by buddhas, or how to get free from the projections and fabrications that are perceptions of their own minds.

“Mahamati, those who dwell among mountains and forests, regardless of whether they cultivate lesser, normal, or greater practices, if they are able to see how projections flow from their own minds, they will have their foreheads anointed by buddhas from countless lands. And as they attain masteries, psychic faculties, higher powers, and samadhis, they will be surrounded by bodhisattvas and spiritual friends. And because of this, they will transcend the sea of birth and death, karma, desire, and ignorance and the mistaken conceptions concerning the realms of self-existence of the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness that are perceptions of their own minds. This is why, Mahamati, practitioners should draw near to buddhas and spiritual friends.”

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Just like waves in a boundless sea / blown by a powerful wind / breakers in a black expanse / they never for a moment cease

2. In the Ocean of Alaya / stirred by the wind of externality / wave after wave of consciousness / breaks and swells again

3. Blue and red and every color / milk and sugar and conch shells¹⁶¹ / fragrances and fruits and flowers / the sun and moon and light

4. Like the ocean and its waves / are neither separate nor not separate / seven forms of consciousness / rise together with the mind¹⁶²

5. Like the ever-changing sea / gives rise to different waves / repository consciousness / gives rise to different forms¹⁶³

6. Mind, will, and consciousness / these refer to different forms / but forms devoid of differences / no seer or thing seen¹⁶⁴

7. As the ocean and its waves / cannot be divided / the mind and the forms of consciousness / cannot be separated

8. The mind is what gathers karma¹⁶⁵ / the will considers what is gathered / the forms of consciousness¹⁶⁶ are conscious / of five apparent worlds.”

Mahamati Bodhisattva then asked in verse:

9. “When colors such as blue and red / appear in someone’s consciousness / and every thought is like a wave / what does all this mean?”

The Bhagavan then replied in verse:

10. “Blue and red and other colors / can’t be found in any wave / we say the mind gathers karma / to awaken foolish beings

11. But karma isn’t real / thus to make their minds let go / what grasps and what is grasped¹⁶⁷ / I liken it to waves

12. Their body, possessions, and the world / this is what they’re conscious of / this is how their karma appears / just like surging waves.”

Mahamati Bodhisattva then asked in verse:

13. “The ocean and its waves exist / we can see them dance / why then are we not aware / of alaya consciousness and karma?”¹⁶⁸

The Bhagavan then replied in verse:

14. “For fools bereft of wisdom / alaya is likened to an ocean / and karma to its waves / through simile they understand.”

Mahamati then said in verse:

15. “Sunlight shines the same / on beings of all classes / since tathagatas light the world / to teach the truth to fools

16. Versed in every kind of teaching / why don't they teach the truth?”

To which the Buddha then replied in verse, “If they taught the truth / in beings' minds would be no truth

17. Like the ocean and its waves / a dream or image in a mirror / both appear together / as do the mind and objective realms¹⁷⁰

18. But objective realms are never perfect / and karma keeps arising / while consciousness is conscious / likewise the will just wills

19. And fivefold are appearances / except in meditation / as a master artist works / and the master's students¹⁷¹

20. Drawing forms and spreading colors / I, too, teach like this / the colors don't contain a pattern / nor do the brush or pristine surface

21. To please the host of beings / they render figures with their art / but teachings are unfaithful¹⁷² / for truth isn't in the words

22. I make distinctions for beginners¹⁷³ / for practitioners I teach the truth / the truth they realize themselves / free from knowing and the known

23. This I teach to bodhisattvas / a broader view to

fools / all manner of illusions / but nothing I reveal is real

24. Thus my teachings are diverse / tailored to the situation / if a teaching doesn't fit / then it isn't taught

25. Because each patient differs / good physicians adjust their cures / buddhas thus teach beings / according to their capacities

26. A realm without projections / unknown to shravakas / this is what the compassionate teach / the realm of inner realization.”

“Moreover, Mahamati, if bodhisattvas wish to understand the realm of projection in which what grasps and what is grasped are nothing but perceptions of their own minds, they should avoid social intercourse and sleep and cultivate the discipline of mindfulness during the three periods of the night. And they should avoid mistaken teachings and texts as well as the characteristics of the shravaka and pratyeka-buddha paths and become versed instead in the characteristics of the projections that are perceptions of their own minds.

XI 175

“Moreover, Mahamati, once bodhisattvas have firmly established themselves in the attributes of wisdom, they should devote themselves to the cultivation of three aspects of the highest buddha knowledge. And to which three aspects of buddha knowledge should they devote themselves? They are freedom from projections, 176 the power of the vows made by all buddhas, and the personal realization of the ultimate knowledge of buddhas. Once their cultivation includes these, they will be able to abandon feeble-minded knowledge and reach the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path. 177

“In the cultivation of these three, Mahamati, freedom from projections comes from the practices of shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and followers of other paths; the power of vows, Mahamati, comes from the vows made by buddhas of the past; and the personal realization of the ultimate knowledge of buddhas, Mahamati, comes from remaining detached from all appearances, from obtaining the body that accompanies the Samadhi of the Illusory, 178 and from entering that place where all buddhas dwell. Mahamati, these are the three aspects of buddha knowledge. Those who perfect these three aspects of buddha knowledge are able to reach the realm of personal realization of the ultimate knowledge of buddhas. Mahamati, this

is why you should devote yourself to the cultivation of the three aspects of buddha knowledge.”

Because Mahamati was aware of the thoughts of the other bodhisattvas about how to distinguish the essential teaching of buddha knowledge and because he was supported by the manifest power of the tathagatas, he asked the Buddha, “Would the Bhagavan please explain how to understand the essential teaching of buddha knowledge on the basis of which the 108 statements are to be distinguished, and on the basis of which tathagatas, arhats, and fully enlightened ones explain how to distinguish the individual and shared characteristics of the imagined reality into which bodhisattvas enter. For by explaining how to distinguish imagined reality, we will be able to understand the absence of a self among beings and dharmas wherever we look. And by ridding ourselves of such projections and by illuminating the various stages, we will transcend the bliss of the meditations of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, and followers of other paths, and we will see the inconceivable realms cultivated by tathagatas. And we will finally let go of the five dharmas and the modes of reality and adorn ourselves instead with the knowledge of a tathagata’s dharma body, leave behind illusory realms,¹⁷⁹ and ascend to the Tushita and Akanishtha heavens of every buddhaland,¹⁸⁰ where we will obtain the ever-present body of a tathagata.”¹⁸¹

XII¹⁸²

The Bhagavan told Mahamati, “There are followers of some paths attached to the projection of nothingness who imagine the nonexistence of rabbit horns when what causes them ends¹⁸³ and that, as with the nonexistence of rabbit horns, the same is true of everything else. And there are followers of other paths, Mahamati, who distinguish each and every thing in terms of elements, tendencies, particles, substances, or shapes and, having seen that there are no such things as rabbit horns, become attached to the conception that ox horns exist.¹⁸⁴

“Mahamati, because they are given to such dualistic extremes, they don’t understand what is nothing but mind and nourish, instead, the projection of realms of their own conception. But such things as their body, their possessions, and the world around them are nothing but projections of sensation. Mahamati, this is true of the existence of all things. They transcend existence and nonexistence. You should not imagine such things.

“Mahamati, since they transcend existence and nonexistence, someone who thinks rabbit horns don’t exist suffers from a misconception. They should not think that rabbit horns don’t exist, because such a view would be relative. And if they were to analyze whatever does exist into the finest particles, they would not find anything there. Mahamati, because it would be

outside the realm of buddha knowledge, you should not imagine that ox horns exist.”

Mahamati then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, if someone imagines something as not existing, is it because they see it as not arising that they subsequently reason since their observation doesn’t result in its discrimination, it doesn’t exist?”

The Buddha replied, “Not so, Mahamati. It isn’t because their observation doesn’t result in its discrimination that they say something doesn’t exist. And why not? It is because discriminations arise in dependence on something. They arise in dependence on horns. And because a discrimination arises in dependence on horns, they are said to be its cause. Hence, it is not because observation doesn’t result in their discrimination that they say horns do not exist, rather it is because they are neither separate nor not separate.

“Mahamati, if the discrimination is separate from the horns, its occurrence is not dependent on the horns. And if it isn’t separate, it is dependent on them. But no matter how minutely you analyze and examine them, you cannot find anything there. Also, because it isn’t separate from the horns, it doesn’t exist by itself. But if neither exists by itself, on what basis do we say it doesn’t exist? Mahamati, if it¹⁸⁵ doesn’t exist, then the horns don’t exist. But you should not think that rabbits do not have horns on the basis of observation. Mahamati, it is because there is no direct cause that arguments in favor of existence or nonexistence cannot be proved.

“Mahamati, there are followers of other paths who are attached to such things as form and space as having shape and location. Although they aren’t able to distinguish space, they say space exists apart from form, and they thus give rise to the

projection of their separation. Mahamati, space is form. It is part of the material elements. And form is space, Mahamati. But in order to establish the existence of which supports and which is supported, they separate space and form. Although their individual characteristics differ, Mahamati, where the four material elements are present, they neither occupy space, nor do they exist without space.

“Likewise, Mahamati, oxen are observed with horns and rabbits without horns. But, Mahamati, if you were to grind ox horns into the finest particles and didn’t stop analyzing those particles for even a moment, could you say they did not exist based on what you saw? Anything else you might examine would be the same.”

The Bhagavan then told Mahamati Bodhisattva, “You should avoid projections that view rabbit horns or ox horns, space or form as separate. You and the other bodhisattvas should reflect on projections as perceptions of your own mind. And in whatever lands you might find yourselves, teach bodhisattvas about the perceptions of their own minds.”

XIII 186

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “There is no form inside the mind¹⁸⁷ / form is nourished by the mind / body, possessions, the world, and beings / from repository consciousness all appear

2. The mind, will, and consciousness / the five dharmas and modes of reality / the purification of two kinds of no-self / these are taught by those who teach

3. Long and short, is and isn’t / from each in turn the other arises / because one isn’t, the other is / because one is, the other isn’t

4. Analyzing something into dust / doesn’t yield the idea of its form / but saying it is nothing but mind / doesn’t please deluded people

5. This isn’t a realm for philosophers / nor is it for shravakas / the teaching of those who would save the world / is the realm of self-realization.”

XIV 188

In order to purify¹⁸⁹ the stream of perceptions of his own mind, Mahamati Bodhisattva once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, how is the stream of perceptions of beings’ minds purified? By degrees or all at once?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “By degrees and not all at once. Like the gooseberry, ¹⁹⁰ which ripens by degrees and not all at once, thus do tathagatas purify the stream of perceptions of beings’ minds by degrees and not all at once. Or like a potter, who makes vessels by degrees and not all at once, thus do tathagatas purify the stream of perceptions of beings’ minds by degrees and not all at once. Or like the earth, which gives birth to living things by degrees and not all at once, thus do tathagatas purify the stream of perceptions of beings’ minds by degrees and not all at once. Or like when people become proficient in such arts as music or writing or painting by degrees and not all at once, thus do tathagatas purify the stream of perceptions of beings’ minds by degrees and not all at once.¹⁹¹

“Or just as a clear mirror reflects formless¹⁹² images all at once, tathagatas likewise purify the stream of perceptions of beings’ minds by displaying pure, formless, undifferentiated realms all at once. Or just as the sun and moon illuminate images all at once, tathagatas likewise reveal the supreme realm of

inconceivable wisdom all at once to those who have freed themselves of the habit-energy and misconceptions that are perceptions of their own minds. Or just as repository consciousness distinguishes such different perceptions of one's mind as the realms of the body, its possessions, and the world around it all at once, nishyanda buddhas¹⁹³ likewise bring beings to maturity in whatever realm they dwell all at once and lead practitioners to reside in Akanishtha Heaven.¹⁹⁴ Or just as the nishyanda buddhas created by the dharmata buddha radiate light, the personal realization of buddha knowledge likewise illuminates and dispels erroneous views and projections regarding the existence or nonexistence of dharmas and their characteristics.¹⁹⁵

XV¹⁹⁶

“Mahamati, the dharmata-nishyanda buddha¹⁹⁷ teaches that the individual and shared characteristics of every dharma are due to the habit-energy of the perceptions of the mind and to the continued attachment to an imagined reality¹⁹⁸ that is no more real than an illusion—and one that cannot be grasped.

“Moreover, Mahamati, an imagined reality arises from attachment to a dependent reality. Mahamati, it is like when a magician uses materials such as plants and wood and tiles and stone to create an illusion and conjures the appearance of different creatures, which then gives rise to different projections, but projections that are not real.¹⁹⁹ In the same manner, Mahamati, it is based on a dependent reality that the myriad projections of an imagined reality arise—the myriad projections of appearances that are the habit-energy of attachment to projections. Mahamati, this is how the appearances of an imagined reality arise. Mahamati, this is what the nishyanda buddha teaches.

“Mahamati, what the dharmata buddha does is establish and create that realm which transcends self-existent appearances of the mind and on which the personal realization of buddha knowledge depends.²⁰⁰

“Mahamati, the nirmita-nirmana buddha²⁰¹ teaches charity,

morality, forbearance, zeal, meditation, and wisdom of the mind, detachment from the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas, liberation from the projection, contemplation, and establishment of appearances of consciousness, and transcendence of the views of followers of other paths and the views of formlessness.

“Also, Mahamati, the dharmata buddha is free from objective support.²⁰² Freedom from objective support and from the operation of sensation is not a realm known to ignorant people, shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, or followers of other paths attached to a self but is the ultimate, unique realm established by the personal realization of buddha knowledge. Therefore, Mahamati, you should devote yourself to cultivating the personal realization of this ultimate, unique realm of buddha knowledge and put an end to views that are perceptions of the mind.

XVI 203

“Moreover, Mahamati, there are two differences that characterize the shravaka path: the differences in their attainment of the personal realization of buddha knowledge and in their attachment to the existence of an imagined reality.

“And what is different about a shravaka’s attainment of the personal realization of buddha knowledge? This refers to attaining stillness of mind in regard to the realms of impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and the absence of a self, in regard to the truths concerning the cessation and transcendence of desire,²⁰⁴ and in regard to the end of anything indestructible among the individual or shared characteristics of the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas. And with stillness of mind come the liberation of dhyana, the final fruit of samadhi, and the deliverance of samapatti. But while enjoying the bliss from the personal realization of buddha knowledge, shravakas are not yet free of habit-energy or imperceptible transformation deaths.²⁰⁵ This is how a shravaka’s attainment of the personal realization of buddha knowledge differs.

“Mahamati, the bliss from the personal realization of buddha knowledge attained by bodhisattvas differs in that they avoid the bliss of annihilation and the bliss of samapatti, which they do not experience because of their compassion for others and their

original vows. Mahamati, this is how the bliss attained by shravakas from the personal realization of buddha knowledge differs. And this difference in the bliss from the personal realization of buddha knowledge is not something bodhisattvas should cultivate.

“Mahamati, what is meant by the attachment of shravakas to the existence of an imagined reality? This refers to knowing that the individual and shared characteristics of blue and yellow and red and white and of solidity and moisture and warmth and movement of the material elements arise without a creator, as previous sages have declared, but upon seeing them, giving rise to projections of their self-existence.²⁰⁶ This is what is meant by the attachment of shravakas to the existence of an imagined reality. This is something bodhisattvas should understand and put an end to by getting rid of views concerning a self among dharmas along with those concerning a self among persons, as they proceed to establish themselves in the sequence of stages.”²⁰⁷

XVII 208

At that time, Mahamati Bodhisattva asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, the Tathagata teaches that what is eternal and inconceivable²⁰⁹ is the realm of ultimate truth, the realm of buddha knowledge one realizes oneself. Bhagavan, do other schools not teach that what is eternal and inconceivable is a cause?”²¹⁰

The Buddha told Mahamati, “The cause of other schools does not qualify as eternal and inconceivable. And why not? Because what other schools claim is eternal and inconceivable is not the result of its own causal attribute. If what is eternal and inconceivable is not the result of its own causal attribute, on what basis does it appear as eternal and inconceivable? Furthermore, Mahamati, if what is inconceivable were the result of its own causal attribute, it would be eternal. But because it would be due to the causal attribute of a creator, it would not qualify as eternal and inconceivable.

“Mahamati, the reason my ultimate truth is eternal and inconceivable is because ultimate truth is the result of a causal attribute that transcends existence and nonexistence. Because the attainment of personal realization is its attribute, it has an attribute. And because the knowledge of ultimate truth is its cause, it has a cause. And because it is beyond existence and

nonexistence, it resembles what is not created: space, nirvana, and complete cessation. This is why it is eternal. Hence, Mahamati, it is not the same as the doctrines about what is eternal and inconceivable of other schools. Thus, Mahamati, this eternal and inconceivable is attained by the personal realization of the knowledge of the tathagatas. Therefore, the eternal and inconceivable attained by the personal realization of buddha knowledge is what you should cultivate.

“Moreover, Mahamati, the eternal and inconceivable of members of other schools is impermanent because it is caused by something else and because it lacks the power to create its own causal attribute. Also, Mahamati, members of other schools consider their eternal and inconceivable as eternal despite having witnessed the impermanence of the existence and nonexistence of what is created.

“Mahamati, despite having witnessed the impermanence of the existence and nonexistence of what is created, I could use the same method to claim that the realm of buddha knowledge realized by oneself is eternal and free from causes. Mahamati, if the eternal and inconceivable of other schools were the result of a causal attribute and that causal attribute did not itself exist, it would be the same as horns on a rabbit. Their eternal and inconceivable would be merely words and imagination. This is the problem among members of other schools. And how so? Because what is merely words and imagination is the same as rabbit horns, for which a causal attribute does not exist.

“Mahamati, what I speak of as eternal and inconceivable is eternal because it is based on the attribute of personal realization and because it transcends the existence and nonexistence of what is created. It is not in consideration of the impermanence of

external nonexistence that it is eternal. Mahamati, if what is eternal and inconceivable were eternal in consideration of the impermanence of external nonexistence, there would be no way to know the eternal and inconceivable's own causal attribute. As this distracts people from the attainment of the personal realization of the realm of buddha knowledge, it is not worth talking about.^{[211](#)}

XVIII²¹²

“Furthermore, Mahamati, shravakas who are afraid of the suffering that comes from their projection of samsara seek nirvana unaware that the difference between samsara and nirvana, as well as their projection of everything else, does not exist.²¹³ They conceive of nirvana as the cessation of all future sensory realms, not the transformation of repository consciousness through the personal realization of buddha knowledge. Thus, ignorant people speak of three paths²¹⁴ and not of the projection-free realm that is nothing but mind.²¹⁵ Mahamati, they therefore do not know the realm of the mind perceived by tathagatas of the past, the present, and the future. Instead, they are attached to the perception of a realm outside the mind and keep turning the wheel of samsara.

XIX 216

“Furthermore, Mahamati, nothing arises. This is what the tathagatas of the past, the present, and the future teach. And how so? Because existence and nonexistence are perceptions of one’s own mind, the existence or nonexistence of which does not arise. Mahamati, nothing that exists arises. Everything is like horns on a rabbit or a horse, the mistaken projections of an imagined reality by ignorant beings. Therefore, Mahamati, nothing that exists arises. The non-arising that characterizes all that exists, this is the personal realization of the realm of buddha knowledge, not the dualistic realm of projections of the ignorant.²¹⁷ The existence that characterizes such things as your body, your possessions, and the world around you, Mahamati, is the interplay of the grasping and the grasped of repository consciousness.²¹⁸ Trapped by their dualistic views of origination, duration, and cessation and their wish for things to arise, the ignorant give rise to projections of existence and nonexistence, not the wise. Mahamati, you should reflect on this in your practice.

XX²¹⁹

“Furthermore, Mahamati, there are five lineages of realization.²²⁰ And what are the five? They are the lineage of shravaka realization, the lineage of pratyeka-buddha realization, the lineage of tathagata realization, the indeterminate lineage, and the distant lineage.²²¹

“How do we recognize the lineage of shravaka realization? Upon learning how to put an end to the individual and shared characteristics of the skandhas, the dhatus, and the ayatanas, the hair on their entire body stands on end, and they delight in cultivating a knowledge of characteristics but not in cultivating an awareness of dependent origination.²²² This is what is meant by the lineage of shravaka realization. The realization of a shravaka belongs to the fifth and sixth stages.²²³ They put an end to the arising of passion but not to the habit-energy of passion. And they escape karmic deaths but do not escape imperceptible transformation deaths.²²⁴ They bellow the lion’s roar: ‘My lives have ended. I have walked the path of purity. I will not suffer another existence.’ Thus, they cultivate the knowledge that there is no self among persons and think that they have attained nirvana.

“Mahamati, those whose realization is distant²²⁵ also seek nirvana but think of it in terms of a self or a being or a life or an

individuality.²²⁶ And there are followers of still other paths²²⁷ who think everything depends on a creator and when its existence comes to an end that is nirvana. Those who think like this are incapable of seeing that there is no self in dharmas, and for them there is no liberation. Mahamati, these lineages of shravaka realization and those of other schools do not transcend the concept of transcendence. You should practice with diligence to transform such pernicious views.

“Mahamati, as for the lineage of pratyeka-buddha realization, upon hearing about the realization of different causal conditions,²²⁸ the hair on their entire body stands on end, and they weep tears of sorrow, and they avoid conditions or any attachment to them. But when they hear about different bodies and powers and different transformations involving combination and separation, their minds are captivated. Anyone whose understanding belongs to the lineage of pratyeka-buddha realization is taught in accordance with the pratyeka-buddha path. This is what characterizes the lineage of pratyeka-buddha realization.

“Mahamati, as for the lineage of tathagata realization, there are four kinds:²²⁹ the lineage of realization concerned with the reality of dharmas,²³⁰ the lineage of realization concerned with the non-reality of dharmas,²³¹ the lineage of realization concerned with the attainment of the personal realization of buddha knowledge, and the lineage of realization concerned with the splendors of external buddhalands. Mahamati, when someone hears these four described one after the other, as well as the inconceivable realm²³² whereby their body, possessions, and the world around them are merely perceptions of their own minds, and they are not terrified or alarmed, this is what

characterizes membership in the lineages of tathagata realization.

“Mahamati, the indeterminate lineage includes those who are instructed in these three lineages²³³ but who enter according to one teaching and succeed according to another. Mahamati, even if they are at the stage of initial purification where lineages are established, if they establish themselves beyond the projectionless stage,²³⁴ and they purify the habit-energy of their passions through the personal realization of the repository consciousness,²³⁵ and they see that dharmas have no self, even if they are shravakas dwelling in the bliss of samadhi, they will attain the glorious body of a tathagata.”²³⁶

XXI 237

The Bhagavan then repeated this teaching in verse:

1. “The goal of finding the stream / returning once more or not at all / or reaching the birthless state²³⁸ / all are confusions of the mind
2. Sometimes I teach three paths / sometimes one and sometimes none / for fools and those of little wisdom / and the wise who dwell apart²³⁹
3. The teaching of ultimate truth / transcends all dualities / for those who dwell in projectionless realms²⁴⁰ / why create three paths?
4. Dhyanas and boundless states / samadhis devoid of form / cessation of perception²⁴¹ / these don’t exist where there is only mind.”

XXII²⁴²

“As for icchantikas,²⁴³ Mahamati, if not icchantikas, who in this world would liberate them?²⁴⁴ There are two kinds of icchantikas, Mahamati,²⁴⁵ those who forsake good roots²⁴⁶ and those whose vows regarding others are without limits.

“Mahamati, what is meant by forsaking good roots? This refers to slandering the bodhisattva canon²⁴⁷ and falsely claiming it is not in accord with the teachings of liberation in the sutras or in the vinaya.²⁴⁸ Because they forsake their good roots, they don’t enter nirvana.

“Next are bodhisattvas whose practice includes the vow not to enter nirvana until all beings enter nirvana. However, Mahamati, what they mean by entering nirvana is characterized by not entering nirvana. Thus, they, too, follow the icchantika path.”

Mahamati asked, “Bhagavan, then which of these never enters nirvana?”

The Buddha replied, “Mahamati, bodhisattva icchantikas. They know that everything is already in nirvana. Thus, they never enter nirvana. This is not true of those icchantikas who forsake their good roots. Mahamati, even though they forsake their good roots, through the power of the tathagatas, at some point their good roots reappear. And how so? Because

tathagatas do not forsake any being. This is why bodhisattva
icchantikas do not enter nirvana.

XXIII 249

“Moreover, Mahamati, bodhisattvas should be well acquainted with the three modes of reality.²⁵⁰ And what are the three modes of reality? Imagined reality, dependent reality, and perfected reality.

“Mahamati, imagined reality arises from appearances. And how does imagined reality arise from appearances?²⁵¹ Mahamati, as the objects and forms of dependent reality appear, attachment results in two kinds of imagined reality. These are what the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones describe as ‘attachment to appearance’ and ‘attachment to name.’ Attachment to appearance involves attachment to external and internal entities, while attachment to name involves attachment to the individual and shared characteristics of these external and internal entities.²⁵² These are the two kinds of imagined reality. What serves as the ground and objective support²⁵³ from which they arise is dependent reality.

“And what is perfected reality? This is the mode that is free from name or appearance or from projection. It is attained by buddha knowledge and is the realm where the personal realization of buddha knowledge takes place. This is perfected reality and the heart of the tathagata-garbha.”²⁵⁴

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Name and appearance and projection / these
characterize two modes of reality / correct knowledge and
suchness / these characterize the perfected mode.”²⁵⁵

“Mahamati, this is what is known as the teaching of how to
view what characterizes the five dharmas and the modes of
reality.²⁵⁶ This is the realm where the personal realization of
buddha knowledge takes place and which you and other
bodhisattvas should cultivate.”²⁵⁷

XXIV²⁵⁸

“Furthermore, Mahamati, bodhisattvas should become adept at examining the two kinds of phenomena that have no self. And what are the two kinds of phenomena that have no self? Neither beings nor dharmas have a self.

“And what does it mean that beings have no self? The assemblage of the skandhas, the dhatus, or the ayatanas arises from ignorance, karma, and desire and includes neither a self nor anything that belongs to a self.²⁵⁹ As the grasping and attachment of such senses as the eye to form give rise to consciousness, bodies, houses²⁶⁰ and the world of objects that are perceptions of one’s own mind are fabricated and manifested from one’s own projections. They change and disappear every moment, like a river or a seed or a candle or the wind or a cloud. Restless like a monkey, attracted to impurities like a fly, and insatiable like a windblown fire, they move like a waterwheel, through life after life and bodily form after bodily form, impelled by habit-energy without beginning, like figures produced by some sort of magic trick or spell or mechanical device. To be skilled in the knowledge of such appearances means to know that beings have no self.

“And what does it mean to know that dharmas have no self? It means to be aware that the self-existence of the skandhas,

dhatus, and ayatanas is imaginary, that the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas are devoid of a self or anything that belongs to a self, that the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas are assemblages tied to desire and karma and that they arise from the interplay of conditions but are themselves passive,²⁶¹ and that all dharmas are like this. Through the power of imagination, fools give rise to erroneous projections devoid of individual or shared characteristics,²⁶² but not the wise, because they transcend the mind, the will and consciousness, the five dharmas, and the modes of reality.²⁶³

“Mahamati, bodhisattvas should become adept at seeing no self in anything at all. Bodhisattvas who become adept at seeing no self in dharmas soon gain an insight into the freedom from projections that characterizes the initial bodhisattva stage,²⁶⁴ and they delight in examining the characteristics of such awareness. As they continue their steady advance, they go beyond the ninth stage to the dharma cloud stage,²⁶⁵ where they create huge lotus flowers decorated with countless jewels and resembling jeweled thrones on which they sit and practice in this realm of illusory existence, and where they are joined by bodhisattvas of similar attainment and their retinues. From every buddhaland, tathagatas come and anoint their foreheads, just as a cakravartin²⁶⁶ anoints the forehead of the crown prince. Having gone past the bodhisattva stage, they attain the personal realization of the realm of buddha knowledge. And because they see no self in any dharma, they acquire the incomparable dharma body of a tathagata. This is what no self in dharmas means. You and the other bodhisattvas should cultivate this.”

XXV 267

Mahamati then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please teach us about assertion and denial so that I and the other bodhisattvas can avoid these two pernicious views and quickly attain unexcelled, complete enlightenment, and once enlightened, we might avoid eternalistic assertions and nihilistic denials and not slander the true Dharma.”

Upon hearing Mahamati Bodhisattva’s request, the Buddha replied in verse:

1. “Assertions and denials / don’t exist where there is only mind / as for the body, the world and possessions / unable to see these are mind / and bereft of any wisdom / fools assert and deny.”[268](#)

The Buddha then explained the meaning of this verse and told Mahamati, “There are four kinds of assertion regarding what is nonexistent. And what are the four? They include assertions of a nonexistent characteristic, assertions of a nonexistent view, assertions of a nonexistent cause, and assertions of a nonexistent existence. These are the four kinds of assertion. As for denial, this means denying what is asserted because it cannot be grasped or observed. This is what is meant by assertion and denial.

“Mahamati, as for the assertion of a nonexistent

characteristic, this refers to becoming attached to a nonexistent individual or shared characteristic among the skandhas, the dhatus, or the ayatanas as being like this and not other than this.²⁶⁹ This is what is meant by the assertion of a nonexistent characteristic. Such assertions of a nonexistent characteristic are the result of attachment to the habit-energy of different mistaken projections without beginning.

“Mahamati, as for the assertion of a nonexistent view, this refers to asserting the view of a self, a person, a being, a life, or an individuality among such entities as the skandhas, the dhatus, or the ayatanas. This is what is meant by the assertion of a nonexistent view.²⁷⁰

“Mahamati, as for the assertion of a nonexistent cause, this refers to an original consciousness which does not arise from causes that would render it unreal or illusory and which does not subsequently arise by itself but only arises after eyes, form, light, and memory arise. And once it exists, it ceases. This is what is meant by the assertion of a nonexistent cause.²⁷¹

“Mahamati, as for the assertion of a nonexistent existence, this refers to attachment to assertions of the existence of what is uncreated, such as space, cessation, or nirvana.²⁷² These neither exist nor do not exist. And any dharma that neither exists nor does not exist is like the perception of a rabbit horn or a horse horn or a strand of hair.²⁷³ It neither exists nor does not exist. This is what is meant by assertions of a nonexistent existence.²⁷⁴

“Assertions and denials are the projections of fools unskilled in examining what are nothing but perceptions of their own minds. This is not true of the wise. Therefore, you should practice avoiding the pernicious views of assertion and denial.

“Furthermore, Mahamati, once bodhisattvas have completely fathomed the characteristics of the mind, the will and conceptual consciousness, the five dharmas, the modes of reality, and the two kinds of no-self, in order to help others, they appear in a variety of guises, just as imagined reality is based on dependent reality.²⁷⁶ And like magic gems that reflect every color, they appear in every buddha assembly in every buddhaland, where they hear teachings that transcend those of shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas, teachings such as ‘all dharmas are like an illusion, a dream, a shadow, or moonlight on the water,’ and ‘avoid the arising or cessation, the permanence or impermanence of all dharmas.’

“And they enter hundreds of thousands of samadhis, countless hundreds of thousands of samadhis. And as they do so, they travel to other buddhalands and venerate other buddhas and are reborn in celestial palaces, where they praise the three treasures²⁷⁷ and appear as buddhas themselves surrounded by assemblies of shravakas and bodhisattvas, and where they liberate beings by explaining to them that what they perceive is nothing but their own mind and that external existence does not exist, thus enabling them to transcend such views as existence and nonexistence.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse,

1. “The world as nothing but mind / this is what
bodhisattvas see / in different kinds of bodies / without the
slightest effort / they attain higher powers / self-masteries
and accomplishments.”[278](#)

XXVII²⁷⁹

Mahamati again asked the Buddha, “May the Bhagavan please explain to us how all things are empty, non-arising, non-dual, and devoid of self-existence so that once I and the other bodhisattvas understand that they are empty, non-arising, non-dual, and devoid of self-existence, we will be free of projections of existence and nonexistence, and we will quickly realize unexcelled, complete enlightenment.”²⁸⁰

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen closely and consider this well. I will now explain this for you.”

Mahamati answered, “Wonderful, Bhagavan. May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha began, “As for emptiness, Mahamati, emptiness belongs to an imagined reality. Mahamati, it is to those who are attached to an imagined reality that I speak of emptiness, non-arising, non-duality, and the absence of self-existence.”²⁸¹

“Mahamati, briefly, there are seven kinds of emptiness:²⁸² the emptiness of characteristics, the emptiness of self-existence, the emptiness of phenomena, the emptiness of non-phenomena, the emptiness of ineffability, the great emptiness of the ultimate truth of buddha knowledge, and the emptiness of mutual exclusion.

“What is meant by the emptiness of characteristics? The emptiness of characteristics refers to the emptiness of the

individual or shared characteristics of whatever exists. Because the observable distinctions of contrast and combination ²⁸³ are nonexistent, neither individual nor shared characteristics arise. And because the existence of this, that, or both together does not exist, characteristics do not persist. Thus, I say the characteristics of whatever exists are empty. This is what is meant by the emptiness of characteristics.

“What is meant by the emptiness of self-existence? This refers to the non-arising of something’s own existence. This is what is meant by the emptiness of something’s self-existence. Thus I speak of the emptiness of self-existence.

“What is meant by the emptiness of phenomena?²⁸⁴ This refers to the lack of a self or anything that belongs to a self in the skandhas, which arise due to the conjunction of causes and the functioning of karma. This is what is meant by the emptiness of phenomena.

“Mahamati, since phenomena are empty, it turns out dependent reality is nonexistent.²⁸⁵ This is what is meant by the emptiness of non-phenomena.

“What is meant by the emptiness of the ineffability²⁸⁶ of things? This means that because imagined reality is devoid of words, everything is ineffable. This is what is meant by the emptiness of the ineffability of things.

“What is meant by the great emptiness of the ultimate truth of buddha knowledge?²⁸⁷ This refers to the emptiness of the habit-energy of all erroneous views upon attaining the personal realization of buddha knowledge. This is what is meant by the great emptiness of the ultimate truth of buddha knowledge.

“What is meant by the emptiness of mutual exclusion? This refers to the emptiness of this not applying to that. This is what is

meant by the emptiness of mutual exclusion.²⁸⁸ For example, Mahamati, if there are no elephants or horses, oxen or sheep in Mrigaramatri Vihara but not no monks, and we say it is empty, the vihara itself isn't empty, and the monks themselves are not empty, and it is not that elephants and horses are not present elsewhere. This refers to the individual characteristics of things, whereby one is not present in another. This is what is meant by the emptiness of mutual exclusion. Among these seven kinds of emptiness, the emptiness of mutual exclusion is the crudest kind of emptiness²⁸⁹ and should be avoided.

“Mahamati, things do not give rise to themselves. This does not mean they do not arise—unless one is in samadhi.²⁹⁰ This is what is meant by non-arising. The absence of self-existence is what is meant by non-arising. What lacks self-existence is momentary and in continuous flux and manifests different states of existence but without possessing any existence of its own. Thus, whatever exists is devoid of self-existence.

“What does non-dual mean?²⁹¹ This refers to everything being cloudy or sunny, long or short, bright or dark.²⁹² Mahamati, everything is non-dual. Samsara isn't present in nirvana, and nirvana isn't present in samsara. This is because their existence is due to their different characteristics.²⁹³ This is what is meant by non-dual. And as with nirvana and samsara, this is true of everything else. Therefore, you should cultivate what is empty, non-arising, non-dual, and without self-existence.”

The Bhagavan then repeated this in verse:

1. “I always teach emptiness / to transcend eternity
and annihilation / samsara is like an illusion or dream / but

karma is relentless

2. Space and nirvana / and two kinds of cessation /
fools create projections / the wise avoid what is or isn't."

The Bhagavan then told Mahamati, "The teaching of emptiness, non-arising, non-duality, and the absence of self-existence pervades all the sutras spoken by the buddhas. Every sutra teaches these truths. But because every sutra responds to the longings of beings, they differ as to how they express these truths, which are not really in the words. Just as the sight of a mirage confuses a herd of deer, whereby the deer imagine the appearance of water where there is no water, likewise the teachings of the sutras are meant to gladden people's hearts. But buddha knowledge is not to be found in the words. Therefore, trust the meaning and don't cling to the words."

XXVIII 294

Mahamati Bodhisattva then asked the Buddha, “In the sutras, the Bhagavan says that the tathagata-garbha²⁹⁵ is intrinsically pure, endowed with thirty-two attributes²⁹⁶ and present in the bodies of all beings, and that, like a priceless jewel wrapped in soiled clothing,²⁹⁷ the ever-present, unchanging tathagata-garbha is likewise wrapped in the soiled clothing of the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas and stained with the stain of the erroneous projections of greed, anger, and delusion,²⁹⁸ and that this is what all buddhas teach. How is it that what the Bhagavan says about the tathagata-garbha is the same as what followers of other paths say about a self? Bhagavan, followers of other paths also speak of an immortal creator without attributes, omnipresent and indestructible. And they say this, Bhagavan, is the self.”

The Buddha replied, “Mahamati, the tathagata-garba of which I speak is not the same as the self mentioned by followers of other paths. Mahamati, when I speak about the tathagata-garbha, sometimes I call it ‘emptiness,’ ‘formlessness,’ or ‘intentionlessness,’ or ‘realm of reality,’ ‘dharma nature,’ or ‘dharma body,’ or ‘nirvana,’ ‘what is devoid of self-existence,’ or ‘what neither arises nor ceases,’ or ‘original quiescence,’ or ‘intrinsic nirvana,’ or similar expressions.²⁹⁹

“It is to put an end to the fear foolish beings have about the expression ‘no self’ that the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones proclaim the teaching of the tathagata-garbha as a projectionless realm devoid of fabrications. Mahamati, bodhisattvas of the present and the future should not become attached to any view of a self.

“Take for example a potter who applies such things as manual labor, water, a stick, a wheel, and a string to a lump of clay to make different kinds of vessels. The Tathagata is also like this, applying wisdom and a variety of skillful means to what has no self and is free from projection. Sometimes I speak about the tathagatagarbha and sometimes no self. Thus, the tathagatagarbha of which I speak is not the same as the self spoken of by followers of other paths. This is what is meant by the teaching of the tathagata-garbha. The tathagata-garbha is taught to attract those members of other paths who are attached to a self so that they will give up their projection of an unreal self and will enter the threefold gate of liberation³⁰⁰ and aspire to attain unexcelled, complete enlightenment forthwith. This is why the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones speak in this manner about the tathagata-garbha. To speak otherwise would be to agree with the followers of other paths. Therefore, Mahamati, in order to avoid the views of followers of other paths, you should rely on the selfless tathagata-garbha.”³⁰¹

XXIX 302

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “A continuous person in the skandhas / conditions
and motes of dust / the creation of a powerful lord /
projections of nothing but mind.”[303](#)

XXX304

Thinking about beings in future ages, Mahamati asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please tell us about the practices of realization³⁰⁵ whereby bodhisattvas become great practitioners.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “There are four practices the mastery of which enables bodhisattvas to become great practitioners. And which four? Becoming adept at distinguishing the perceptions of one’s own mind, perceiving the nonexistence of external existence, avoiding views of arising, duration, and cessation, and delighting³⁰⁶ in the personal realization of buddha knowledge. These are the four practices the mastery of which enables bodhisattvas to become great practitioners.³⁰⁷”

“And how do bodhisattvas become adept at distinguishing the perceptions of their own minds? They regard the three realms like this: as merely distinctions of the mind, devoid of a self or what belongs to a self, as motionless and free from coming or going, the result of the habit-energy of erroneous fabrications without beginning, and the various forms and phenomena of the three realms involving their body, their possessions, and the world around them as perceptions of those fabrications. This is how bodhisattvas become adept at distinguishing the perceptions of their own minds.

“And how do bodhisattvas become adept at perceiving the

nonexistence of external existence? Since everything is a dream or mirage, they regard the self-existence of everything that exists as the result of the habit-energy of erroneous projections without beginning. This is how bodhisattvas become adept at perceiving the nonexistence of external existence.³⁰⁸

“And how do bodhisattvas become adept at avoiding views of arising, duration, and cessation? Since whatever exists is like an illusion or a dream and its existence does not arise from itself, from another, or from a combination of both, but as a distinction of one’s own mind, they therefore see external existence as nonexistent, consciousness as not arising, and conditions as not combining but arising due to projections. When they see that all internal or external dharmas in the three realms cannot be grasped and are devoid of self-existence, their views of arising cease. And once they know that the self-existence of everything is illusory, they attain the forbearance of non-arising. And once they attain the forbearance of non-arising, they avoid views of arising, duration, and cessation. This is how bodhisattvas become adept at distinguishing and avoiding views of arising, duration and cessation.³⁰⁹

“And how do bodhisattvas become adept at delighting in the personal realization of buddha knowledge? Upon attaining the forbearance of non-arising, they dwell at the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path, where they are able to transcend characteristics of the mind, will and consciousness, the five dharmas, the modes of reality, and the two kinds of no-self, and where they acquire a projection body.”³¹⁰

Mahamati asked the Buddha,³¹¹ “Bhagavan, why is it called a projection body?”

The Buddha replied, “Mahamati, the reason it is called a

projection body is because it travels quickly and without obstruction, like a thought. Thoughts travel to other places countless leagues away unobstructed by rock walls because of the memory of something experienced in the past. And they arise without interrupting the functioning of one's mind or interfering with one's body. Mahamati, such projection bodies are acquired at one and the same time. Endowed with higher powers and spiritual masteries obtained in the Samadhi of the Illusory, the different projection bodies of bodhisattvas appear simultaneously, like unobstructed projections, in whatever realms they recall having vowed to bring those beings to perfection who delight in the personal realization of buddha knowledge.

“Thus do bodhisattvas attain the forbearance of non-arising and dwell at the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path, where they exchange the body characterized by the mind, will and consciousness, the five dharmas, the modes of reality, and the two kinds of no-self, for a projection body and become adept at delighting in the personal realization of buddha knowledge.

“These are the four practices the mastery of which enables bodhisattvas to become great practitioners and to which you should devote yourselves.”

Mahamati once again asked, “Bhagavan, please tell us about the causes and conditions of things so that once we are aware of their characteristics, we bodhisattvas will avoid erroneous views concerning their existence or nonexistence, and we will not mistake their appearance as sequential or simultaneous.”³¹³

The Buddha replied, “Mahamati, all things are characterized by two kinds of conditions: namely, external and internal. External conditions include such things as a lump of clay, a post, a wheel, a piece of string, a stick, water, and manual techniques. It is from the application of such conditions that a pot results. As with a pot from clay, the application of conditions likewise results in a rug from yarn, a mat from grass, a sprout from a seed, and butter from milk. These are the before-and-after results of external conditions.

“As for internal conditions, such things as ignorance, desire, and karma constitute the conditions, while the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas give rise to constitute the results of the conditions. They aren’t separate, but this is how foolish people imagine them. This is what is meant by internal conditions ³¹⁴

“Mahamati, there are six kinds of causes: an immanent cause, a connecting cause, a characterizing cause, an instrumental cause, a manifesting cause, and an inactive cause.³¹⁵ An

immanent cause produces internal and external effects as soon as it becomes a cause. A connecting cause produces internal and external effects as soon as it forms a connection, such as the skandhas and seeds.³¹⁶ A characterizing cause produces the characteristic of an uninterrupted continuity. An instrumental cause exerts supremacy like a cakravartin. A manifesting cause manifests causes and effects whenever projections occur, just as a lamp illuminates forms. And an inactive cause³¹⁷ is the absence of projection that occurs with the interruption of continuity when something ceases.

“Mahamati, these are the projections of foolish people, and they do not occur sequentially or simultaneously. And how so? If they occurred simultaneously, there would be no difference between cause and effect, and it would be impossible to identify a cause. And if they occurred sequentially, it would be impossible to identify an individual entity. The non-occurrence of a sequential occurrence is like having no word for father in the absence of children.

“Mahamati, it is not true that what occurs sequentially is a continuity. It is merely a projection of what produces or what is produced by direct, supporting, continuous, or contributing causes.³¹⁸ Mahamati, a sequential occurrence does not occur because it is characterized by an attachment to an imagined reality. It does not occur sequentially or simultaneously because it belongs to the perceptions of your own mind. And it does not occur sequentially or simultaneously, Mahamati, because the individual or shared characteristics of an external existence do not exist. It is only because you are unaware that the perceptions of your own mind are projections that forms appear. Therefore you should avoid views of a sequential or

simultaneous occurrence characterizing the operation of causes and conditions.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Nothing arises from causes and conditions / nor does anything cease / at the heart of ceasing and arising / arise conceptions of causes and conditions

2. This isn’t to stop ceasing and arising / or the continuity of causes and conditions / only to stop foolish people / from misconceiving causation

3. Something existing or not due to causes / no such thing occurs / the confusion of habit-energy / from this the three realms appear

4. In truth nothing arises from causes / nor does anything cease / regard conditioned things / like flowers in the sky / let go deluded views / the grasping and the grasped³¹⁹

5. Nothing has arisen or ever will / nor do causes or conditions exist / nothing exists at all / and these are nothing but words.”

XXXII 320

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please explain for us the essential characteristics of word projection. Bhagavan, once I and the other bodhisattvas understand the essential characteristics of such projection and are able to penetrate the two kinds of truth regarding words and what they express,³²¹ we will quickly attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, and we will use the two kinds of truth regarding words and what they express to free all beings from impurity.”

The Buddha replied, “Mahamati, listen carefully and ponder this well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati said, “Wonderful, Bhagavan. May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “There are four kinds of word projection: object words, dream words, words for attachment to mistaken projections, and words for projections without beginning.³²²

“Object words arise from attachment to the projection of forms and characteristics. Dream words arise from recollecting previously experienced realms that upon waking are found to be nonexistent. Words for attachment to mistaken projections arise from recollecting previous acts of hostility.³²³ And words for projections without beginning arise from the habit-energy of the

seeds of past attachments to beginningless projections. This is what characterizes the four kinds of word projection.”

Mahamati once more beseeched the Buddha to explain the meaning of this, “Bhagavan, please tell us again about the realm in which word projection occurs. Bhagavan, where and why and how and based on what do beings give rise to their projection of words?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Sounds are produced by the conjunction of the head, chest, throat, nose, lips, tongue, and teeth.”

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, are words and projections separate or not separate?”

The Buddha replied, “Words and projections are neither separate nor not separate. And how so? Because the one is the cause of the other.³²⁵ Mahamati, if words and projections were separate, projections could not be their cause. And if they were not separate, words could not express their meaning. But they do. Hence, they are not separate and not not separate.”

Mahamati again asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, are words ultimate truth? Or is what they express ultimate truth?”

The Buddha replied, “Mahamati, words are not ultimate truth, nor is what they express ultimate truth. And how so? Ultimate truth is what buddhas delight in. And what words lead to is ultimate truth. But words are not ultimate truth. Ultimate truth is

what is attained by the personal realization of buddha knowledge. It is not a realm known by means of the projection of words. Therefore, the projection of words does not express ultimate truth.

“Words arise and cease and shift, with their occurrence depending on changing causes and conditions. Mahamati, what depends on changing causes and conditions for its occurrence does not express ultimate truth. Mahamati, because of the nonexistence of their own characteristics or of those of something else, words do not express ultimate truth. Moreover, Mahamati, because any characteristic of an external existence does not exist except as a perception of one’s own mind, the projection of words does not express ultimate truth. Hence, Mahamati, you should avoid the projection of words.”

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The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Whatever exists has no self-existence / the same is true of words / the profound truth of the emptiness of emptiness / is something fools don’t know
2. The self-existence of what exists / and the words I teach are like shadows / to those who realize buddha knowledge themselves / I teach ultimate reality.”[327](#)

Mahamati then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please tell us, how do we transcend sameness, difference, both and neither, existence, nonexistence, and neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence and impermanence,³²⁹ which is not practiced by followers of other paths but which is the practice of the personal realization of buddha knowledge? And how do we get free of the individual and shared characteristics of projection? And how do we accord with the truth of ultimate reality and the sequence of stages marked by increasing purification that lead to the tathagata stage, where one’s effortless resolve, like a magic gem that reflects every color, displays realms without limit, but where everything displayed is distinguished as a perception of one’s own mind? And how do we and other bodhisattvas avoid views of the individual or shared characteristics of such an imagined reality and quickly attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment and enable other beings to achieve complete happiness and contentment?”

The Buddha replied, “It is excellent, Mahamati, excellent, that you are able to ask me about the meaning of such things for the happiness of the many, for the welfare of the many, out of compassion for all gods and humans.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen carefully and ponder it

well, and I will clarify and explain this for you.”

Mahamati said, “Wonderful, Bhagavan. May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha said, “Mahamati, foolish people cling to internal and external existence due to the habit-energy of their attachments to projections of the self-existence of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence, unaware they are nothing but their own mind.

“Mahamati, it is like when deer are oppressed by thirst, and they see a shimmering mirage, and thinking it is water, they rush foolishly toward it, unaware it isn’t water. In the same manner, foolish people are infected by the habit-energy of beginningless projections and fabrications and are inflamed by the fires of greed, anger, and delusion. Delighting in worlds of form and beholding their origination, duration, and cessation and clinging to external and internal existence, they fall prey to grasping and imagining conceptions of their sameness or difference or both or neither, or of their existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of their permanence or impermanence.

“It is like a city of gandharvas,³³⁰ which foolish people devoid of wisdom imagine as a city but which is the appearance of the habit-energy of their beginningless attachment to form and is neither a city nor not a city. In the same manner, there are followers of other paths who cling to views of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence due to the habit-energy of their beginningless attachment to fictions and who are thus unable to see them as nothing but perceptions of their own minds.

“It is like when people dream³³¹ they are in a place filled with men and women, elephants and horses, carts and pedestrians, towns and villages, orchards and forests, mountains and rivers, ponds and lakes. And upon waking, they remember this. Mahamati, what do you think? If these people don’t let go of the memory of what they have previously dreamt, are they wise or not?”

Mahamati replied, “They are not, Bhagavan.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “The same is true of foolish people infected by erroneous views and the wisdom of followers of other paths who do not realize their views of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence are the dreamlike perceptions of their own minds.

“It is like a landscape painting without height or depth³³² in which foolish people imagine height and depth. The same is true of future followers of other paths full of the habit-energy of erroneous views. Due to their views of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence, they harm themselves and harm others, calling them nihilists for maintaining the doctrines of non-arising and neither existence nor nonexistence. Denying causation, they sever their good roots and destroy the means to get free of impurity. Anyone who seeks transcendence should keep away from them. Once those who make such claims fall prey to views of self, other, or both and projections of existence or nonexistence, they become trapped in assertions and denials, and because of such mistaken conceptions, they end up in one of the hells..

“It is like someone with defective vision who sees a strand of hair and asks others if they see it. The strand of hair does not actually exist. But neither does it not exist, because it is seen and not seen. The same is true of the fantasies and longings of the followers of other paths, which are based on views of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence, and with which they slander the true Dharma and mislead themselves and others.

“It is like a wheel of fire that is not a wheel.³³³ Foolish people imagine a wheel, but not the wise. In the same manner, the fantasies and longings of the followers of other paths are based on imagining whatever arises in terms of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence.

“It is like raindrops, which look like jewels.³³⁴ Fools and those of little or no wisdom mistake them for gems and try to grab them. But raindrops are neither gems nor not gems because they are grasped and not grasped. Likewise, followers of other paths infected by the habit-energy of false views and projections regard what does not exist as arising and what exists due to causes as ceasing.³³⁵

“Furthermore, Mahamati, there are those conversant with the three means to knowledge³³⁶ or the five-part syllogism³³⁷ who imagine that there is something in the personal realization of buddha knowledge that exists apart from the two modes of reality.³³⁸ Mahamati, those who transform their mind, will, and conceptual consciousness put an end to the projections of grasping and grasped that are perceptions of their own minds. But those who cultivate the personal realization of buddha

knowledge of the tathagata stage do not think of it as existing or not existing. If those who cultivate should develop a perception of the existence or nonexistence of such a realm, they would perceive an individuality, a self, or a person.

“Mahamati, any teaching involving the self-existence of individual or shared characteristics is the teaching of an apparition buddha, not the teaching of a real buddha. Moreover, all their teachings arise from the views and longings of foolish beings and are not for establishing teachings of another reality or for indicating the bliss of the samadhi attained by those who dwell in the personal realization of buddha knowledge.

“It is like the appearance of a tree’s reflection in water,³³⁹ which is not a reflection and not not a reflection, and which does not resemble a tree and does not not resemble a tree. In the same way, those who are infected by the habit-energy of heterodox views and attached to projections of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence would not know that these are nothing but the perceptions of their own minds.

“It is like a clear mirror that shows all the shapes and images before it without discriminating among them.³⁴⁰ They are not images and not not images. But they are seen as images or not depending on whether foolish people discriminate them as such. In the same way, the misconceptions of the followers of other paths appear as images of their own minds, which they discriminate and cling to based on their views of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence.

“It is like the sounds made when water and wind come together.³⁴¹ They neither exist nor do not exist. In the same way, the misconceptions and projections of followers of other paths are based on views of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence.

“It is like the heat waves that flow like rivers or well up like clouds in places barren of vegetation.³⁴² They neither exist nor do not exist depending on the existence or not of thirst. The same is true of the ignorant. Infected by the habit-energy of beginningless fabrications, they imagine the sameness or difference or both or neither, or the existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or the permanence or impermanence of origination, duration, and cessation as the knowledge of reality known to buddhas,³⁴³ just like heat waves.

“It is like when someone uses incantations to make something move that isn’t alive,³⁴⁴ or when something controlled by a pishaca³⁴⁵ moves and foolish people attached to the projection of movement say it exists. In the same way, the misconceptions and longings of followers of other paths are based on views of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence. But they are attachments to fictions and not founded on anything real.

“Therefore, Mahamati, those who would attain the personal realization of buddha knowledge should abandon³⁴⁶ all views and projections concerning the sameness or difference or both or neither, or concerning the existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or concerning the permanence or impermanence of origination, duration, and cessation.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “An illusion, a dream, the reflection of a tree in water / a strand of hair, a shimmering mirage / who views the three realms like this / finally attains liberation³⁴⁷

2. Just as the sight of a mirage / bewilders the mind as it shimmers / deer imagine water / where no water actually exists

3. Likewise seeds of consciousness³⁴⁸ / shimmer in the visible world / fools give rise to projections / as if they were looking through cataracts

4. Through birth and death without beginning / attached to grasping existence / removing one wedge with another / they renounce their desire to grasp

5. Like something that moves by magic / a cloud, a dream, or lightning / such insight results in liberation / and severs the three continuities forever³⁴⁹

6. There is no creator inside / things resemble a mirage in the sky³⁵⁰ / once you know they’re like this / there isn’t anything known

7. Designations are merely names / devoid of characteristics / but from them come projections / the skandhas are like strands of hair

8. Like strands of hair or paintings / illusions or dreams or gandharvan cities / shimmering mirages or wheels of fire / beings who don’t exist are thus perceived

9. Permanence or impermanence, sameness or difference / both of these or neither / the mistaken projections of fools / continuities without beginning

10. In water, a mirror, or an unclouded eye / in a

miraculous jewel / countless forms are seen / none of which are real

11. Whatever exists appears / like a painting or a shimmering mirage / all the forms that are seen / are like a dream in which nothing is real.”

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“Moreover, Mahamati, the teaching of the tathagatas is free from the four possibilities^{[352](#)} of sameness or difference or both or neither, or of existence or nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, or of permanence or impermanence and also free from projections of assertion or denial of existence or nonexistence. What the tathagatas chiefly teach are the truths of the scriptures, dependent origination, the path, cessation, and liberation.^{[353](#)} Their teaching does not include a self-existence or a supreme lord or a spontaneous cause or minute particles or temporal periods or a continuously existing entity. Furthermore, Mahamati, it is in order to eliminate the twin obstructions of passion and knowledge that they put forth the series of 108 projection-free statements^{[354](#)} and distinguish the characteristics of the various paths and stages,^{[355](#)} as if they were caravan chiefs.^{[356](#)}

XXXVII³⁵⁷

“Moreover, Mahamati, there are four kinds of meditation. And what are the four? They include beginner meditation, meditation on meaning, meditation on suchness, and tathagata meditation.

“What is meant by beginner meditation? This refers to what shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, and followers of other paths practice, which is to focus primarily on meditating on the nonexistence of a personal self among the individual and shared characteristics of their bodily frame, on its impermanence, its suffering, and its impurity. Meditating on no other characteristics than these, they proceed from one to the next but without eliminating such characteristics.³⁵⁸ This is what is meant by beginner meditation.

“And what is meant by meditation on meaning?³⁵⁹ Given the absence of a self among the individual or shared characteristics of persons and the nonexistence of a self, an other, or both as taught by heterodox sects, this refers to meditating on the absence of a self among dharmas and on the meaning of the characteristics of the stages through which one steadily advances. This is what is meant by meditation on meaning.

“And what is meant by meditation on suchness?³⁶⁰ This refers to the projection of the projection of the two kinds of no-self³⁶¹

and the projection of the non-arising of suchness. This is what is meant by meditation on suchness.

“And what is meant by tathagata meditation? This refers to enjoying the threefold bliss³⁶² that characterizes the personal realization of buddha knowledge and to performing inconceivable deeds on behalf of other beings upon reaching the tathagata stage. This is what is meant by tathagata meditation.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Meditation practiced by beginners / meditation on the meaning of characteristics / meditation based on suchness / or the pure meditation of the tathagatas

2. On such shapes as the sun or moon / or a lotus in the depths of hell³⁶³ / or space after the fire³⁶⁴ / thus do practitioners contemplate

3. A myriad of objects such as these / fill the meditations of other schools / and those trapped in the realms / of shravakas or pratyeka-buddhas

4. Those who abandon these / are thereby free of projections / buddhas come from every land / with hands beyond conception / and touch their heads as one / and lead them into suchness.³⁶⁵

XXXVIII 366

Mahamati Bodhisattva then addressed the Buddha, “As for entering nirvana, Bhagavan, what is meant by ‘nirvana?’”

The Buddha replied, “Witnessing the transformation of the habit-energy of self-existence of the repository consciousness, the will, and conceptual consciousness, this is what is meant by nirvana. The nirvana of other buddhas and myself is the realm that is empty of self-existence.

“Moreover, Mahamati, nirvana is the realm of the personal realization of buddha knowledge. It is free from the existence or nonexistence of projections of permanence or impermanence. And why is it not permanent? Because projections of individual or shared characteristics are impermanent. Therefore it is not permanent.³⁶⁷ And why is it not impermanent? Because it is the personal realization attained by all sages of the past, the present, and the future. Therefore it is not impermanent.³⁶⁸

“Mahamati, nirvana is not annihilation or death. If nirvana were death, there would be the continuity of something reborn. And if nirvana were annihilation, it could be characterized as something created.³⁶⁹ Therefore, nirvana is free from annihilation and free from death. This is why it is the refuge of practitioners.

“Moreover, Mahamati, nirvana isn’t lost, and it isn’t found. It isn’t impermanent, and it isn’t permanent. It doesn’t have one

meaning, and it doesn't have multiple meanings.³⁷⁰ This is what is meant by nirvana.

“Furthermore, Mahamati, the nirvana of shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas consists in an awareness of individual and shared characteristics, in avoiding contact, in an end to delusions, and in not giving rise to projections.³⁷¹ This is their idea of nirvana.

“Moreover, Mahamati, there are two kinds of self-existence. And what are they? Attachment to the self-existence of words and attachment to the self-existence of objects. Attachment to the self-existence of words comes from attachment to the habit-energy of word projections without beginning. Attachment to the self-existence of objects comes from not realizing that the distinctions that arise are perceptions of one’s own mind.

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“Moreover, Mahamati, the tathagatas employ two kinds of powers³⁷⁴ for the support of bodhisattvas who come before them for instruction. And which two supporting powers? The power to appear in bodily form and speak to those in samadhi and the power to anoint their foreheads.³⁷⁵

“Mahamati, by relying on these powers of the buddhas, bodhisattvas at the initial bodhisattva stage enter what is known as the Light of the Mahayana Samadhi.³⁷⁶ Once they enter this samadhi, buddhas from worlds throughout the ten directions appear in bodily form and speak to them by means of these powers, as they did to Vajragarbha Bodhisattva³⁷⁷ and to other bodhisattvas of similar virtue and accomplishment.

“Mahamati, the power of the samadhi attained by these bodhisattvas at the initial bodhisattva stage is a result of the good roots they have cultivated and accumulated over the course of a hundred thousand kalpas. As they work their way through the easy and difficult³⁷⁸ aspects of the various stages, they finally reach the dharma cloud stage,³⁷⁹ where they dwell inside a magnificent lotus flower palace seated upon a jeweled lotus flower throne surrounded by a retinue of their fellow bodhisattvas adorned with necklaces of jewels that shine like the

sun or moon or golden champaka flowers.³⁸⁰ The great victors of the ten directions then appear before their thrones in this lotus flower palace and anoint their foreheads, just as Shakra³⁸¹ or a cakravartin might anoint the forehead of a crown prince.³⁸² This is what is meant by the power to anoint the foreheads of bodhisattvas. Mahamati, this is what is meant by the two powers that support bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas who rely on these two powers will meet the tathagatas. Otherwise, they will not.

“Moreover, Mahamati, all the special abilities of bodhisattvas regarding samadhi and teaching depend on these two powers of the tathagatas. Mahamati, if bodhisattvas could teach without the supporting powers of the tathagatas, fools could do so too. And why don’t they? Because they aren’t supported by these powers.

“Mahamati, when tathagatas enter a city, due to their great powers, music comes forth spontaneously from instruments as well as from hills and rocks and trees and from city walls and palaces, not to mention from sentient beings, as those who are deaf, blind, and mute are liberated from countless forms of suffering—such are the limitless powers of the tathagatas to help others.”

Mahamati then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, why do the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones bestow their powers of support when bodhisattvas are in samadhi and anoint their foreheads during the higher stages?”

The Buddha replied, “Mahamati, the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones use their powers to support bodhisattvas so that they are not troubled by demons and do not fall into the trances of shravakas and so that they will attain the personal realization of the tathagata stage and so that their

attainments will increase. If they did not use their powers to support them, they might fall prey to the misconceptions and projections of followers of other paths or to the longings of shravakas and demons and not attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Therefore, all tathagatas use their powers to protect bodhisattvas.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “The noblest of those with higher powers / vow to purify everyone / their samadhis and their foreheads / from the initial stage to the tenth.”[383](#)

XLI 384

Mahamati again asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, when the Buddha speaks of dependent origination,³⁸⁵ he speaks of causes and conditions and does not speak of a self.³⁸⁶ Bhagavan, followers of other paths also speak of causes and conditions, namely, that whatever exists arises as a result of a supreme deity or force, or time, or minute particles. When the Bhagavan says whatever exists arises as a result of causes and conditions, is his position the same or different?

“Bhagavan, followers of other paths say what exists comes from what exists or what does not exist, while the Bhagavan says what exists comes from what does not exist, and once it arises, it ceases. According to the Bhagavan, ignorance is the condition of memory and so on up to old age and death.³⁸⁷ But this, Bhagavan, is a teaching of no causes, not a teaching of causes. The teaching established by the Bhagavan goes like this: ‘Because this exists, that exists.’³⁸⁸ It does not acknowledge a gradual existence.³⁸⁹ The teaching of other schools would appear to be superior, not that of the Tathagata. And how so? Because according to other schools, Bhagavan, the cause does not arise from conditions but gives rise to what exists.³⁹⁰ Whereas the Bhagavan says the effect is discernable in the

cause, and the cause is discernable in the effect,³⁹¹ which confuses causes and conditions and which thus forms an endless circle.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “I do not teach that there are no causes, nor do I confuse causes and conditions, rather ‘because this exists, that exists,’ the nonexistence of what grasps and what is grasped, and the awareness that these are nothing but perceptions of one’s own mind. Mahamati, as long as people cling to what grasps or what is grasped and are unaware that these are nothing but perceptions of their own mind, it is they who mistake the existence or nonexistence of external objects, not my teaching of dependent origination. I have always taught that things arise due to the conjunction of causes and conditions not that they arise without a cause.”

XLII 392

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, is it not because words exist that things exist? Bhagavan, if nothing existed, words would not arise. Therefore, Bhagavan, it is because words exist that things exist.”³⁹³

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Words are created even when things don’t exist. Among the words that appear nowadays are ‘rabbit horns’ and ‘tortoise hair.’³⁹⁴ Mahamati, these do not exist and do not not exist. They are merely words. Your contention that because words exist things exist is faulty.

“Nor, Mahamati, do words exist in every world. Words are simply fabrications. In other buddhalands, the Dharma is expressed by staring or by facial expressions, or by lifting the eyebrows, or by blinking the eyes, or by smiling, or by opening the mouth, or by clearing the throat, or by thinking about something, or by nodding. For example, Mahamati, in the worlds of Unblinking Eyes or Gathered Fragrances³⁹⁵ or in the land of Samatabhadra Tathagata,³⁹⁶ a simple stare enables bodhisattvas to attain the forbearance of non-arising and incomparable samadhis. Therefore, the existence of words does not mean the existence of things. Mahamati, in this world such creatures as mosquitoes and gnats and ants and bugs all conduct their lives without words.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Just as space or rabbit horns / or a barren woman’s child / do not exist except as words / such are the projections of existence

2. Where causes and conditions meet / fools give rise to projections / unable to fathom what is real / they wander through the Inn of Three Realms.”³⁹⁷

XLIII 398

Mahamati Bodhisattva then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, why is speech said to be eternal?”³⁹⁹

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Because of delusion.⁴⁰⁰ Delusions also appear to the wise, but they aren’t confused by them. Mahamati, such things as shimmering mirages, firebrands, strands of hair, cities of gandharvas, illusions, dreams, and reflections confuse worldly people, but not the wise. It is not that these don’t appear, Mahamati—all kinds of delusions appear, but it is not the case that delusions are not eternal. And how so? Because they neither exist nor do not exist.

“And how is it, Mahamati, that delusions neither exist nor do not exist? Because the realms of foolish beings are different. For example, because pretas see and do not see the Ganges, it does not exist as a delusion.⁴⁰¹ But because it appears to others, it does not not exist. Likewise, the wise are neither confused nor not confused by delusions. Thus, because their characteristics are not destroyed, delusions are eternal. Mahamati, it is not the different characteristics of delusions but the characteristics of projections that are destroyed. Thus, delusions are eternal.

“And how is it, Mahamati, that delusions are real?⁴⁰² For the reason that the wise do not give rise to the thought of being confused or the thought of not being confused by a delusion.

Not only the wise, Mahamati, but if anyone gives rise to the slightest perception of a delusion, it does not qualify as buddha knowledge. Mahamati, anything about its existence is the mistaken talk of fools and not the talk of the wise.

“Whether delusions are imagined as confusion or not, they give rise to two lineages: the lineage of fools and the lineage of the wise, with the lineage of the wise being further divided among a shravaka path, a pratyeka-buddha path, and a buddha path.

“And how do the projections of the ignorant give rise to membership in the shravaka path? Membership in the shravaka path is the result of attachment to individual and shared characteristics. This is how projections give rise to membership in the shravaka path.

“Mahamati, as for how the projections of delusion give rise to membership in the pratyeka-buddha path, membership in the pratyeka-buddha path is the result of attachment to aversion to the individual and shared characteristics of delusions.

“And as for the wise, and how delusions give rise to membership in the buddha path, membership in the buddha path is the result of the awareness of perceptions as nothing but one’s own mind, of external existence as nonexistent, and of the non-projection of characteristics. This is how delusions give rise to membership in the buddha path.⁴⁰³

“Meanwhile, when people misperceive the existence of different objects, this gives rise to membership in the lineage of fools. Maintaining that this object does not exist or that object does not not exist, this is what is meant by this lineage.

“But when delusions are not projected, Mahamati, the wise are able to transform the existence of the habit-energy of the

mind, the will and consciousness, the modes of reality, and the dharmas into what is called suchness.⁴⁰⁴ Thus is it said: ‘suchness is the mind set free.’ And to make it clearer, I say ‘to be free of projections means to be free of all projections.’”

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, do delusions exist or not?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “They are like illusions. There is nothing to grasp. If a delusion had something that could be grasped, the existence of grasping would never cease, and dependent origination would amount to creation by causes and conditions, as claimed by followers of other paths.”⁴⁰⁵

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “If a delusion is like an illusion, can it serve as the cause of other delusions?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “An illusion is not the cause of a delusion because it does not give rise to misperception. Mahamati, an illusion does not give rise to misperception because it does not involve projection. Mahamati, illusions are produced by magic and not by the habit-energy of projections or misperceptions. Thus, they do not give rise to misperception. Mahamati, it is the minds of fools that become attached to delusions, not those of the wise.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “The wise don’t see delusions / with anything real
inside them / if there was something real inside / delusions
would be real

2. If delusions are abandoned / and something should
appear / it would be another delusion / a defect like a
cataract.”⁴⁰⁶

XLIV⁴⁰⁷

“Moreover, Mahamati, in viewing everything as an illusion, if not for illusions, there would be nothing to compare things to.”⁴⁰⁸

Mahamati said, “Bhagavan, do you say things are illusory because of attachment to illusory characteristics or because of attachment to something else? If everything that exists was illusory because of attachment to different illusory characteristics, Bhagavan, something would exist that wasn’t illusory.⁴⁰⁹ And how so? Because the different characteristics of a form have no cause. Bhagavan, it is the appearance of the different uncaused characteristics of a form that is illusory. Therefore, Bhagavan, it isn’t attachment to different illusory characteristics that makes things seem illusory.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “It isn’t because of attachment to different illusory characteristics that makes everything seem illusory. Rather, Mahamati, it is because everything is unreal and vanishes as fast as lightning. This is why it is illusory. Like lightning, Mahamati, it appears but for a moment. And as soon as it appears, it disappears. But this is not how things appear to foolish people, who observe everything in terms of the individual and shared characteristics of their own projections. Since what doesn’t exist doesn’t appear, they remain attached to the

characteristics of form.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “If not an illusion what are things like / thus are they called illusory / unreal and transient as lightning / thus are they called illusory.”

XLV⁴¹⁰

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “According to the Bhagavan, everything is non-arising and illusory. But when he says what is non-arising is illusory, is there not a contradiction in the Bhagavan’s earlier and later statements?”⁴¹¹

The Buddha told Mahamati, “It is not true that when I say what is non-arising is illusory there is a contradiction in my earlier and later statements. And why not? Because what arises does not arise. When you realize that whether something exists or not is nothing but the perception of your own mind, its external existence is seen as nonexistent and non-arising. Mahamati, there is no contradiction in my earlier and later statements.

“However, it is to refute the arising from causes of other schools that I say everything is non-arising. Mahamati, the confused members of other schools maintain the arising of existence or nonexistence and deny that they are the result of attachment to their own projections. Mahamati, because I deny the arising of existence or nonexistence, I teach the teaching of non-arising.

“Mahamati, I teach existence to refute the nihilistic view that nothing exists and so that my disciples will accept samsara,⁴¹² so that they will accept that where they are reborn involves

differences in karma. Thus, I teach existence so that they will accept samsara.⁴¹³

“Mahamati, I teach the illusoriness of self-existence so that they will get free of self-existence. But due to erroneous views and hopes, foolish people are unaware that these are nothing but the perceptions of their own minds. To refute arising from causes and attachment to the self-existence of conditions and to prevent foolish people from clinging to erroneous views and hopes regarding what belongs to themselves and others and from creating mistaken doctrines about how to see things as they really are, I teach that the self-existence of everything is an illusion and a dream. Mahamati, to see things as they really are means to transcend ⁴¹⁴ what are nothing but perceptions of your own mind.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Non-arising means nonexistence / existence includes samsara / who sees these as illusions / doesn’t give rise to projections of form.”

XLVI⁴¹⁵

“Moreover, Mahamati, I will explain the characteristics of word, phrase, and letter units.⁴¹⁶ For bodhisattvas who become adept at examining the characteristics of word, phrase, and letter units and at penetrating the meaning of word, phrase, and letter units will quickly attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. And once they are thus enlightened, they will enlighten others.

“Mahamati, as for a word unit, a word is established based on an object. This is what is meant by a word unit. As for a phrase unit, a phrase is a unit of meaning. It defines or determines the self-existence of something. This is what is meant by a phrase unit. As for a letter unit, it points to a word or phrase. This is what is meant by a letter unit. Moreover, a letter unit can be long or short, high or low.⁴¹⁷ Also, a phrase unit is a footprint. For example, a footprint left by a person or by an animal like a horse or an elephant can be called a phrase unit.⁴¹⁸

“Mahamati, as for words and letters, we use words to refer to the four formless skandhas.⁴¹⁹ Thus we speak of words. And we use letters to point to their individual characteristics. Thus we speak of letters. This is what is meant by word, phrase, and letter units and why I say distinguishing the characteristics of word, phrase, and letter units is something you all should cultivate.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Distinguish units of letters / units of words and phrases / people who foolishly cling to these / are like elephants in a quagmire.”

XLVII⁴²⁰

“Moreover, Mahamati, in future ages those who are wise might ask those who are not what I mean by ‘avoiding views characterized by sameness, difference, both, or neither.’⁴²¹ And they might answer, ‘Whether form⁴²² and so on are permanent or not or whether they are different or not is not a proper question.’⁴²³ Likewise, if they are asked to compare and contrast the characteristics of nirvana and samskara,⁴²⁴ characteristics and what is characterized, qualities and what is qualified, matter and what is made of matter,⁴²⁵ seeing and what is seen, earth and dust, practice and practitioner, they might answer, ‘The Buddha has declared these to be unanswerable.’

“But silence is something such foolish people would not understand. It is because those present lack sufficient wisdom that the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones say these are unanswerable to help them overcome fear. This is why they don’t answer. Also, it is to put an end to the mistaken views of other paths that they don’t respond.

“Mahamati, followers of other paths teach such unanswerable propositions as, ‘Life is identical to the body.’⁴²⁶ Mahamati, this is because these followers of other paths are bewildered by causality. Unanswerable propositions are not what I teach. What I teach, Mahamati, is getting free of what grasps and what is

grasped and not giving rise to projections. Why should I be silent?

“However, Mahamati, when someone is attached to what grasps or what is grasped and does not understand that these are nothing but perceptions of their own minds, then I am silent. Mahamati, the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones use four kinds of explanation to teach others. Mahamati, I invariably use silence with those whose roots are not yet mature, not with those whose roots are mature.”[427](#)

XLVIII⁴²⁸

“Moreover, Mahamati, whatever exists is neither created nor does it arise from causes. There is no creator. Hence whatever exists does not arise. And why, Mahamati, does whatever exists have no self-existence? Because in the light of personal realization, neither individual nor shared characteristics can be found. Thus, I say whatever exists does not arise.

“Mahamati, why is it that whatever exists cannot be grabbed or released? If you try to grab its individual or shared characteristics, there is nothing to grab. And if you try to release them, there is nothing to release. Thus, whatever exists cannot be grabbed or released.

“Mahamati, why is it that whatever exists does not cease to exist? Because no characteristics of its self-existence exist, whatever exists cannot be found. Thus, whatever exists does not cease to exist.

“Mahamati, how is it that whatever exists is impermanent? Because once a characteristic appears, its impermanence exists.⁴²⁹ This is why I say whatever exists is impermanent. And how is it, Mahamati, that whatever exists is permanent? Because once a characteristic appears, its non-arising exists.⁴³⁰ And because its impermanence is permanent, I say everything is permanent.⁴³¹

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “For refuting the views of other paths / I use four kinds of explanations / a direct answer or another question / analysis or silence

2. Whether life exists or doesn't / for what is better left to silence / Vaisheshika and Samkhya masters⁴³³ / present their explanations

3. Examined by correct knowledge / self-existence cannot be found / because it transcends words / I teach no self-existence.”

XLIX⁴³⁴

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Please tell us about srota-apannas and the different characteristics common to the srota-apanna path so that by becoming versed in such characteristics and by knowing how to differentiate the practices of sakrid-agamins, an-agamins, and arhats, we bodhisattvas might thus explain the Dharma to others, namely, the two kinds of no-self and the elimination of the two obstructions.⁴³⁵ And as we pass through the various stages until we finally reach the inconceivable and ultimate realm of the tathagatas, we might benefit all beings like multicolored, wish-fulfilling gems and protect and nourish them with the infinite bodies and wealth of the realm of all dharmas.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen carefully and ponder this well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati replied, “Wonderful, Bhagavan. May we be so blessed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “There are three different levels of srota-apannas and attainments of srota-apannas.⁴³⁶ And what are the three? They are basic, intermediate, and advanced. Those at the basic level are reborn seven more times at the most. Those at the intermediate level are reborn three to five more times before they attain nirvana. And those at the

advanced level attain nirvana in this life.

“For each of these three, there are three bondages: coarse, intermediate, and subtle. And what are the three bondages? They are belief in a body, doubt, and attachment to codes.⁴³⁷ In terms of differences among these three bondages, whoever reaches the subtlest of the advanced level becomes an arhat.

“Mahamati, there are two kinds of belief in a body: that which is innate⁴³⁸ and that which is a projection, such as the projections of dependent or imagined reality.⁴³⁹ For example, the different attachments to an imagined reality arise in dependence on a dependent reality. They neither exist, nor do they not exist. And they neither exist nor do not exist and are not real because they are projections. The projections of foolish people are attached in different ways to an imagined reality, just like thirsty deer imagine water when they see a shimmering mirage. This is the view of the body imagined by srota-apannas, who think that since persons have no self, by grasping its nonexistence, they thereby put an end to their attachment to beginningless ignorance.⁴⁴⁰

“Mahamati, as for the innate belief of srota-apannas in a body, whether their own or others, because the four formless skandhas along with form—which arises from matter and what is made of matter—interact as the cause of each other, and because the material elements and form do not combine, when srota-apannas contemplate the non-appearance of what exists or does not exist,⁴⁴¹ their belief in a body comes to an end. And once their belief in a body ends, their desires no longer arise. This is what characterizes a srota-apanna’s belief in a body.

“Mahamati, as for what characterizes their doubt,⁴⁴² because they become adept at viewing the characteristics of dharmas,

and they have previously put an end to projections of the two kinds of belief in a body, they do not give rise to doubts regarding dharmas, nor do they give rise to views as to the purity or impurity of other teachers. This is what characterizes a srota-apanna's elimination of doubt.

“Mahamati, as for their attachment to codes, how do srota-apannas cease their attachment to codes? When they become adept at seeing the suffering where they might be reborn, they cease their attachment. Attachment, Mahamati, refers to how foolish beings resolve to undertake ascetic practices for the sake of attaining greater bliss. Hence, they seek rebirth. But when they are not attached and turn instead toward undertaking those practices and upholding those precepts that are free from projection and passion and that lead to the peerless realm of personal realization, this is what characterizes a srota-apanna's elimination of attachment to codes.

“Because srota-apannas sever these three bondages, desire and delusion do not arise. However, if srota-apannas should think ‘These bondages are not my doing,’ they will err in two ways. They will end up believing in a body, and they will not sever these bondages.”

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, the Bhagavan speaks of many desires. Which desires do they put an end to?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “They do not give rise to the different kinds of behavior involving love or the desire to embrace women or to misdeeds involving the mouth or body that give present pleasure but ensure future suffering. And how do they do this? By attaining the bliss of samadhi. Thus, they put an end to desires, but not the desire for nirvana.

“Mahamati, what characterizes sakrid-agamins?⁴⁴³ The

moment they see forms, they give rise to projections but not to views about them. But because they are adept at contemplating forms during meditation, the moment they return to this world, their term of suffering ends, and they attain nirvana. This is what constitutes a sakrid-agamin.

“Mahamati, what about an-agamins ?⁴⁴⁴ This refers to those who give rise to visions of calamity regarding the existence or nonexistence of past, present, or future forms. Because they prevent projections from arising, and because they sever bondages, they are called an-agamins.⁴⁴⁵

“Mahamati, as for arhats,⁴⁴⁶ this refers to those for whom projections of meditations, samadhis or liberations, higher powers or masteries, afflictions or sufferings do not exist.⁴⁴⁷ Hence, they are called arhats.”

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “The Bhagavan has said that there are three kinds of arhats. To which kind is he referring here? To those who attain the one path of tranquility, to those who appear as arhats but who perform bodhisattva practices, or to those who are the projections of apparition buddhas?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “To those shravakas who attain the one path of tranquility and not to the others—‘the others’ referring to those who practice bodhisattva practices and those who are the projections of apparition buddhas. As a result of their vows and skillful means, they are reborn in the great assemblies, where they add to the glory of the retinues of buddhas.

“Mahamati, they teach different teachings concerning attainment and meditation depending on the projections of each place. But because they avoid the objects of meditation and the one who meditates, they point instead to the characteristics of

attainment as nothing but perceptions of one's own mind. This is what they call attainment.

“Moreover, Mahamati, in order to get past the boundless and formless realms of meditation,⁴⁴⁸ you should avoid characteristics that are nothing but perceptions of your own mind. And it is not the case, Mahamati, that even the samadhi involving the cessation⁴⁴⁹ of sensation and perception⁴⁵⁰ is anything other than the perception of your own mind. And how so? Because it is nothing but mind.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “The four boundless meditations / the formless samadhis / the cessation of sensation and perception / none exist except as mind

2. The attainments of the srota-apanna / the sakrid-agamin and an-agamin / also that of the arhat / all are confusions of the mind⁴⁵¹

3. Meditation, meditator, and object of meditation / renunciation and beholding the truth / these are nothing but projections / who knows this achieves liberation.”

L⁴⁵²

“Moreover, Mahamati, there are two kinds of knowing.⁴⁵³ knowing that examines and knowing that is based on attachment to the characteristics of projection. ⁴⁵⁴ Mahamati, the knowing that examines focuses on the characteristics of self-existence of whatever exists and concludes that they are beyond the reach of the four possibilities and not graspable. This is what is meant by the knowing that examines.

“As for the four possibilities, Mahamati, this means to be beyond the reach of sameness, difference, both or neither, existence, nonexistence or neither existence nor nonexistence, permanence or impermanence. These are the four possibilities.⁴⁵⁵ Mahamati, everything that exists is beyond the reach of these four possibilities. And you should practice examining everything, Mahamati, according to them.

“Mahamati, what is the knowing that is based on attachment to the characteristics of projection? Attachment to the characteristics of projection refers to attachment to the erroneous projection of solidity, moisture, warmth, and movement as characterizing the four elements and attachment to proposition, reason, characteristics, and example⁴⁵⁶ as the foundation on which such falsehoods are based. This is what is meant by the knowing that is based on attachment to the

characteristics of projection.

“This is what characterizes the two kinds of knowing. By mastering what characterizes these two kinds of knowing, bodhisattvas finally understand the absence of a self among persons and things and understand the means by which to use their projectionless knowing to examine the stages of practice. As they reach the initial stage, they enter hundreds of samadhis. And in certain of these samadhis, they see hundreds of buddhas and bodhisattvas and events, hundreds of kalpas in the past and future. And in the light of hundreds of buddha realms, they come to know the characteristics of the higher stages. And by virtue of their peerless vows and their masteries and higher powers, they reach the personal realization of the tathagata stage where their foreheads are anointed among dharma clouds.⁴⁵⁷ And with their minds well focused on the ten inexhaustible vows,⁴⁵⁸ they bring others to perfection and manifest themselves in a variety of refulgent forms while enjoying the bliss of samadhi and the personal realization of buddha knowledge.⁴⁵⁹

LI⁴⁶⁰

“Moreover, Mahamati, bodhisattvas should become versed in the four elements and their elemental forms.⁴⁶¹ And how should bodhisattvas become versed in the four elements and their elemental forms? Mahamati, bodhisattvas should know this: that in reality the four elements do not arise. They should thus examine the non-arising of the four elements. Once they have done so, they will know that the distinguishing of names, appearances, and projections⁴⁶² is the distinguishing of perceptions of their own mind and that their external existence does not exist. This is what is meant by distinguishing projections as perceptions of the mind. This means to see that the three realms are devoid of the existence of the four elements and their elemental forms, that they are completely devoid of the four possibilities, and that they include no self or anything that belongs to a self, and to focus instead on the essential characteristic of reality, the essential characteristic of which consists in non-arising.

“Mahamati, how do the four elements give rise to elemental forms? The element distinguished as moisture produces internal and external realms of water. The element distinguished as energy produces internal and external realms of fire. The element distinguished as movement produces internal and external realms

of wind. And the element distinguished as divisible form produces internal and external realms of earth—and with form comes space. According to those who cling to mistaken truths, it is the four elements and their elemental forms that give rise to the assemblage of the five skandhas.

“Mahamati, consciousness⁴⁶³ continues in another existence because of the delight for different realms. As for earth and the other elements and their elemental forms, Mahamati, the four elements serve as its conditions,⁴⁶⁴ and the four elements do not serve as its conditions. And how so? The elements do not arise unless nature, shape, location, and function exist.⁴⁶⁵ But even if they do arise together with nature, shape, location, and function, Mahamati, they do not do so with regard to what is formless.⁴⁶⁶ Therefore, the four elements and their elemental forms are projections of other paths and not mine.

“Moreover, Mahamati, I will now explain what characterizes the self-existence of the skandhas. By ‘what characterizes the self-existence of the skandhas,’ I mean the five skandhas. And as to which five, I mean form, sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness, four of which are formless, namely sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness.

“Mahamati, by ‘form’ I am referring to the different characteristics of each of the four elements and their elemental forms. But it is not the case, Mahamati, that the formless ones are actually four in number. They are like the sky. Just as the sky is devoid of numbers or the characteristics of numbers, it is only due to projection that we speak of one sky. Mahamati, the skandhas are likewise devoid of numbers or the characteristics of numbers and thus devoid of existence or nonexistence and devoid of the four possibilities. Foolish beings talk in terms of numbers, not the wise.

“Mahamati, to the wise, forms are illusory. They are designations that are neither separate nor not separate, just as a dream or shadow is neither separate nor not separate from a person’s body. Mahamati, the realm of buddha knowledge appears the same as the projections of the skandhas. This is what is meant by what characterizes the self-existence of the

skandhas.⁴⁶⁸ You should get rid of projections.⁴⁶⁹ And once you do, proclaim the teaching of detachment⁴⁷⁰ and in every buddhaland put an end to the views of other schools. For once you proclaim detachment, Mahamati, you will be freed from the view of no self among dharmas, and you will reach the unshakeable stage.⁴⁷¹ And once you reach the unshakeable stage, you will gain a mastery of countless samadhis and projection bodies.⁴⁷² And as you become fully versed in the Samadhi of the Illusory, you will use your higher powers, insights, and masteries to help and protect all beings. For just as the earth supports everything that lives, so too do bodhisattvas aid beings everywhere.

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“Moreover, Mahamati, according to followers of other paths, there are four kinds of nirvana. And what are the four? They include the nirvana in which the self-existence of what exists does not exist, the nirvana in which the existence of characteristics does not exist, the nirvana in which the awareness of one’s own characteristics and self-existence does not exist, and the nirvana in which the continuity of the individual and shared characteristics of the skandhas ends.^{[474](#)} These are what are meant by the four kinds of nirvana taught by followers of other paths. They are not what I teach. What I teach, Mahamati, is that nirvana is the cessation of the consciousness that projects.”^{[475](#)}

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “But does the Bhagavan not put forward eight forms of consciousness?”

The Buddha answered, “Yes, I do.”

Mahamati asked again, “If so, then why does the Bhagavan speak of getting free from conceptual consciousness^{[476](#)} and not the seventh form of consciousness?”^{[477](#)}

The Buddha replied, “Because, Mahamati, it is the cause and the supporting condition whereby the seventh form of consciousness does not arise.^{[478](#)} And it is the division and attachment of conceptual consciousness regarding external

realms that produces the habit-energy that nourishes repository consciousness.⁴⁷⁹ And it is the Will,⁴⁸⁰ together with its attachment to a self and what belongs to a self and its reflection on causes and conditions, that gives rise to the characteristics of an indestructible body.⁴⁸¹ And it is attachment to an external world that is a perception of one's own mind that is the cause and supporting condition of the repository consciousness. Thus, this system of consciousness⁴⁸² arises through mutual causation. It is like the ocean and its waves, which rise or cease as the wind of externality that is a perception of one's own mind blows. Thus, when conceptual consciousness ceases, the seventh form of consciousness also ceases.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Mine isn't a nirvana that exists / a created one or one with attributes / the consciousness that projects what we know / the cessation of this is my nirvana
2. This is the cause and supporting condition / whereby thoughts create the body / on this is what the mind is based / on this is what consciousness depends⁴⁸³
3. When the great river quits flowing / waves no longer stir / when conceptual consciousness ceases / the other forms don't rise.”

“Moreover, Mahamati, I will now explain the different characteristics common to imagined reality.⁴⁸⁵ By becoming versed in distinguishing the different characteristics common to imagined reality, you and the other bodhisattvas will be able to free yourselves from projections and attain the personal realization of buddha knowledge and an insight into the paths of other practitioners. You will also understand how to put an end to projections of grasping and what is grasped and no longer project an imagined reality upon the various characteristics of dependent reality.

“Mahamati, what are the different characteristics common to imagined reality? They include the projection of words, the projection of the objects of words, the projection of characteristics, the projection of value, the projection of self-existence, the projection of causes, the projection of views, the projection of reasoning, the projection of arising, the projection of non-arising, the projection of continuity, and the projection of bondage and emancipation. These are the different characteristics of imagined reality.⁴⁸⁶

“Mahamati, what is the projection of words? This refers to attachment to the pleasure from the various sounds of beautiful speech and song. This is what is meant by the projection of

words.

“Mahamati, what is the projection of the objects of words? This refers to how the projection of words arises in dependence on the self-existence of the objects of words and on what is realized by buddha knowledge.⁴⁸⁷ This is what is meant by the projection of the objects of words.

“Mahamati, what is the projection of characteristics? This refers to the projection of the existence of characteristics such as solidity, moisture, warmth, and movement⁴⁸⁸ onto the objects of words to which one is attached as if to a mirage. This is what is meant by the projection of characteristics.

“Mahamati, what is the projection of value? This refers to delight in such precious things as gold, silver, and gemstones. This is what is meant by the projection of value.

“Mahamati, what is the projection of self-existence? This refers to the mistaken projection of the self-existence of something as being like this and not like anything else. This is what is meant by the projection of self-existence.

“Mahamati, what is the projection of causes? This refers to the appearance of the characteristics of causation based on the projection of the existence or nonexistence of causes and conditions. This is what is meant by the projection of causes.

“Mahamati, what is the projection of views? This refers to the projection of erroneous views of existence or nonexistence, or of sameness or difference or both or neither, which followers of other paths imagine and cling to. This is what is meant by the projection of views.

“Mahamati, what is the projection of reasoning? This refers to arguments whose logic and conclusions involve conceptions of a self or what belongs to a self. This is what is meant by the

projection of reasoning.

“Mahamati, what is the projection of arising? This refers to attachment to the arising of something whether or not causes exist. This is what is meant by the projection of arising.

“Mahamati, what is the projection of non-arising? This refers to the non-arising of whatever exists being due to the non-functioning of causation and the arising of entities that have no cause.⁴⁸⁹ This is what is meant by the projection of non-arising.

“Mahamati, what is the projection of continuity? This refers to something that continues between one thing and another, like a golden thread.⁴⁹⁰ This is what is meant by the projection of continuity.⁴⁹¹

“Mahamati, what is the projection of bondage and emancipation? This refers to attachment to causes and conditions that bind or unbind, as when a person attempts to tie or untie something. This is what is meant by the projection of bondage and emancipation.⁴⁹²

“These are the different characteristics common to imagined reality to which all foolish beings are attached as existing or not existing.

“Mahamati, what those attached to dependent reality are attached to is the self-existence of the projections of the objects to which they are attached. Although they appear like so many illusory entities, foolish beings imagine them as different from illusions. Mahamati, the illusions and the objects are neither separate nor not separate. If they were separate, the illusions would not be the cause of the objects. If they were not separate, the illusions and the objects would be indistinguishable. But they are distinguishable. Hence, they are neither separate nor not separate. Therefore, Mahamati, you and the other bodhisattvas

should not become attached to whether the illusions of dependent and imagined reality are separate or not or whether they exist or not.’^{[493](#)}

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The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “When the mind is tied to external realms /
knowledge is subject to speculation / where freedom from
projection prevails / impartial wisdom rises

2. What exists in imagined reality / in dependent
reality doesn’t / imagined reality is what is grasped /
dependent reality is not imagined

3. Where a myriad distinctions arise / like illusions
they aren’t real / where characteristics multiply / because
they’re projections they aren’t perfect

4. Characteristics are mistakes / rising from a mind in
bondage / projections of what isn’t known / based on
dependent reality⁴⁹⁵

5. What exists in imagined reality / is simply
dependent reality / projections of all kinds / based on
dependent reality

6. There’s conventional truth and ultimate truth / and a
third that denies causation⁴⁹⁶ / projections refer to
conventional truth / their cessation is the realm of sages

7. Like someone who contemplates / who perceives
a multitude in one / where no multitude exists / this is what
projections resemble

8. Like someone with cataracts / who imagines different forms / which neither are nor aren't cataracts / dependent reality is thus mistaken

9. Like gold that has been refined / free of dross and impurities / the sky without a cloud / imagined reality purified⁴⁹⁷

10. Imagined reality doesn't exist / dependent reality does / assertions and denials / by projections are undone

11. If imagined reality doesn't exist / and dependent reality does / if one doesn't and the other does / from what doesn't comes what does⁴⁹⁸

12. Thus is dependent reality / based upon projection / from which name and appearance follow / giving rise to more projections

13. Though they remain unperfected / once you get past all projections / knowledge is thus purified / this is ultimate truth

14. Projections are twelve in number⁴⁹⁹ / dependent reality is sixfold⁵⁰⁰ / the knowledge known to oneself / includes not one distinction

15. The truth includes five dharmas / reality has three modes / practitioners who distinguish these / don't separate them from suchness⁵⁰¹

16. Dependent reality and appearances / imagined reality and names / from the characteristics of projection / dependent reality arises⁵⁰²

17. In the radiant light of wisdom / dependent and imagined reality vanish / nor does perfected reality exist / so how is anything distinguished ⁵⁰³

18. Because their natures are distinguished / the two realities are established / where a myriad projections appear / lies the realm of pure buddha knowledge

19. Imagined reality is like a painting / projecting dependent reality / something other than projection / this is the view of other schools⁵⁰⁴

20. What is projected by projection / they see coming from causes / beyond the duality of projection⁵⁰⁵ / this is where perfection occurs.”

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Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please tell us what characterizes the personal realization of buddha knowledge and the one path so that⁵⁰⁷ by becoming well-versed in what characterizes the personal realization of buddha knowledge and the one path, I and the other bodhisattvas need rely on nothing else to understand the teachings of buddhas.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen carefully and ponder this well, and I shall now instruct you.”

Mahamati answered, “May it be so, Bhagavan,” and gave his full attention.

The Buddha said, “The teaching known and passed down by the sages of the past is that projections are nonexistent and that bodhisattvas should dwell alone in a quiet place and examine their own awareness. By relying on nothing else and avoiding views and projections, they steadily advance to the tathagata stage. This is what characterizes the personal realization of buddha knowledge.

“Mahamati, what characterizes the one path? When I speak of the one path, I mean the one path to realization. And what does the one path to realization mean? Projections, such as projections of what grasps or what is grasped, do not arise in suchness. This is what the one path to realization means.

Mahamati, the one path to realization is beyond the reach of followers of other paths or shravakas or pratyeka-buddhas or even Brahma⁵⁰⁸ but not tathagatas. This is why I speak of the one path.”

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, why then do you teach three paths and not teach one path?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Because neither shravakas nor pratyeka-buddhas enter nirvana by themselves, I do not teach them the one path.⁵⁰⁹ Because shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas attain liberation through training in detachment by the tathagatas and not through their own power, I do not teach them the one path. Also, Mahamati, I do not teach shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas the one path because they have not yet put an end to the habit-energy of karma or the obstruction of passion.⁵¹⁰ Because they are not aware that dharmas have no self, and they are not free of karmic deaths,⁵¹¹ I teach them three paths.⁵¹²

“Mahamati, once they put an end to all the habit-energy that gives rise to passion and realize that dharmas have no self, by putting an end to the habit-energy that gives rise to passion, in their affliction-free realms⁵¹³ they will wake up to the nonexistence of the samadhis to which they have been addicted. And once they are awake, they will enter that highest of transcendent, affliction-free realms where they obtain an inconceivable, invincible dharma body complete with every virtue.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “A path for gods and Brahma / one for shravakas
and pratyeka- buddhas / another for tathagatas / these are

the paths I teach⁵¹⁴

2. As long as the mind keeps turning / these paths never end / when the mind finally ceases / there is no path or one who walks it

3. The path that isn't made / this is my one path / to attract and guide all beings / I teach different paths

4. The three kinds of liberation⁵¹⁵ / just like dharmas have no self / when passion and knowledge are the same⁵¹⁶ / liberation is transcended

5. Like floating logs at sea / forever rolling with the waves / thus are foolish shravakas / at the mercy of the wind of characteristics

6. Though they keep passion from rising / the force of its energy remains⁵¹⁷ / addicted to the bliss of samadhi / they dwell in affliction-free realms

7. But having no final goal / and having no place to retreat to / in their samadhi-born bodies / they pass through kalpas unaware

8. Like someone who is drunk / who wakes up when the wine wears off / their awakening is the same / and their buddha body too.”

Chapter Two. Mahamati now rises from the assembly and asks the Buddha a series of questions. Comprising half the sutra, this second chapter introduces us to the transformation of vision whereby external or internal worlds are seen as nothing but perceptions of our own mind. Although some commentators see this chapter as dealing with a series of unrelated topics, each section leads to the next in orderly progression, albeit a progression that might make more sense to a practitioner than to a student of philosophy. My translation of this and the remaining

chapters is based on the Chinese translation of Gunabhadra. For those passages where I have preferred the translation of Bodhiruchi or Shikshananda or the Sanskrit, I have mentioned this in my notes.

1 Section I. This marks the beginning of what most scholars think was the original form of this sutra. In order to avoid repetition, I have omitted the initial paragraph of Gunabhadra's translation, which is substantially the same as the initial paragraph of Bodhiruchi's and Shikshananda's translations and the Sanskrit in Chapter One.

2 Requesting instruction involves expressing reverence with the body, the mouth, and the mind. In this case, the Buddha helps Mahamati make such a request.

3 I have preferred Bodhiruchi's reading of the last two lines of this verse and also of the following three verses.

4 In this first series of verses, Mahamati presents his understanding of the Buddha's teaching as well as his own attainment. The "world" refers to the stage we clothe with reality in order for our mind-play to have some credence. In light of the Buddha's wisdom, it does not exist. In light of the Buddha's compassion, it does not not exist.

5 Worldly "things" are produced by the magician of the mind to decorate the stage on which the play of life and death is performed. They include those that are intangible as well as those that are tangible. The compound "mind and consciousness," or *citta-vijnana*, is used in this sutra to refer to the eight forms of consciousness, with *citta* referring to the *alaya-vijnana*, or repository consciousness, and *vijnana* referring to the remaining seven, which include the will, or self-consciousness, conceptual consciousness (which takes the will

as its organ and the following five as its object), and the different forms of sensory consciousness.

6 Shikshananda and the Sanskrit follow this verse with two verses that are not present in Gunabhadra or Bodhiruchi: “His dharma body is a phantom / what is there to praise / knowing nothing exists or arises / this is what we praise in buddhas. The Buddha is not an object of sensation / to see no names is to see the Buddha / in regard to Shakyamuni / how can praise or blame be apt?”

7 Gunabhadra expands this verse into six lines. I’ve followed Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit, all of which render it in four. Unlike Hinayana Buddhists, who see nirvana as the final goal of practice, Mahayana Buddhists see it as a higher form of delusion still involving the dualities of subject and object, existence and nonexistence. These initial verses, although spoken by Mahamati, refer to the view from a buddha’s perspective, a view in which Mahamati is well-versed but which he has yet to experience for himself.

8 An understanding of the doctrine of non-arising is associated with the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path. The problem with “arising” (or ceasing) is that it divides the past (or future) from the present. It designates states of existence and nonexistence.

9 Section II. This section presents what is essentially a Buddhist catechism, or list of topics that would have been studied at a Buddhist vihara or academy during the period when this text was compiled—albeit, a list representing all levels of knowledge, from the most rudimentary to the most advanced. Some commentators have tried to see an order in the list, but I’m of the opinion it is merely an example of the way the repository consciousness works: you never know what seed is going to

sprout next. After listening to Mahamati's questions in verses 4–50, the Buddha repeats them in verses 52–90. However, he does not repeat them all and even adds a few of his own, as if in anticipation of questions that might have been asked but weren't. In any case, these questions are merely fodder for the Buddha's teaching in Section III.

[10](#) The number 108 was often used to refer to any large number. Mahamati's questions do not, in fact, total 108. Some commentators wonder if this suggests that we don't have them all, that some were deleted over time. Even if we don't have them all, I think we have enough.

[11](#) The personal experience of that realm which is free from projection, free from subject and object, is this sutra's underlying teaching and will be referred to repeatedly. Thus, the following series of questions, which range from the mundane to the transcendent, are answered before they are asked. Self-realization can begin anywhere, with any thought. And why not this very thought? Curiously, in his commentary on the *Lankavatara*, written after working on Shikshananda's rough draft, Fa-tsang notes that the 36,000-stanza version of the text (of which we have no other information) included a chapter devoted to explaining these 108 questions. But given the Buddha's answers to these questions, I would think any further explanation would be irrelevant, if not misguided.

[12](#) The lands in which buddhas appear and teach are meant here, and "attributes" refer to the thirty-two physical attributes of every buddha. Throughout this sutra, the term "other paths" refers to non-Buddhist teachings.

[13](#) The ten stages of the bodhisattva path are meant here. As for freedom from projections, *nir-abhasa* has often been translated

as “imageless.” Monier-Williams’ definition is “non-erroneous appearance.” But the usage of this term in the *Lankavatara* concerns the absence of self-generated images or appearances. Hence, I have usually translated this term as “freedom from projections” or “projectionlessness.” Mahamati anticipates the qualifying condition of “self-realization.” Only when one is free of the projections of the mind can one apprehend what is real. Gunabhadra adds an extra line here: “what does ‘freedom from projection’ mean?” But no other edition follows suit.

[14](#) *Jina-putra*—meaning “son of the victor”—is used synonymously with *bodhisattva*.

[15](#) The three paths normally include the two lesser paths of the Hinayana, namely those of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, and the greater path of the Mahayana walked by bodhisattvas. However, in Section LXVI of this sutra, the Buddha says there is one path for gods and Bhrama, one for shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, and one for tathagatas. After the last line, Gunabhadra alone adds: “Would you please explain?”

[16](#) What the Buddha criticizes in this sutra is the belief in the reality of cause and effect, not the operation of cause and effect.

[17](#) Meditations aimed at transcending the three realms and entering the formless realm were practiced by Hinayana and Mahayana monks as well as by followers of other paths. Usually four formless meditations are listed: meditation on limitless space, limitless consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception. Complete cessation of perception, to which the last two of these meditations refer, was one of many descriptions of nirvana, which was the goal of Hinayana practitioners.

[18](#) The ten stages of the bodhisattva path are meant here.

[19](#) The three realms of desire, form, and formlessness. If people leave these behind, how do they become bodhisattvas?

[20](#) The Buddha distinguishes eight forms of consciousness: the basic five (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile), along with conceptual consciousness (*mano-vijnana*), self-consciousness or will (*manas*), and repository or storehouse consciousness (*alaya-vijnana*), which is sometimes referred to in this sutra simply as “mind.”

[21](#) The Sanskrit word *gotra* refers to membership in an ethnic, familial, or religious group, and the word is usually translated “family,” “lineage,” etc. Here, it also refers to the potential for spiritual advancement, while *agotra* (no lineage) refers to the absence of such potential among those who are spiritually barren, such as icchantikas. For more on this, see sections XX and XXII.

[22](#) Views of life and death in terms of something that lasts forever or the end of all that exists were the two extremes that Buddhism’s Middle Way sought to avoid.

[23](#) In the centuries following the Buddha’s Nirvana, his followers established dozens of sects. Here, though, the Sanskrit specifies the Naiyayika, who didn’t appear as a sect until the second century and who otherwise refer to non-Buddhist proponents of logic.

[24](#) A *kshana* is the shortest imaginable period of time. Not only can the question about a womb be read as a conundrum (which comes first: the baby or the womb?), it can also be read as referring to the tathagata-garbha (womb of buddhas) or the *alaya-vijnana* (repository consciousness).

[25](#) The world is said to shake upon the birth of a buddha.

Hence, Mahamati wonders why it no longer shakes. Is the Buddha not still a buddha?

[26](#) As noted earlier, *gandharvas* are celestial musicians who live in the sky. Hence, a “city of *gandharvas*” was a common metaphor for an illusion, in this case, one based on the shape of clouds.

[27](#) The Sanskrit is *bodhi-angani*. There are seven: perception of the true, perception of the false, zeal, joy, transcendence, remembrance, and renunciation.

[28](#) The Sanskrit is *bodhi-paksha*. There are thirty-seven, seven of which are the above-mentioned “aids.”

[29](#) A flower we see in the sky isn’t real. More likely it’s the result of a cataract. Thus, the “flower” neither comes into existence as a flower nor does it cease to exist as the image of a flower.

[30](#) For this line, Gunabhadra has “Who gets free from projection,” but no other version agrees. Gunabhadra, however, does have this line in the next verse.

[31](#) The world beyond projection is suchness, the sky as opposed to a flower in the sky. Among the examples of *tathata*, or suchness, are the undifferentiated mind, buddha-nature, the dharma body, the tathagata-garbha, reality itself, the dharma realm, and dharma nature. As for divisions of the mind, the *Lankavatara* mentions eight kinds of consciousness. The six paramitas, or means to the other shore, include charity, morality, forbearance, zeal, meditation, and wisdom, to which skillful means, vows, strength, and knowledge were later added to make ten.

[32](#) Bodhiruchi omits this line, while Shikshananda has “how does one attain freedom from projection?” Suzuki renders the

Sanskrit as “what is the state of imagelessness?”

[33](#) Most accounts of the bodhisattva path list ten stages. The projectionless realm, which is free from subject and object, is associated with the eighth stage. Due to the obstruction of passion, ordinary people see a self in beings. And due to the obstruction of knowledge, Hinayana practitioners see a self in dharmas.

[34](#) According to the Buddha’s contemporaries, it was Brahma who created language and also the variations among beings.

[35](#) *Cakravartins* (wheel–turning–kings) are those whose accumulated merit results in a birth in which they have the option of becoming a buddha or ruling the world.

[36](#) In the first line, instead of “liberation,” Sanskrit texts have *vidya-sthana*: “fields of knowledge,” but no Chinese text agrees.

[37](#) The Sanskrit has *jataka*, referring to the literary genre in which the previous lives of Shakyamuni were recorded. Some texts recount as many as 500 previous lives.

[38](#) The term *mara*, or demon, is used for those who obstruct other beings from understanding the Dharma or who cause chaos, illness, and death in the world. During the Buddha’s time, there were said to be ninety-six heterodox paths. The reference can also be taken in the pejorative sense as equivalent to “heretics.”

[39](#) According to the Yogacara conception, there are three modes of *sva-bhava*, or reality: imagined, dependent, and perfected.

[40](#) The Sanskrit omits the first two lines, although they are present in all three Chinese translations. Since Mahamati has already asked about how many kinds of consciousness in verse

20, here he is probably referring to the varieties of mental dharmas that formed the basis of abhidharma.

[41](#) The Sanskrit is *prajnapiti-matra*. This Yogacara concept means that whatever we might say exists only exists as a verbal convention or designation. What is real cannot be designated or indicated because it includes the finger and the one doing the pointing.

[42](#) The Sanskrit combines the last two lines into one and for the fourth line has: “Tell me, Lord, about the three realms.”

[43](#) This line is missing in Gunabhadra (and replaced by a repetition of the fourth line) but present in all other editions. The Sanskrit is *citta-sarathi* (mind-charioteer), where *sarathi* also means “guide.”

[44](#) Apparently in the sense of “ritually observe.” The Sanskrit is *grahana*. In India the year was divided into six two-month seasons.

[45](#) *Ichchantikas* are those so immersed in pleasure, they are incapable of understanding the Dharma. Thus, they are said to lack the ability to become buddhas.

[46](#) *Androgynes* are neither male nor female, though they can appear as either.

[47](#) For the third and fourth lines, Suzuki, following the Sanskrit, has: “How many exercises are there / and how are men kept abiding in them?”

[48](#) Buddhists list five realms of rebirth: gods, humans, animals, sinners or demons in hell, and hungry ghosts. To these, a sixth is sometime added, namely, that of *asuras*, ex-gods who make war on other gods.

[49](#) For the last two lines, the Sanskrit has: “How does one become a lord of wealth, tell me, you who art like the sky?”

[50](#) The Buddha was born into the Shakya clan, and his name, Shakyamuni, meant “Sage of the Shakyas.” His entire clan was exterminated during a war while he was still alive. King Ikshvaku was the earliest known ruler of India. His name means “sugar cane,” and one story has him arising from the stalk of such a plant as a baby. Some Buddhists and Jains trace the founders of their lineages back to Ikshvaku. The ascetic referred to was apparently one of the teachers Shakyamuni met prior to becoming a buddha. Perhaps it was the one who taught that liberation required depriving the body of sustenance. Both Gunabhadra and Bodhiruchi render this verse in six lines. The Sanskrit for the last two lines is obscure. In line three, if *dirghapatah* is a mistake for *dirghatapas*, then it might be rendered, “Who was the ascetic Dirghatapas / and how did he prevail?” See also verse 84 in this section.

[51](#) Hinayana Buddhists believed there was only one buddha for each epoch and world, although they acknowledged that each buddha could manifest apparitions in other worlds. Mahayana Buddhists hold that there are countless buddhas, both in time and space.

[52](#) This sutra devotes its final chapter to encouraging practitioners to refrain from eating meat. Eating meat was not proscribed by the precepts adhered to by monks and nuns, if only because they begged for their food and had to eat whatever they were given. However, eating the meat of elephants, horses, lions, and humans was proscribed, apparently as a sumptuary restriction. In any case, the precepts do proscribe the killing of living creatures or being responsible for their deaths.

[53](#) Mount Sumeru is at the center of each world, and its height is beyond any known measure. Gunabhadra compresses this verse

and also the next into three lines. I've followed Shikshananda in my order of lines for this verse and also for the next two.

[54](#) The swastika, or shrivatsa, was an ancient cruciform symbol similar in meaning to the yin-yang symbol of China as representing the cycle of change among the different forces of creation.

[55](#) Indra, or Shakra, is the creator of the world. His palace includes a net of jewels, each of which reflects all the other jewels.

[56](#) At the end of this, Gunabhadra adds, "Like this and countless other shapes."

[57](#) Gunabhadra alone presents four buddhas here. The Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and Sanskrit texts have the first two (*nirmanika-buddha* and *buddha-vipakaja*) and a third that reads as a combination of Gunabhadra's third and fourth (*tathata-jnana-buddha*—a buddha who knows suchness). When Buddhists first developed their theories of a buddha's different bodies, some considered a four-body version before finally settling on three bodies. Perhaps the difference in texts here reflects that development. But compare this with Section XIV, where Gunabhadra also has three.

[58](#) The three realms include the realm of desire (in which there are either five or six kinds of existence), the realm of form (in which there are four heavens), and the formless realm (in which there are also four heavens or levels). It was in the highest heaven of the three realms that the Buddha attained Enlightenment and also that he later entered Nirvana.

[59](#) Sugata is another epithet for a buddha. It means "well-gone."

[60](#) Hinayana and Mahayana texts give different accounts of the length of time the Dharma will be taught and understood. But

both agree that such understanding will eventually come to an end.

[61](#) The Sanskrit is *siddhanta*, for which see Section LXIII. This term was used in logic to denote a conclusion based on reasoning and example. But here and elsewhere in the *Lankavatara*, it refers to a “spiritual conclusion” that transcends logic. “Code of ethics” is a translation for *vinaya*.

[62](#) Again, the text has *jina-putra* (sons of victors) for bodhisattvas.

[63](#) The transformation of one’s awareness from the imagined, fabricated world of projections to a perfected view devoid of projections is one of the basic teachings of the Yogacara. However, in this sutra such a view is considered provisional. The Sanskrit is *nirabhasa-shata*.

[64](#) The five higher powers include distant vision and hearing, bodily transport, telepathy, and knowledge of past lives. The transcendent powers refer to those essential to progress on the bodhisattva path, such as awareness of the illusory nature of the self. Before the Mahayana developed a ten-stage path, early Buddhists saw their practice as involving seven stages, to which the bodhisattva path added three more stages. Freedom from projections or false appearances characterizes the eighth, which is essentially the first stage of buddhahood.

[65](#) The different kinds of *sangha*, or spiritual community, include both lay and monastic, which can be further characterized by the dominant form of practice: Zen, Pure Land, Tantric, Vipassana. The Buddha was called the Great Physician because his sermons on spiritual health were often couched in the language of physical health. The last line only appears in Gunabhadra.

[66](#) Krakucchanda and Kanakamuni were the names of the first

two buddhas of the present kalpa. Kashyapa was the third, and Shakyamuni (Mahamuni) was the fourth. The Buddha taught that all buddhas are one buddha.

[67](#) Gunabhadra expands the last two lines into four but without adding anything. I've followed Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit.

[68](#) The reference to gender-specific trees is to species that produce fruits resembling men or women. Karitaki and amali refer here to the fruits of trees, the first of which has a heavenly taste, the second of which never ripens. Kailash is a sacred peak in the Himalayas and remains a center of pilgrimage. The Iron Ring Mountains surround the seas that surround the world. At the center of the world is Mount Sumeru at the top of which is Diamond Summit.

[69](#) Rishis are seers or shamans and often associated with mountains. Gandharvas are beings that live in the sky. Gunabhadra omits the last line, and Shikshananda expands this verse into six lines. I've followed Bodhiruchi and the Sanskrit. Mahamati is also referring to their appearance and disappearance in Chapter One.

[70](#) Depending on which text one uses, Mahamati asks somewhere between 104 and 112 questions. In repeating them, however, the Buddha does not list them all and even adds new items to the list.

[71](#) In the context of this verse, noting the absence of self-existence (*sva-bhava*) is intended to deny that there is anything that exists or continues to exist in nirvana, in emptiness, from one moment to the next, or from one life to the next.

[72](#) Gunabhadra spreads this over six lines. I've followed Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit.

[73](#) Asuras are gods who have been expelled from the heavens atop Mount Sumeru and who now make war on the other gods.

[74](#) Buddhist texts list eight liberations, countless masteries, and five, or sometimes six, higher powers.

[75](#) The Sanskrit is *nirodha*, or extinction of suffering, which is the third of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths; the ability to travel as fast as thought is one of the five higher powers; there are seven aids and thirty-seven elements of the path to enlightenment; among meditations are those of boundless light and boundless purity; and the five skandhas represent the constituents of what seems to be the individual.

[76](#) In this case, "the mind" refers to the eighth consciousness, "the will" to the seventh, and "conceptual consciousness" to the sixth. The five dharmas include name, appearance, projection, correct knowledge, and suchness. "No self" refers to no self in persons and no self in dharmas or things.

[77](#) *Ichchantikas* are those whose karmic roots are so impoverished they lack the ability to understand the Dharma. The external world is seen as composed of the material elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. The question of whether there was one buddha or many was a subject of debate among early Buddhists.

[78](#) Proofs (*siddhanta*) are formulated on the basis of reason and demonstrated through the use of illustration. Elsewhere in this sutra, *siddhanta* is used to refer to "spiritual proofs," and in such cases I have translated the word as "attainments." Gunabhadra compresses the last two lines into one.

[79](#) Mahamati asked earlier, "How do we pass through the stages?" But the Buddha's teaching in this sutra is that stages are provisional and meant to be transcended, if not abandoned.

[80](#) This refers to the overturning or transformation (*paravrtti*) of one's foundation, which occurs as a result of the freedom from projections (*nirabhasa*) that accompanies or marks the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path.

[81](#) This last line is missing in Gunabhadra and Shikshananda.

[82](#) The last line is missing in Gunabhadra and Shikshananda.

[83](#) The last two lines are missing in Bodhiruchi. A bow-length (*dhanu*) was an ancient Indian unit of linear measurement equal to about six feet.

[84](#) Units of length, capacity, and weight are used here to demonstrate that everything is made of parts and thus does not exist on its own. A *pada* is a foot in length, and a *hasta*, or forearm, is one and a half feet. A *krosha* is about two miles, and four *kroshas* make a *yojana*, or a day's march for an army, variously measured at around eight miles. As for the smaller measurements, there are seven dust motes in a mote of airborne dust, seven motes of airborne dust in a rabbit hair, seven rabbit hairs in a sheep hair, seven sheep hairs in a cow hair, seven cow hairs in a gnat, seven gnats in a louse egg, seven lice eggs in a mustard seed, seven mustard seeds in a barley grain, and seven barley grains in a fingertip. Thus, there are nearly two billion dust motes in a fingertip.

[85](#) The Sanskrit terms here are *prastha* (quart) and *drona* (bushel). Ten bushels is a *kharya*, a hundred thousand bushels is a *laksha*, a million bushels is a *koti*, and a billion is a *bimbara* or *vimvara*. Gunabhadra spreads this verse over six lines.

[86](#) Except for dust motes and mustard seeds, the Sanskrit terms here were also used as units of exchange in the marketplace. Hence, my translations are merely indicative of measurements smaller than a gram. Again, Gunabhadra renders this in six lines.

[87](#) Again, the units of the marketplace are meant here, and my use of grams (grains would have been more appropriate, but this would have been confusing following “grass grains”), ounces, and pounds is simply meant to indicate approximate relationships with the idea being that since parts make up a whole, they negate the self-existence of the parts and the whole. Gunabhadra’s version extends over six lines. I’ve followed Bodhiruchi here.

[88](#) In the third line, I’ve followed Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda, who specify “dust motes,” while Gunabhadra has simply “number.” All versions render this in six lines. In this and the following verse, the Buddha seems to chastise Mahamati for the limitations of his questions. But then in verse 78 he resumes recounting Mahamati’s questions.

[89](#) Gunabhadra spreads this over five lines.

[90](#) The “diamond-hard mountain” refers to Diamond Summit atop Mount Sumeru. For the second line, which is missing in Gunabhadra, I’ve used Bodhiruchi’s version. The Sanskrit *mrga-trshna* (deer-thirst) is a standard metaphor for the illusory nature of projections.

[91](#) This entire verse is missing in Gunabhadra. I’ve followed Bodhiruchi.

[92](#) The first two lines are missing in Gunabhadra, which I’ve replaced with those of Bodhiruchi. In Mahamati’s earlier question, the last two lines referred to the rishis and gandharvas on the peaks manifested by the Buddha.

[93](#) This is another verse that Gunabhadra has expanded into six lines.

[94](#) The first line is handled differently by every text. I’ve followed Gunabhadra.

[95](#) Gunabhadra expands the last two lines into four but without adding anything of substance.

[96](#) I've followed Gunabhadra for the third line. Bodhiruchi has: "why do you ask me?" Shikshananda has: "and what about the other aids (of the path)." Meanwhile Sanskrit texts add "the logicians of other paths" to the third line and follow this with "O, Son of Victors."

[97](#) This verse is in six lines in Gunabhadra and the Sanskrit, five in Shikshananda, and four in Bodhiruchi. Again, designation (*prajnapiti*) refers to the arbitrary fabrication of something as existing or not existing.

[98](#) The name of an ascetic sage. He also appears in verse 35.

[99](#) Gunabhadra renders this in five lines, which I've expanded into six for purposes of euphony. Shikshananda and the Sanskrit also have it in six lines, but do so by adding part of the next verse.

[100](#) This is the highest heaven in the realm of form. Suzuki adds the first two lines of this verse to the end of the previous verse. Gunabhadra compresses the first two lines into one line. In this case, I've followed Shikshananda.

[101](#) Gunabhadra has four buddhas, instead of three, expanding "buddhas of true knowledge" into "buddhas of suchness" and "buddhas of impartial knowledge." In the last couplet, extant Sanskrit texts have "bodhisattva" while all three Chinese translations have "sangha."

[102](#) Gunabhadra compresses this into three lines. I've followed Shikshananda. The first seven stages of the bodhisattva path are meant here, during which one has not yet realized the nonexistence of a self among dharmas.

[103](#) Gunabhadra renders this in five lines, which I've put into

four, as has Shikshananda.

[104](#) Neither Mahamati's questions nor the Buddha's repetition of them add up to 108, nor do those that follow in the next section.

[105](#) Section III. In other sutras, the Buddha responds to such questions with the doctrine of relativity: birth only exists if death exists. Since neither exists by itself, neither is ultimately real. Here, he assumes this is already understood and turns to the doctrine of negation instead: to talk about anything is to talk about nothing. This section can also be viewed as following from the Buddha's explanation of dharmas and non-dharmas to Ravana at the end of Chapter One. Essentially, all dharmas are non-dharmas. That is, they are nothing more than arbitrary designations behind which nothing is real. In the *Diamond Sutra* (Chapters 8 and 17), the Buddha says, "As for dharmas, Subhuti, only as non-dharmas can we speak of dharmas." This is the meaning of the Buddha's statement in #90 above that he will be answering Mahamati's questions with "truths that transcend words." Note, too, that in Section XI, we are told that these 108 questions are not to be answered on the basis of "feble-minded knowledge" but buddha knowledge.

[106](#) Because he uses the same Chinese characters for "modes of reality" and "self existence," Gunabhadra uses *li-tzu-hsing* (transcend modes of reality) in place of *fei-tzu-hsing* (no modes of reality) to differentiate this statement from his statement later in which he has *fei-tzu-hsing* (no self-existence). I've followed Shikshananda in this case.

[107](#) Shikshananda reads *citta* (mind) instead of *anta* (extreme) here. Apparently, the Sanskrit text was altered sometime after Gunabhadra's translation appeared, with *anta* being mistaken as

antah (feeling/mind), and this subsequently replaced by *citta*. Bodhiruchi has two separate statements for both “mind” and “extreme.”

[108](#) When expedience and skill are differentiated, as they are here, expedience is viewed as insight into a situation and skill as the application of that insight.

[109](#) Normally, these refer to the paths of the shravaka, the pratyeka-buddha, and the bodhisattva. However, in Section LXVI, the Buddha says among the three paths, one path is for gods and Brahma, one is for shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas, and one is for tathagatas.

[110](#) Apparently there is a copyist error in Gunabhadra’s text. He has *suo-yu* (projection) instead of *wu-suo-yu* (no projection). The Sanskrit is *nirabhasa*, which Gunabhadra normally renders either *wu-suo-shou* or *wu-suo-yu*. Since Gunabhadra has *suo-yu* later in this series, he must have originally had *wu-suo-yu* here, which is supported by Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda.

[111](#) According to the teachings of the Yogacara, there have been three turnings of the wheel of the Dharma, each directed to audiences with different levels of understanding: the first was the Buddha’s teaching of the Four Noble Truths and the Abhidharma that followed, the second was the Madhyamaka teachings of Nagarjuna and others, and the third was the Yogacara teachings of this and other mind-only texts.

[112](#) Bodhiruchi has “a statement about existence and nonexistence,” while Shikshananda breaks “existence” and “nonexistence” into two statements.

[113](#) This refers to the third item in the tetralemma popular with logicians: x, y, both x and y, neither x nor y.

[114](#) Gunabhadra combines this and the previous statement into

one statement: “the personal realization of buddha knowledge and delight in what is present is about no delight in what is present.” However, the omission in the second part of his statement suggests his text was corrupt or his translation was miscopied. I’ve rendered this as two statements, as have Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda. The Sanskrit for the second statement is *drishṭa-dharma-sukha*, which appears again near the end of the sutra.

[115](#) The Sanskrit is *bhuta*, referring to the four material elements.

[116](#) Gunabhadra divides the Sanskrit (*samkhya-ganita*) into two statements, one concerning numbers, and the other enumeration, but using the same Chinese characters for both. I’ve restricted my rendering to one statement, as have Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda.

[117](#) Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda divide this (*shilpa-kala-vidya*) into two statements about “crafts” and “sciences.”

[118](#) The Sanskrit is *prajnapti*, which refers to the arbitrary fabrication or identification of individual entities. Thus, the term *prajnapti-matra* (designation-only) was a hallmark of Yogacara texts.

[119](#) Shikshananda alone has “wheels of fire.”

[120](#) The Sanskrit is *nirodha-vyutthana* (cessation-arising). Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda preface this statement with: “a statement about cessation is about no cessation.” Instead of “cessation and arising,” this refers to emerging from a state of meditation such as the Samadhi of Cessation.

[121](#) This refers to aids to enlightenment, or *bodhi-anga*.

[122](#) The assurances meant here are those given to bodhisattvas concerning their future buddhahood.

[123](#) This statement is only present in Gunabhadra.

Unconditioned or uncreated things (*asamskrita-dharma*) include space and two types of nirvana.

[124](#) After this, Bodhiruchi adds, “a statement about nuns is about no nuns.”

[125](#) The Sanskrit is *adhishtana*, which means “resting place” or “refuge” but also “what supports” practice.

[126](#) Gunabhadra has 104 answers, as do I. However, he combines two that everyone else separates (personal realization of buddha knowledge and delight in what is present), and he adds two not found in any other text or translation (numbers and moral codes). Although Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda differ in their inclusion or exclusion of certain answers, only Bodhiruchi’s total comes to 108.

[127](#) The last sentence is present in Gunabhadra and Bodhiruchi but not in Shikshananda or current Sanskrit texts. The reason bodhisattvas should study this is that seeing whatever they think of as real as not real will free them from the fabrication or projection of reality and prepare them for the personal realization of what buddhas know.

[128](#) Section IV. Mahamati continues by asking the same kind of question he asked before: “How many kinds of this or that are there?” He now asks about consciousness because the reality of its contents has just been denied. However, the Buddha did not deny consciousness itself. To do so would have been to side with those nihilists who held that nothing remained after death. Thus, while Mahamati asks about the apparent rising and ceasing of consciousness, implicit in his question is a concern with its ceasing. The Buddha answers that while consciousness rises and ceases, it possesses an intrinsic quality that remains

unaffected by those forms of consciousness tied to the contents he has just now denied. Such forms are themselves delusions that can only be said to exist as long as the *alaya-vijnana*, or repository consciousness, is not transformed into the *tathagata-garba*, or womb of buddhas.

[129](#) The Sanskrit for “continuity” is *prabandha*. For “characteristic,” it is *lakshana*. Both of these terms also occur in early Indian music, with *prabandha* denoting the underlying form or connectedness of music and *lakshana* denoting its surface melody. Again, the ocean and its waves come to mind.

[130](#) Yin-shun says only with the cessation of consciousness as a continuity and as a characteristic can our true nature appear.

[131](#) The unfolding/transforming (*paravrtti*) aspect is produced by causes, the karmic (*karma*) aspect produces effects, while the intrinsic (*jati*) aspect remains free from causes and effects. The Sanskrit for “aspect” here is also *lakshana*.

[132](#) Gunabhadra alone includes “true consciousness.” Since the text segues into “true consciousness” in the next paragraph, it would only make sense if it had already been mentioned. Hence, I have followed Gunabhadra. Basically, this threefold division is a simplification of the eightfold division of consciousness, with perceiving consciousness (or the unfolding aspect of consciousness) including the five sensory forms of consciousness; object-projecting consciousness (or the karmic aspect of consciousness) including the sixth and seventh forms of consciousness; and true consciousness (or the intrinsic aspect of consciousness) including the eighth form of consciousness, or at least the eighth form transformed into the *tathagata-garba*.

[133](#) Again, the point seems to be that perceiving consciousness is the recipient of karma, and object-projecting consciousness

creates it.

[134](#) Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit texts have *alaya-vijnana*, or repository consciousness.

[135](#) The cessation of consciousness here refers not to the cessation of repository consciousness, but only to the karma-creating and ever-unfolding aspects of the five forms of sensory consciousness along with the sixth form, conceptual consciousness.

[136](#) This phrase is only present in Gunabhadra.

[137](#) What in chapters Three and Four are referred to as “the threefold combination.”

[138](#) The Buddha presents two nihilistic views held by other paths regarding the cessation of the continuity of consciousness: the first holds that it is dependent on sensory consciousness alone, and the second holds that it is not dependent on sensory consciousness but on some external entity. The Buddha’s view, as presented above, is that the intrinsic state of consciousness does not cease, only those states tied to the sowing and sprouting of the seeds of projection that obscure it cease.

[139](#) Section V. Most commentators read this as a continuation of the last statement of the previous section—as a list of the “something else” that followers of other paths considered responsible for the continuity of consciousness. Thus, Gunabhadra’s and Shikshananda’s translations could be read as beginning “Furthermore, Mahamati, they have” instead of “there are.” Bodhiruchi’s translation is not so ambiguous: “Moreover, Mahamati, followers of others paths have seven kinds of self-existence.” However, some commentators disagree with Bodhiruchi’s reading and see these as seven examples of the Buddha’s use of skillful means and conventional truth, beginning

with the origination (*samu-daya*) of suffering and concluding with the completion (*nishpatti*) of the Eightfold Noble Path. Given the Buddha's comment in the next section concerning his establishing of both "mundane" and "metaphysical" truths in addition to "transcendent truths," I have decided in favor of retaining the ambiguity.

[140](#) The Sanskrit is *bhava-svabhava* and refers to something whose existence is not predicated or dependent on anything else in time, in space, or in mind. The term could also be translated as "reality." However, I have tried to reserve the use of that word for such terms as *tri-svabhava* (the three modes of reality), *bhutakoti* (ultimate reality), etc.

[141](#) Section VI. Contrasting this with the previous section, Bodhiruchi begins, "I have seven kinds of higher truth." Commentators generally agree with his interpretation, if not with his inclusion of *wo* (I), that these seven refer to seven successive levels of understanding used in dealing with erroneous views arising from the preceding seven forms of self-existence.

[142](#) The Sanskrit for "higher truth" is *parama-artha*.

[143](#) However one views the seven kinds of self-existence of Section V, it is clear that their proper use is dependent on buddha knowledge. Only the eye of wisdom exercised by a buddha can see without seeing and thus remain unattached to what is seen.

[144](#) The three realms of existence include those of desire, form, and formlessness.

[145](#) The concluding statement suggests that the foregoing has been an introduction and, as elsewhere, the Buddha is not so concerned with philosophical argument as he is with putting an end to suffering, which arises from projection and which ceases

upon understanding the true nature of one's own perceptions.

[146](#) Section VII. This section critiques the views regarding causation held by the Sarvastivadins and Vaisheshikas, among others, who held that the effect exists in the cause or that it does not exist in the cause. T'ai-hsu and Yin-shun note how ridiculous such views regarding the existence or nonexistence of cause and effect can be. If the result does not exist in the cause, this would be like eating but never producing shit. But if the effect exists in the cause, this would be tantamount to shit being present in food. This section mercifully ends with the transcendence of all views of causation.

[147](#) The Buddha is denying the validity of impermanence. Te-ch'ing says, "The broken jug is a metaphor for no effect, the burnt seed for no cause." Yin-shun says, "If a thought that has arisen ceases, where does the next thought come from? Once the previous thought ceases, the subsequent thought has no cause of origination. Vasubandhu is quoted as saying: 'Once a rooster dies, how is it going to crow?'"

[148](#) Te-ch'ing says, "Tortoises do not have any hair because there is no such cause, and sand is not the source of cooking oil because there is no such effect." The threefold conjunction normally refers to the combination of a sense organ, a sense object, and the form of sensory consciousness that arises upon their conjunction.

[149](#) This term is often used in Sanskrit as the opposite pair to nirvana. Although usually understood to mean "birth and death," it means "wandering," as in wandering through birth and death.

[150](#) The Sanskrit is *maya-upama-samadhi*. This is a samadhi in which one acquires an illusory body, hence the name.

[151](#) Te-ch'ing notes that changing one's understanding is

immediate, changing one's behavior takes longer.

[152](#) In this section, the Buddha rejects focusing on the study of dharmas, or at least dharmas viewed as subject to causation. This is because anything that might be subject to causation, and that thus exists in time, does not, in fact, exist except as an illusory concept.

[153](#) Section VIII. This summarizes and concludes the foregoing sections.

[154](#) Section IX. The Buddha briefly explains how consciousness works and then points out that it can only be transcended by realizing that consciousness itself is a self-fabricated fiction. Such a teaching, however, is not something everyone is prepared to hear. Hence, buddhas vary their teachings to suit the audience.

[155](#) Gunabhadra alone words this first paragraph as a statement of what the Buddha has taught, rather than as a request to cover such topics. Given the Buddha's response, I've decided to follow Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit in this case.

[156](#) As elsewhere in this sutra, "mind" (*citta*) means "to gather" and refers to the eighth consciousness where karmic seeds generated by the other seven are stored and manifested; "will" (*manas*) means "to reason, reflect, consider" and refers to our seventh consciousness; and "conceptual consciousness" (*mano-vijnana*) means "consciousness of the mind" and refers to the sixth consciousness, which conceptualizes the five forms of sensory consciousness.

[157](#) T'ai-hsu says, "The dharma body has no attributes but also does not have no attributes. Because it has no attributes, it is the nature of suchness. Because it does not have no attributes, it is the waves of our repository consciousness."

[158](#) This differs from the usual list, which include the *power* of

sensation, the *domain* of sensation, the consciousness that arises from their *conjunction*, and the *desire* for sensation.

[159](#) These two metaphors are distinguished with images in the mirror representing a static view of consciousness and the ocean and waves representing a dynamic view. In the metaphor of the ocean and waves, the water represents repository consciousness, the movement of water represents the will (or self-consciousness), the waves represent conceptual consciousness, and the wind is that of externality.

[160](#) This is a difficult paragraph in any language, and all three Chinese translations differ quite a bit, as does the Sanskrit. I've followed Gunabhadra, I think.

[161](#) These are all examples of the color white.

[162](#) As elsewhere, the word "mind" is often used for the eighth, or *alaya*, consciousness.

[163](#) Gunabhadra spreads this over six lines, repeating the last two lines of the previous verse, which I've omitted, as have Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit.

[164](#) Gunabhadra's version of this verse is problematic, as it focuses only on conceptual consciousness (*yi-shih*). Hence, I've followed Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda in this case.

[165](#) This line also appears in the first verse of Section LXVI.

[166](#) The Sanskrit specifies *mano-vijnana* (conceptual consciousness), but none of the Chinese translations do.

[167](#) I've based my translation of the third line on Shikshananda. Gunabhadra has "what is grasped and what isn't grasped."

[168](#) The word *yeh* (karma) is only present in Gunabhadra. Given the Buddha's response, Gunabhadra's text is clearly preferable here.

[169](#) This division of a quatrain between two speakers is unusual,

but it occurs here in the translations of both Gunabhadra and Shikshananda.

[170](#) Though both appear as one, we focus on the wave, not the ocean, the image, not the mirror, the dream, not the dreamer, the object, not the mind.

[171](#) The five forms of sensory-based consciousness are meant here. Unlike most four-line verses in this sutra, this one stops in the middle and then begins another metaphor that is developed in the next verse.

[172](#) The Sanskrit *vyabhicarin* means “to deviate” or “to have secondary meanings.” But it also means “to be unfaithful,” which is the only meaning that follows from the simile of artistic representations that precedes it. Bodhiruchi translates this line: “teachings are separate from the truth,” while Shikshananda renders it: “teachings change and diverge.”

[173](#) For the first line, Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda have: “The truth I have attained.”

[174](#) Section X. For the Buddha, the path to understanding is not through speculation or philosophical discourse but through personal realization, which requires avoiding distractions and cultivating whatever brings one closer to one’s own mind.

[175](#) Section XI. The cultivation of buddha knowledge advocated by the Buddha in the previous sections is viewed here as having three aspects: realizing that dharmas are empty, realizing that dharmas are not empty, realizing that dharmas are neither empty nor not empty. The division of this section is rather odd in that it ends by having Mahamati pose a question that isn’t answered until the following section. This division must be peculiar to the Japanese commentary on which Suzuki based his divisions, as I cannot find a Chinese commentary that follows

suit.

[176](#) The Sanskrit is *nirabhasa*, where *nir* is a negative prefix, and where *abhasa* means “erroneous appearance” but also refers to a thing’s “range” or “scope.” Previous translators have preferred “imageless,” which is fine as long as one understands that the images in question are self-generated or projected.

Freedom from projections or erroneous appearances is usually associated with the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path.

[177](#) Knowledge appears to the mind in forms that can become an obstruction to personal realization. Thus, knowledge of the first seven stages is sometimes called feeble-minded or “lameass” knowledge because it concerns one’s own liberation—the attainment of nirvana and not enlightenment.

[178](#) The body that accompanies this samadhi is one of the three projection bodies. For more on this, see Section LVII.

[179](#) I have followed Edgerton’s reading of *abhinivṛtta* here in *maya-vishaya-abhinivṛtta* (to depart illusory realms).

Gunabhadra has “give rise to illusory realms.” Shikshananda has “enter illusory realms.” And Bodhiruchi has “which is composed of illusory realms.”

[180](#) Tushita Heaven is where bodhisattvas are reborn prior to their final rebirth, the one during which they attain buddhahood. Akanishtha Heaven is the highest heaven in the realm of form and where buddhahood is attained.

[181](#) We can see from Mahamati’s “question” that according to his view, buddha knowledge is the end of the path to buddhahood. Thus, he reviews the attainments of its final stages—namely, the eighth through the tenth stages. Only Gunabhadra includes the modifier “ever-present” (*ch’ang-chu*) before “body” (*shen*). This entire paragraph should be understood as

belonging to the beginning of the next section.

[182](#) Section XII. Among the three aspects of buddha knowledge mentioned in the previous section, the first was freedom from projections, which is often misinterpreted to mean nonexistence. Here, the Buddha steers his audience past the shoals of arguments involving views concerning either existence or nonexistence, as both are nothing but the perceptions of one's own mind. The validity of any ontological argument is thus denied, as is the relevance of such arguments.

[183](#) What causes rabbit horns is the misperception of rabbit ears as rabbit horns.

[184](#) The arguments here are simplified to the point where they don't quite tell us enough. The first position is based on the idea that if the existence of an entity ends when the causes that support its existence end, then it doesn't exist in the first place. Hence, the reason rabbit horns don't exist isn't because they are a mistake of perception, but because their necessary cause, namely, the mistake of perception, doesn't exist—or it shouldn't, once one has a better view. And since the causes on which anything is based eventually cease to exist, nothing exists. The logic of the second is based on the idea that as long as something is composed of some kind of underlying entity, it must also exist. Thus ox horns are real, while rabbit horns are not. For the Buddha, both positions are beside the point. The only reason anything can be said to exist or not is merely a matter of projections, which are themselves nothing but perceptions of the mind.

[185](#) Here, “it” refers to “discrimination.”

[186](#) Section XIII. As elsewhere in this sutra, not all of these verses repeat what is said in the prose that precedes them. In

this case, they point beyond the alternatives of existence and nonexistence to what cannot be described, only experienced. In that regard, they summarize much of the foregoing and not just the preceding section.

[187](#) I've followed Bodhiruchi for this line. Gunabhadra has: "There is no form or mind," which is not the teaching here. Shikshananda agrees with Bodhiruchi: "What the mind sees does not exist." The Sanskrit has *drshyam na vidyate cittam / cittam dyrshyat pravartate* which translates to: "Mind does not exist as what is visible / but the mind emerges from what is visible." Form is used here to represent all the skandhas, of which it is the first of five.

[188](#) Section XIV. Like all bodhisattvas, Mahamati has vowed to liberate all beings, hence he asks whether such liberation, or "purification" of the mind, occurs by degrees (*krama-vrittya*) or all at once (*yugapat*). The Buddha presents a series of eight metaphors, four of which demonstrate how purification takes place by degrees and four of which demonstrate how it takes place all at once. The first four are said to relate to the early stages of the bodhisattva path and the second four to the later stages. What is noteworthy is that in the light of the two kinds of no-self, beings do not purify their own minds, rather their minds are purified by buddhas.

[189](#) The Sanskrit is *vishuddhi*, meaning "clear," "pure," "free from error."

[190](#) The *amalalamlā*, or *Phyllanthus emblica*.

[191](#) These four similes liken the purification of the mind by degrees to a fruit that develops naturally, a vessel produced by a creator, a living thing produced by a nonliving thing, and a skill that requires time and effort.

[192](#) Images in a mirror are formless until someone distinguishes them as to color and shape. The mirror itself reflects without distinguishing among forms.

[193](#) The terminology used here in reference to a buddha's three bodies is unique to the *Lankavatara* but commensurate with the standard trio of Mahayana Buddhism: *dharmakaya*, *sambhogakaya*, and *nirmanakaya*, or the bodies of truth, realization, and appearance. In this case, the *nishyanda buddha* is associated with "personal realization" and thus with the body of realization, while the *dharmata buddha* represents the truth on which that realization is based and thus the body of truth. The word *nishyanda* means "result" or "outcome," but it also means "to flow from." Hence, some see it as referring to the result of attainment while others see it as referring to its origin in the *dharmata buddha*.

[194](#) Akanishtha Heaven is the highest heaven in the realm of form. It is also the place where buddhas are enlightened and where they are said to attain their *sambhogakaya*, or body of realization.

[195](#) These four similes liken the purification of the mind to a mirror that reflects without making distinctions, a light that illuminates without making distinctions, all-inclusive consciousness, and personal realization. In the last of these, the word *tun* (all at once) appears in *Shikshananda* and the Sanskrit but not in *Gunabhadra* or *Bodhiruchi*. It could be argued that the reason it is omitted here is that the difference between "all at once" and "by degrees" is no longer relevant.

[196](#) Section XV. Each of the three buddhas mentioned in the *Lankavatara* is associated with one of the modes of reality. The *dharmata buddha* establishes the dependent reality of personal

realization, the nishyanda buddha reveals the imaginary reality conjured by the mind, and the nirmita-nirmana buddha teaches the perfected reality of spiritual practice.

[197](#) Because the nishyanda buddha is said to arise from the dharmata buddha, this buddha is sometimes called the dharmata-nishyanda buddha. At the end of the next paragraph, the Buddha reverts to the simpler term.

[198](#) The three modes of reality include an imagined reality (*parikalpita-svabhava*), a dependent reality (*paratantra-svabhava*), and a perfected reality (*parinishpanna-svabhava*). Dependent reality is also referred to as *pratitya-samutpada*, or the reality of “dependent origination,” which was the reality realized by the Buddha the night of his Enlightenment—but not before he had broken through the imagined reality of ignorant beings as well as the perfected reality of the spiritual elite.

[199](#) Just as a magician fabricates forms that people imagine as being what they are not, thus does our repository consciousness produce our world of objects as well as our sensory bodies, both of which we imagine to be real, out of the seeds of habit-energy from past discriminations that we once more imagine as being what they are not.

[200](#) Transcending appearances of the mind, the dharmata buddha does not teach, does not speak, but only establishes the buddha realm on which personal realization is based.

[201](#) Here and elsewhere, Gunabhadra translates this as *hua-fo* (apparition buddha). This is the buddha that appears in the world.

[202](#) The Sanskrit is *niralamba*.

[203](#) Section XVI. The attainments of shravakas and bodhisattvas are compared. Although both are capable of

attaining the truths associated with personal realization, shravakas remain attached to the self-existence of dharmas and thus are not free of the habit-energy of such projections and the endless round of existence it entails, however subtle.

[204](#) The Four Noble Truths are the truths meant here.

[205](#) The Sanskrit is *acintya-parinati-cyuti*. Death and rebirth so subtle it is barely noticed.

[206](#) This is apparently a reference to early Hinayana sects, such as the Sarvastivadins, who believed all dharmas contained something that was not subject to creation or destruction.

[207](#) I have followed Shikshananda in inverting the order of the last two sentences.

[208](#) Section XVII. This section makes my head hurt. The Buddha contrasts the ultimate reality of personal realization with the “first causes” of other paths and thankfully moves on.

[209](#) The Sanskrit is *nitya-acintya* (eternal-inconceivable). This expression was used by other schools as an appellation for the creator or for other “first causes.”

[210](#) The Sanskrit *karana* means “cause,” but it also means “creator” and thus “first cause.”

[211](#) Amen.

[212](#) Section XVIII. Not only do followers of other paths cling to nihilistic views, shravakas do, too. Compounding their misunderstanding of samsara (wandering, birth, and death), they misunderstand nirvana (no breath, extinction), and finally misunderstand the teaching of *citta-matra* (mind-only) meant to liberate them, seeing it as nothingness. The Buddha points instead to the projections that comprise repository consciousness as the source of the problem and to their transformation into correct knowledge through personal

realization, not through nihilistic practices.

[213](#) The Sanskrit has “they do not know the difference between samsara and nirvana.” Suzuki saw the problem with this and rendered it “they do not know that birth-and-death and Nirvana are not to be separated the one from the other,” changing the text’s *avishasajnah* to *avishasajnah*.

[214](#) People talk of differences among the shravaka, pratyeka-buddha and bodhisattva paths, but differences are only conceptual. Such people also misunderstand “the projection-free realm” as another form of nihilism. Although the “three paths” are normally understood as referring to those of shravakas, prateyka-buddhas, and bodhisattvas, the Buddha defines them elsewhere in this sutra as a path for gods and Brahma, a path for shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas, and a path for tathagatas.

[215](#) Gunabhadra omits the negative *pu* (not) in this sentence. However, it is present in the translations of Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda and present as an equivalent negative in the Sanskrit and seems called for here.

[216](#) Section XIX. Not only is cessation an illusion, so is birth. Ignorant people believe in existence and nonexistence, that things come into existence, persist, then cease to exist. The buddhas teach that things neither exist nor do not exist. What seems to exist or not to exist are projections of things as existing or not existing. Things themselves do not arise. There are no such things as things, only the projections of things. Instead of arguing that things arise as the result of causes, and because they do not exist by themselves they are empty of self-existence, and because they are empty of self-existence, they neither arise nor cease, the *Lankavatara* sees this as the long way around and

simply denies that anything arises in the first place. Arising is a delusion. Nothing arises. The relevance of the Buddha's discussion of dharmas and non-dharmas at the end of Chapter One becomes clearer now.

[217](#) A popular saying among Buddhist masters comes to mind: "Outside of the mind, there are no things. Outside of things, there is no mind."

[218](#) The repository consciousness has no form; it is the grasping and the grasped that have form. Once transformed, another name for the repository consciousness is the Great Perfect Mirror Mind.

[219](#) Section XX. The concept of lineage (*gotra*) was and still is important in Indian culture and law. It is through such means that people establish their identity. Although the Buddha associates the first three lineages with the three paths, his intent here is to go beyond the paths to the realizations on which they are based and to emphasize that buddhahood is open to all. What lies in the background here is the importance of the teachers with whom one comes into contact and not their doctrines. Also, this is aimed at instilling an awareness of how to adjust one's own instruction of others.

[220](#) According to commentators, these lineages of realization (*abhisamaya-gotra*) are based upon the habit-energy from what one has learned in the past: upon hearing the expedient teachings taught by a nirmana buddha, one joins the shravaka lineage; upon hearing the teaching of dependent origination taught by a nishpanna-nirmitta buddha, one joins the pratyeka-buddha lineage; upon hearing the teaching of detachment taught by the dharmata buddha, one joins the tathagata lineage; upon hearing all three teachings and believing and doubting at the

same time, one joins the indeterminate lineage; and not believing any of these teachings, one joins the distant lineage.

[221](#) Gunabhadra’s Sanskrit text apparently had *bhinna-gotra* (distant lineage—as in “distant relation”), not *a-gotra* (non-lineage—as in “no relation”), which is what all other texts have. Gunabhadra’s text, I feel, is superior here, as the Buddha does not support the exclusion of anyone from access to a lineage of realization, even those who reject the basis for such a lineage, as the icchantikas do in Section XXII.

[222](#) It was while cultivating dependent origination (*pratitya-samutpada*) that Shakyamuni experienced enlightenment.

[223](#) Gunabhadra has “the eighth stage.” But the attainments listed here do not correspond to that stage of the bodhisattva path, as described by Gunabhadra elsewhere in his translation. In this case, I have turned to Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda, both of whom have the “fifth and sixth stages,” which agrees with what the Buddha says elsewhere in this and other sutras.

[224](#) “Karmic deaths” refer to rebirth in accordance with one’s karma, whereas, due to the vows made by bodhisattvas, their subsequent rebirths transcend such perceptible realms.

[225](#) Only Gunabhadra includes this first clause attributing what follows to the fifth of the five lineages.

[226](#) This refers to the Sarvastivadin school of early Buddhism. The Sarvastivadins thought there was a substance that survived death. Here, the Buddha provides an abbreviated list of possibilities. I’ve followed Edgerton in reading *posha* as equivalent to *purusha*, with which it is linked, and thus the Chinese compound *chang-yang-shih-fu* as one term, namely “individuality.”

[227](#) This refers to the Hindu sect of the Vaisheshikas.

[228](#) Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda have *yuan-chueh* (pratyeka-buddha). I've followed Gunabhadra, who has *ke-pieh-yuan* (differing-conditions), referring to the twelve links on the chain of dependent origination that begins with ignorance and ends with old age and death.

[229](#) Shikshananda and the Sanskrit texts combine the first two of these four and thus list only three such lineages.

[230](#) This refers to the three modes of reality (*tri-svabhava*): imagined reality, dependent reality, and perfected reality.

[231](#) This refers to the three modes of non-reality (*tri-asvabhava*): form, life, and reality.

[232](#) This is identified as the repository consciousness in the translations of Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda.

[233](#) Referring to the shravaka, pratyeka-buddha, and tathagata lineages, and not the distant lineage.

[234](#) *Nirabhasa-bhumi*. The eighth stage of the bodhisattva path, beyond which the ninth and tenth stages are those of buddhahood.

[235](#) Whereby repository consciousness turns out to be the tathagata-garbha, or womb of buddhas.

[236](#) The point of this last sentence is that one's path is not as important as the lineage of realization to which one belongs.

[237](#) Section XXI. Another case where the verses do not at first seem to recapitulate the preceding prose section. But on a closer reading, the first verse dismisses the goals of the shravaka path, the second verse introduces the use of expedient teachings while dismissing the goals of the pratyeka-buddha path, the third verse turns to the tathagata path, and the fourth verse finds even the highest meditative realms, be they Hinayana or Mahayana, unequal to the teaching of mind-only.

[238](#) These are the four heroes of the shravaka path: the *srota-apanna*, who reaches the river of impermanence; the *sakrid-agamin*, who is reborn once more; the *anagamin*, who is not reborn as a human but among the gods; and the *arhat*, who is not reborn at all.

[239](#) Referring to pratyeka-buddhas, who cultivate in solitude.

[240](#) Again, the realm free from projections is a characteristic of the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path.

[241](#) These are the names of meditations in the realms of form and formlessness which some liken to nirvana.

[242](#) Section XXII. Having considered the karmic lineages that make buddhahood possible for us benighted beings, the Buddha now turns to those who in some quarters are said to lack such a possibility, the icchantikas. At issue here is whether or not all beings have the buddha-nature. The Buddha offers a novel solution. All beings have the ability to become buddhas. It only takes instruction and the willingness to be instructed. Hence, bodhisattvas cultivate patience. In fact, given their vow not to enter nirvana until all others do so, some bodhisattvas assume the guise of icchantikas in order to liberate them. As noted earlier, icchantikas make up the “distant lineage” of Section XX. They are distant relations, but still relations.

[243](#) The word *icchantika* is derived from *icchatva*, meaning “desire.” Thus, icchantikas refer to “pleasure seekers.” According to the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths, desire is the cause of suffering. Thus, devotion to desire is tantamount to rejection of the Dharma and the possibility of liberation.

[244](#) The first part of this section is handled differently in each translation. I’ve followed Gunabhadra (and the reading of his version by Tseng Feng-yi and T’ung Jun). Bodhiruchi has:

“Mahamati, what is the path of no lineage? It is that of the icchantika? Mahamati, icchantikas have no potential for nirvana. And why not? They don’t believe in liberation, so they don’t enter nirvana.” Shikshananda has: “Furthermore, Mahamati, why do the icchantikas among these (apparently referring to the indeterminate lineage of the previous section) have no desire or delight for liberation? Because they have forsaken their good roots or because they have made vows concerning beings without beginning?”

[245](#) This sentence is only present in Gunabhadra and Bodhiruchi.

[246](#) Good roots (*kushala-mula*) produce good fruit (*kushala phala*). The “good fruit” of Buddhism is buddhahood. Thus, “good roots” include thoughts, words, or deeds of compassion and wisdom that give rise to such a fruit.

[247](#) This refers to the *bodhisattva-pitaka*, or those canonical texts of Mahayana Buddhism that extol the bodhisattva, who takes the vow to liberate all beings as the proper goal of practice, as opposed to the arhat, who seeks only to enter nirvana. When the Mahayana first developed, its supporters often felt obliged to defend the authenticity of its teachings.

[248](#) The vinaya refers to that part of the Buddhist canon that deals with moral discipline.

[249](#) Section XXIII. Resuming his review of the major teachings bodhisattvas were expected to understand, the Buddha introduces the three modes of reality, which he summarizes according to their relationships to the five dharmas. They are, after all, two different ways of looking at the same thing, namely, the world we perceive and think of as real: one based on projection, the other based on correct knowledge.

[250](#) The three modes of reality (*tri-sva-bhava*) include imagined reality, (*parikalpita*), dependent reality (*paratantra*), and perfected reality (*parinishpanna*). The three modes do not refer to separate realities. They simply represent the three ways we perceive what is real. In imagined reality, we mistakenly perceive things as separate from other things. In dependent reality, we correctly perceive things as dependent on other things, but we still perceive the world in terms of things which are themselves fictions. In perfected reality, we neither perceive nor do not perceive things, for things neither exist nor do not exist. In perfected reality, we dwell in the realm of the tathagata-garbha.

[251](#) Gunabhadra puts this question in Mahamati's mouth, but it does better as a rhetorical question, which is how it appears in the translations of Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda and also in the Sanskrit.

[252](#) Gunabhadra reverses the order and attribution of "name" and "appearance," apparently by mistake. I've gone along with Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit texts in placing "appearance" first, followed by "name."

[253](#) The "ground" of dependent reality is the eighth, or repository, consciousness, which supplies the "names." The "objective support" includes the remaining seven forms of consciousness, including the five sensory-based forms of consciousness, which supply the "appearances." The Sanskrit for "ground" is *ashraya* and for "objective support" is *alambana*.

[254](#) The *tathagata-garbha*, or womb of buddhas, is the name applied to the repository consciousness when it is transformed.

[255](#) Gunabhadra and Shikshananda render this verse with four-

character lines, instead of the usual five-character lines.

[256](#) The relationship between the five dharmas and the three modes of reality, as described in the above verse and elsewhere in this sutra, connects name and appearance to imagined reality, projection to dependent reality, and true knowledge and suchness to perfected reality. For more on these, see Sections LXXXIII & LXXXIV

[257](#) The reference here is to perfected reality. It should be noted, however, that elsewhere (at the end of the third paragraph in the next section, for example) the Buddha says that personal realization involves transcending the five dharmas and the three modes of reality, which would include the perfected mode as well.

[258](#) Section XXIV. The Buddha completes his review of the major teachings in which bodhisattvas are expected to be versed with the two kinds of no-self. The skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas are simply different ways of breaking down one's experience of awareness in search of a self. The skandhas include the external world of form and the internal worlds of sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness. The dhatus include the six powers of sensation, the six domains of sensation, and the six forms of consciousness that arise upon their conjunction. The ayatanas include only the six powers and six domains. Not only does the Buddha deny the existence of anything permanent among such dharmas as the skandhas, he also denies that the skandhas, or anything else, are themselves permanent, or "self-existent."

[259](#) Other paths located the self in the skandha of consciousness and what belongs to the self among the remaining four skandhas.

[260](#) I've followed Bodhiruchi who is somewhat clearer in his reading of *garbha* as referring to "house" than Gunabhadra. Shikshananda reads this as referring to the repository consciousness, as does Suzuki.

[261](#) The Sanskrit is *niraha*, which means "indifferent." This term is absent in Bodhiruchi's translation, but Shikshananda translates it *wu-neng-tso* (no ability to create).

[262](#) The attribution of individual or shared characteristics was often used as a way of slipping in a self through the back door.

[263](#) In the previous section, we were told that personal realization of buddha knowledge takes place in the realm of perfected reality. Here, we learn that this, too, is merely another way of looking at things and that one must leave this behind as well.

[264](#) I read this as referring to the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path, which is marked by freedom from projections and which is where shravakas and bodhisattvas usually part company. If the eighth stage is the initial stage of the bodhisattva path, then the ninth stage would be its final stage, as the Buddha says here that bodhisattvas who reach the tenth stage have "gone beyond the bodhisattva stage."

[265](#) The ninth stage is called the good wisdom stage, and the tenth stage is called the dharma cloud stage. They are traditionally listed as the last two stages of the bodhisattva path.

[266](#) A monarch with universal dominion.

[267](#) Section XXV. This section follows from the previous one and examines the four aspects from which a self can be postulated to exist or not to exist. The Buddha rejects both sides of this issue. This is because the aspects that are asserted or denied neither exist nor do not exist. They exist as words, as

concepts, but not as anything real.

[268](#) Gunabhadra, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit all render this in six lines, while Bodhiruchi has it in four lines.

[269](#) Comparing similarities and differences is the means whereby individual or shared characteristics are determined.

[270](#) Assertions of characteristics are usually associated with the vaishe shikas, and assertions of views with the Sarvastivadins.

[271](#) Everything arises due to the repository consciousness. Thus, everything arises from delusions, not causes and conditions.

[272](#) The division of our experience into dharmas, and thus the creation of the Abhidharma, or Study of Dharmas, began shortly after the Buddha's Nirvana. According to this scheme, these entities of the mind were either created or conditioned, that is, dependent on other dharmas for their existence, or they were uncreated. Space, two kinds of cessation, and nirvana were the only dharmas that qualified as uncreated or unconditioned according to the sects.

[273](#) Strands of hair before the eyes usually refer to what we call "floaters" on the surface of the eye.

[274](#) Assertions of cause and of existence were made by Hinayana sects, whereby the assertion of cause concerned practice and the assertion of existence concerned its fruit. For Hinayana sects, space, cessation, and nirvana were viewed as goals of practice.

[275](#) Section XXVI. Having mastered the preceding teachings, bodhisattvas now go beyond the eighth stage and begin their own careers as teachers of the Dharma, in particular the Dharma as taught by this sutra. The emphasis here is not on what bodhisattvas attain but on what they do to help others.

[276](#) The point seems to be that they adjust their appearance to the needs of those they would teach.

[277](#) The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, or community of practitioners.

[278](#) Gunabhadra renders this in four-character lines, rather than his standard five-character lines.

[279](#) Section XXVII. The Buddha now examines the basic teachings common to all sects of Mahayana Buddhism, beginning with emptiness. But as he says here, “Mahamati, it is because people are attached to an imagined reality that we speak of emptiness.” The same holds for the other teachings covered here: non-arising, non-duality, and the absence of self-existence. Thus, at the end of this section, he advises his followers to trust truth and not words, including words such as “emptiness.”

[280](#) At the heart of Mahamati’s question is whether these teachings by negation do not lead to nothingness instead of to the somethingness of enlightenment.

[281](#) If it weren’t for deluded people, there would be no buddhas.

[282](#) The Buddha uses the word “briefly” here because in other sutras he lists as many as twenty kinds of emptiness.

[283](#) The term *paraspara* means reciprocal but, like *anyonya*, it also means contrasting, which is how I read it here. It is contrast and combination (*samuha*) that establish individual or shared characteristics.

[284](#) Phenomena (*pracarita*) refer to conditioned, or created, dharmas, such as the skandhas, while non-phenomena (*apracarita*) refer to unconditioned, or uncreated, dharmas, such as space, cessation, and nirvana.

[285](#) Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit have variations of: “By the emptiness of non-phenomena is meant that the skandhas are in nirvana and devoid of phenomena.”

[286](#) The Sanskrit is *nir-abhilapya*.

[287](#) The Sanskrit is *paramartha-aryajnana-mahashunyata*. To this, Gunabhadra adds “of all things” (*yi-ch'ieh-fa*), both here and at the end of this paragraph, but this is not supported by Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, or the Sanskrit, and I have omitted it as extraneous.

[288](#) Although the previous forms of emptiness were used by various Buddhist sects, the emptiness of mutual exclusion was limited to logicians of heterodox sects. The example the Buddha uses here refers to a vihara, or retreat center, donated by one of his disciples, a woman known as Mrigaramatri (the mother of Mrigara). Because she wanted to show her respect for the three treasures, she donated a large piece of land northeast of Shravasti and built a residence for a thousand monks for their use during the rainy season. To insure its cleanliness, animals were not allowed within the compound. In the *Small Sutra on Emptiness*, which is part of the *Madhyamagama*, the Buddha uses the example of this vihara to show the absurdity of the conception of emptiness held by heterodox practitioners, whereby something was said not to be empty if it was not present.

[289](#) This is the crudest kind of emptiness because it merely excludes this from that, it does not lead practitioners to an understanding of the other kinds of emptiness listed here, much less to an understanding of non-arising, non-duality, or the absence of self-existence.

[290](#) Hinayana practice focuses on the cultivation of samadhis

that involve the cessation of thought and thus the non-arising of thought. Here, non-arising doesn't refer to the non-arising of thought but to the non-arising of anything that can be identified as separate from the causes and conditions by means of which we say it arises. But saying that something arises does not mean there is something that exists apart from causes and conditions. Arising and non-arising are both fictions.

[291](#) If one thing cannot be established, how can we possibly establish two things?

[292](#) Most Chinese commentators take these three as examples of how we discriminate the day. Like samsara and nirvana, they are neither inside nor outside of each other, nor are they identical to each other. They are mutually exclusive and merely erroneous projections.

[293](#) Shikshananda has, "They only exist relative to each other and cannot exist alone. Outside of samsara there is no nirvana. And outside of nirvana there is no samsara. Samsara and nirvana are not separate. And as with samsara and nirvana, the same is true of everything else. This is what is meant by non-dual."

[294](#) Section XXVIII. Previously, Mahamati wonders if the Buddha's teaching is not nihilistic, now he wonders if the Buddha's teaching is not eternalistic, and if the teaching of the tathagata-garbha does not run counter to the foregoing teachings of emptiness, non-arising, and no self. The Buddha explains how the tathagata-garbha is not the same as a self but rather an expedient means used to attract those who cling to a self by providing something less frightening than no self.

[295](#) In this sutra, the *tathagata-garbha* (womb of buddhas) is treated as the same as the *alaya-vijnana* (repository

consciousness), two sides of the same coin. Elsewhere, it is linked with the dharma body: hidden, it's the tathagata-garbha, visible, it's the dharma body.

[296](#) The bodies of all buddhas are said to be marked by thirty-two physical attributes, such as long arms and long earlobes, webbed fingers and toes, a swastika in the middle of the chest, a curl between the brows, and eyes the shape of a crescent moon. In the case of the tathagata-garbha, however, physical attributes no longer apply, and a series of epithets are used instead, such as emptiness, etc.

[297](#) This is one of nine similes used in the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra*. Others liken the tathagata-garbha to gold in a mine or seeds in a flower.

[298](#) These are also known as the three poisons.

[299](#) The Buddha varies his description of the tathagata-garbha depending on the attachments of his audience. For those attached to existence, the tathagata-garbha is empty, formless, or intentionless. For those attached to nonexistence, the tathagata-garbha is the realm of reality, the dharma nature, or the dharma body. For those attached to existence and nonexistence, it is nirvana, the absence of self-existence, or what neither arises nor ceases. And for those attached to neither existence nor nonexistence, it is original quiescence or intrinsic nirvana.

[300](#) The gate of threefold liberation includes emptiness, formlessness, and intentionlessness. As the Buddha notes earlier in this section, these are also other names for the tathagata-garbha.

[301](#) The Sanskrit is *tathagata-nairatmya-garbha*.

[302](#) Section XXIX. Short though this section is, the Buddha manages to list the major conceptions of a self held by other

paths: something that continues from one life to the next, something that results from a combination of matter and conditions, or something created by an outside force, all of which are nothing more than fictions.

[303](#) Gunabhadra alone renders this in four-character lines.

[304](#) Section XXX. These are the highlights of the bodhisattva path leading to the tathagata-garbha, beginning with seeing that there is nothing to see other than one's own mind (*sva-citta-drshya-matra*) and concluding with the personal realization of what buddhas know (*sva-pratyatma-arya-jnana*), to which is added the means to teach such realization to others.

[305](#) The practices of realization (*yoga-abhisamaya*) recall the bodhisattva's lineage of realization (*abhisamaya-gotra*) in Section XX.

[306](#) Sanskrit texts have *abhilashanata* (desiring), which is reflected in Shikshananda's translation. However, both Bodhiruchi and Gunabhadra have *le* (delighting).

[307](#) Although these four practices are usually interpreted as sequential, they are also viewed as simultaneous, as becoming aware of one's own mind necessarily entails transcending limitations of space and time and experiencing what can only be experienced by oneself.

[308](#) Gunabhadra repeats this sentence a second time in slightly altered form. I've followed Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda, neither of whom includes the repetition.

[309](#) This paragraph is rendered quite differently by each translator. As elsewhere, I've followed Gunabhadra.

[310](#) This unusual term (*mano-maya-kaya*) is further explained in Section LVII, where three projection bodies are mentioned: one acquired during the third, fourth, or fifth stages of the

bodhisattva path, one at the eighth stage, and one beyond the eighth stage, apparently at the tenth stage.

[311](#) Gunabhadra omits “Mahamati asked the Buddha,” but this is present in Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit. Hence, I have added it. I’ve also followed Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit for Mahamati’s question. Gunabhadra has: “What is the reason for the projection body?”

[312](#) Section XXXI. It was the understanding of causation that formed the basis of the Buddha’s own Enlightenment. Mahamati, too, seeks to understand causation. However, from the point of view in this sutra, cause and effect are considered in terms of their origin as projections, not in terms of whether one exists or not or what their temporal or spatial relationship might be.

[313](#) The question revolves around this issue: does the effect exist in the cause (simultaneous) or are they separate (sequential)? The Sanskrit terms are *krāma* (sequential) and *yugapat* (simultaneous). Mahamati’s question anticipates the Buddha’s answers.

[314](#) External conditions make up the world in which most people live, while they remain unaware that what exists in that world and what causes it to exist are merely perceptions of their own mind. Internal conditions constitute the world of Hinayana practitioners (the “foolish people” here), unaware that what exists and what causes it to exist are merely perceptions of their own mind. Internal conditions are usually encompassed by the five skandhas or the twelve links of dependent origination, beginning with ignorance and karma (memory) and ending with illness, old age, and death.

[315](#) The subject of causality and different lists of causes fill the texts of every Buddhist sect. This particular list is apparently

unique to this sutra.

[316](#) Referring to the latent habit-energy of the repository consciousness.

[317](#) Yin-shun gives the example of the sun. After it goes down, it is the inactive cause of its reappearance.

[318](#) This set of four causes, which considers causation from the point of view of the effect, is common to early Hinayana texts.

[319](#) All three Chinese translations and the Sanskrit render this verse in six lines.

[320](#) Section XXXII. Mahamati's question here arises from the last line in the previous section, where the Buddha says, "Nothing exists at all / and these are nothing but words." So how are we to understand words, and where do they come from? The Buddha says that words are based on projections, and projections are a falsification of reality. Hence, to know the truth behind words requires seeing through the falsehood of projection.

[321](#) The Sanskrit for "words" and "what they express" are *abhilapa* (expression) and *abhilapya* (expressed). These are the two kinds of truth (*artha*), the validity of which the Buddha denies in the next section.

[322](#) These four are associated with different forms of consciousness: object projection with the first five forms of sensory-based consciousness; dream projection with the sixth, or conceptual consciousness; words for attachment to erroneous projections with the seventh, or self-consciousness; and words for beginningless projections with the eighth, or repository consciousness.

[323](#) Some commentators think "hostility" here is short for "hostility and kindness." But this is not supported by any of our

texts: the Sanskrit has simply *shatru* (hostility), Gunabhadra has *yuan* (enmity), and Shikshananda has *yuan-ch'ou* (hatred). None include “kindness.” Bodhiruchi chooses not to translate *shatru* at all. However, the place of “hostility” here is clearer when it is understood that it is based on the seventh form of consciousness, or ego-consciousness. And wherever the ego is involved, hostility, and not kindness, is the operant emotion.

[324](#) Section XXXIII. What is the relation between words and projections, between words and ultimate truth (*parama-artha*)? Ultimate truth cannot be projected because it has no characteristics. Hence, it cannot be expressed or revealed by words. It can only be known by realizing that the projections of words are nothing but the perceptions of one’s own mind. The Buddha’s initial response here seems out of place. It also appears in section LXV, where it fits better. Hence, its appearance here is probably a copyist error.

[325](#) Although Gunabhadra’s translation of this line is a bit ambiguous, it is clearer in Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda, which have variations of “Because projection is the cause of words.”

[326](#) Section XXXIV. While this does summarize the foregoing, Gunabhadra’s translation includes only these two verses. Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit include two more and handle the second verse quite differently. Weaving their versions together results in something like this: 2. “Whatever exists has no self-existence / avoid the projection of words / everything is a dream or illusion / neither samsara nor nirvana. 3. Just as a ruler or elder / tries to keep his children happy / giving them animals of clay at first / only later real ones (a story from the *Lotus Sutra* about the use of skillful means). 4. Thus do I teach my disciples / devices that make them happy / only later

do I instruct them / to realize the realm of reality themselves.”

[327](#) The Sanskrit is *bhutakoti*, which means “the boundary/limit/extent of what is real.” This term is sometimes used as equivalent to nirvana, but in the *Lankavatara* it refers to what transcends nirvana and samsara and points to the tathagata-garbha as our primordial buddha nature. Here, all three Chinese translators have *shih-chi* (limit of reality).

[328](#) Section XXXV. The Buddha uses a series of twelve similes to exemplify the unreality of the four possible standpoints on which other paths based their sense of reality: this, that, either this or that, neither this nor that. Of the twelve similes, the first seven are directed to followers of other paths and teach that perceptions of an external world are not real (thus there are no views to get free from). The remaining five are directed to Hinayana practitioners and teach that perceptions of an external world are “nothing but mind” (thus there is no buddha knowledge to realize).

[329](#) This version of the tetralemma common to logical schemes the world over (either x or y, both x and y, neither x nor y) will be repeated throughout the rest of the sutra. While its use in logic is usually intended to establish the validity of one of the four possibilities, the *Lankavatara* uses it to dismiss all four. Although the full tetralemma is only stated for the first series regarding spatial reality, it is implied for the remaining two, which concern conceptual and temporal reality.

[330](#) Gandharvas are gods known for their skill as musicians who are devoted to pleasure and who live in the sky. Thus, their cloud-like cities are often used as a metaphor for illusions. While the deer represent those who seek pleasure in the realm of desire, the gandharvas represent those who seek pleasure in the

realm of form.

[331](#) While the first two similes involve the first five forms of sensory consciousness, dreams involve the sixth, or conceptual, consciousness.

[332](#) The reference here is to the seventh form of consciousness, which Hinayana monks seek to eliminate in order to enter nirvana.

[333](#) The wheel (or firebrand) represents the wheel of birth and death. This paragraph is missing in Bodhiruchi.

[334](#) The raindrops represent nirvana.

[335](#) This refers to the first six forms of consciousness, the cessation of which was considered the prerequisite of nirvana by Hinayana practitioners.

[336](#) The three means to knowledge of Samkhya epistemology include: accepted authority, inference or reasoning, and direct experience.

[337](#) The five-part syllogism of Nyaya logicians was a form of argument aimed at discovering the truth by means of proposition, reason, example, application, and conclusion.

[338](#) Imagined reality and dependent reality are the two modes of reality referred to here. The Buddha's reference is to those who think perfected reality is real, and the text can be read as a critique of some Yogacarins in this regard.

[339](#) This and the similes that follow are also taken as examples of the teachings of apparition buddhas. Here, the Buddha is the tree, and the minds of beings are the water.

[340](#) This refers to a buddha's mind, which reflects without distinction.

[341](#) This refers to a buddha's oral teaching.

[342](#) This refers to the appearance of teachings.

[343](#) The Sanskrit is *arya-pratyatma-jnana-vastu*.

[344](#) This refers to the five skandhas and other conceptions of self-existence, including the body of a buddha.

[345](#) Pishacas are demons who have the ability to make the dead move as if they were alive. Here the pishaca is *bhutata*, or reality, and the power of incantation comes from *alaya-vijnana*, or repository consciousness.

[346](#) And yet there is nothing attained, nothing abandoned.

[347](#) This verse is expanded into two verses in Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit by applying these and other similes to the five skandhas as well as to the three realms.

[348](#) The “seeds of consciousness” refer to habit-energy in the repository consciousness.

[349](#) In Section LXVIII, the Buddha defines the three continuities as referring to greed, anger, and delusion, which are also known as the three poisons.

[350](#) Referring to the skandhas, for example.

[351](#) Section XXXVI. The Buddha does not teach any of the four viewpoints that prevent personal realization of buddha knowledge. In place of these, he teaches dependent origination, the path, cessation, and liberation. His aim is practical, not theoretical. He turns to whatever works.

[352](#) This refers to the tetralemma, which is only spelled out in its entirety for sameness and difference.

[353](#) Basically, this is a restatement of the Four Noble Truths.

[354](#) This refers to the Buddha’s 108 responses to Mahamati’s 108 questions: “a statement about x is a statement about no x.” Teachings involving realms that are free from projections are presented to lead people away from their beliefs in the existence or the nonexistence of things.

[355](#) The paths of shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas are for eliminating the obstruction of passion, while the bodhisattva path is for eliminating the obstruction of knowledge.

[356](#) Tathagatas are likened to caravan chiefs because they lead practitioners across the desert of barren knowledge and because they know the location of the oases where they can rest on their way to liberation. The paths and its stages, along with the oases, however, are a mirage.

[357](#) Section XXXVII. To eliminate the obstructions of passion and knowledge of the previous section, the Buddha lists four kinds of meditation, one for Hinayana practitioners and members of other paths, one for beginning bodhisattvas, one for accomplished bodhisattvas, and one for those who transcend the bodhisattva path. Thus, the practice of meditation is viewed here as sequential, with the last kind tantamount to what later became known as “direct understanding.”

[358](#) Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit read this differently: “until they reach the cessation of perceptions,” which is the goal of Hinayana practitioners.

[359](#) The Sanskrit is *artha-pravicaya dhyana* (meaning-examination meditation).

[360](#) The Sanskrit is *tathata-alambana-dhyana* (suchness-based meditation). The object of this meditation is the teaching itself as a projection.

[361](#) No self among persons and no self among things.

[362](#) The threefold bliss of samadhi, enlightenment, and nirvana.

[363](#) The Sanskrit is *patala*, referring to that region of the Underworld that is the home of serpents and demons.

[364](#) After the kalpa-ending conflagration that destroys all worlds.

[365](#) All versions render this verse in six lines.

[366](#) Section XXXVIII. Reflecting on the threefold bliss of personal realization that marks tathagata meditation, Mahamati asks about the bliss of nirvana. The Hinayana view is that nirvana is the extinguishing of consciousness and the end of birth and death. Here, the Buddha says nirvana is not something outside birth and death but rather the transformation of birth and death, the transformation of the eight forms of consciousness into the four kinds of non-discriminating wisdom: the wisdom of perfect accomplishment (sensory consciousness), the wisdom of perfect observation (conceptual consciousness), the wisdom of perfect equanimity (will or self-consciousness), and the wisdom of perfect reflection (repository consciousness).

[367](#) Permanence is a characteristic. If nirvana is free from characteristics, it cannot be permanent.

[368](#) If nirvana is what all buddhas realize, it cannot be impermanent.

[369](#) Of the dozens of dharmas listed by the various schools of Buddhism, those that were considered *asanskrita* (uncreated or unconditioned) included space, two kinds of cessation, and nirvana.

[370](#) The Sanskrit has “no meaning” (*nirartha*), but none of the three Chinese translations agree.

[371](#) That is, projections of conceptual consciousness.

[372](#) Section XXXIX. Practitioners unable to transform the habit-energy of self-existence continue to see nirvana in terms of words or objective states and thus fail to realize nirvana.

[373](#) Section XL. Even the most advanced bodhisattvas rely on the powers of the tathagatas to assist and protect them, which tathagatas accomplish by appearing before them during

meditation and by instructing them by means of wordless transmission.

[374](#) The Sanskrit is *adhishtana*: enabling or supporting powers; Suzuki has “sustaining.”

[375](#) Wordless transmission or empowerment is a custom common to many spiritual traditions whereby the touching of the forehead is considered tantamount to opening a third eye.

[376](#) A samadhi marked by emptiness and the absence of form and intention.

[377](#) This bodhisattva appears in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (Chapter 26) and is supported by the Buddha in teaching the Dharma at the beginning stage of his practice. The “initial stage” of the bodhisattva path in this sutra is the eighth stage, where shravakas and bodhisattvas normally, but not always, part company.

[378](#) The Sanskrit is *paksha-vipaksha* (with and without wings).

[379](#) The tenth and final stage of the bodhisattva path.

[380](#) *Michelia champaca*, a member of the magnolia family. Its orange-tinted blossoms are used in the production of perfumes in India.

[381](#) Chief of the gods who dwell atop Mount Sumeru.

[382](#) Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda add “to transmit their power.”

[383](#) Based on usage here and elsewhere in this sutra, this would include the eighth, ninth, and tenth stages of the bodhisattva path.

[384](#) Section XLI. Mahamati asks the Buddha to explain how his teaching of causation differs from that of other paths and even wonders if it is not inferior. The Buddha redirects Mahamati’s attention to the source of cause and effect and the source of

views about them.

[385](#) The Sanskrit is *pratitya-samutpada*. This was the basis of the Buddha's Enlightenment and the focus of his early teachings.

[386](#) The meaning of this last phrase is unclear, or at least ambiguous, in Gunabhadra. Bodiruchi interprets this "self" here as referring to self-generated projections, which would be a misunderstanding of the Buddha's position in this sutra, while Shikshananda reads it as referring to an underlying self-existent substance of some kind, which is more likely.

[387](#) The Buddha's teaching of dependent origination, or twelve links of the chain of existence, begins with ignorance and continues with memory, consciousness, name and form (the inside and outside of the "individual"), sense organs, contact, sensation, desire, grasping, existence, birth, and old age and death. The problem that Mahamati sees with this explanation of cause and effect is that while ignorance is the cause of memory, old age and death is the cause of ignorance. Mahamati sees circularity as a non-solution.

[388](#) The Sanskrit version of this classic formula is *asmin sati idam bhavati*.

[389](#) Mahamati sees another problem in the Buddha's teaching. Do things come to exist gradually or suddenly, as the Buddha's formula implies?

[390](#) Mahamati sees the causation of other schools as simpler and clearer: a supreme deity gives rise to things, and that is that. Things do not give rise to a supreme deity. Nor does an effect become a cause, as in the Buddha's teaching.

[391](#) That is, once the effect appears, it becomes the cause of a new effect.

[392](#) Section XLII. Having heard the Buddha speak of the existence and nonexistence of external objects, Mahamati wonders about their relation to words and suggests words establish the reality of objects. The Buddha divests him of such a view. Words are not connected to anything other than the imagination that gives rise to them, and they are not essential for communication, in this or in other worlds. So much for their connection to reality.

[393](#) Shikshananda omits this last sentence.

[394](#) These terms were used by philosophers to argue about existence and nonexistence.

[395](#) This is one of the names of a buddhaland to the east over which Akshobya Buddha presides.

[396](#) This bodhisattva is often depicted riding an elephant and known for his use of skillful means rather than doctrines in teaching the Dharma.

[397](#) The three realms of desire, form, and formlessness through which one passes life after life. The reference here is also to the burning house in the *Lotus Sutra* which foolish children refuse to leave until the Buddha entices them out with carts.

[398](#) Section XLIII. The Buddha explains delusion. The foolish are misled by it, lesser practitioners try to annihilate it, and the wise transform it into suchness. In the background here is the Buddha's teaching that beyond the mind there are no things and beyond things there is no mind.

[399](#) Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda read this as a rhetorical question and put it in the Buddha's mouth. The contention that speech was eternal (*nitya-shabda*) is traced back to Katyayana, a Sanskrit grammarian and mathematician who flourished about 150 B.C. and who held that the sacred

syllables of Sanskrit were indestructible and alone capable of expressing the truth. The Buddha, however, is not interested in the status of speech as eternal, but in delusion, of which speech is an example. According to the Buddha, speech is eternal as long as it is not a projection. As soon as it is a projection, it either exists or does not exist and is not eternal.

[400](#) By delusion (*bhṛanti*) is meant what the mind gives rise to. When people add their projections to what the mind gives rise to, they cannot help but misrepresent it. And in so doing, they become attached to their misrepresentations. The wise don't add projections to what the mind gives rise to but accept it for what it is, the mind. Hence, for them delusion becomes reality.

[401](#) What humans see as water, pretas (hungry ghosts) see as fire.

[402](#) The Sanskrit is *tattva*.

[403](#) Foolish people do not distinguish individual or shared characteristics, only a world of objects. Such objects, however, are delusions, mistaken judgments as to what is real. Shravakas distinguish characteristics rather than objects but cannot see past characteristics. The same is true for pratyeka-buddhas, who seek to get free of such characteristics. Only those wise enough to see “objects” and “characteristics” as delusions and merely the perceptions of their own minds can remain detached from them and cease creating the projections that conjure them into existence. Delusions, for the wise, thus become real by means of the transformation of their awareness.

[404](#) The three modes of reality and the five dharmas are meant. The Sanskrit for “suchness” is *tathata*. Earlier, the Buddha says the transformation of the habit-energy of the mind is nirvana. Here it is suchness. Just different words.

[405](#) The reference is to the teaching of causation, but causation that is traced back to a first cause.

[406](#) Cataract removal, using curved needles made of gold, was practiced in India even before Shakyamuni's time.

[407](#) Section XLIV. This section is a continuation of the previous section. Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit all read it differently. As usual, I've followed Gunabhadra. Mahamati wonders when the Buddha says everything is illusory if he is only referring to the characteristics of things, if there is not something to which the characteristics belong that is not illusory. Ignoring the twigs and cutting to the root, the Buddha tells him that everything is illusory because it isn't real, that there is not something other than characteristics—all of which, of course, are the result of projection.

[408](#) The meaning here is that it is only as dreams or illusions that we can talk about anything at all.

[409](#) Mahamati wonders if characteristics belong to something that is not illusory.

[410](#) Section XLV. The Buddha uses doctrines as skillful means. They are didactic, not absolute. Thus, he teaches non-arising to those who believe in causes, and he teaches existence to those who might mistake non-arising for nihilism and forget about karmic consequences. However, the teaching of existence does not admit of self-existence but only the illusoriness of existence. Thus the Buddha urges his disciples to see things as they really are, the perceptions of their own minds.

[411](#) Mahamati wonders if something does not arise, how can it be illusory. Only Gunabhadra proceeds as if he understands this last sentence. Bodhiruchi inverts the meaning: "... what arises is not illusory." Shikshananda gives up and omits the whole

sentence.

[412](#) Samsara refers to birth and death and is the counterpoint to nirvana. The Buddha's teaching here is aimed at those shravakas who would deny their own existence in order to get free of the suffering of existence.

[413](#) The Buddha talks of existence and rebirth as skillful means to those not ready for the teaching of no-birth, of non-arising. Thus, he urges them to do good deeds and accumulate merit so that they will enjoy a good rebirth where they will hear the teaching of non-arising once more.

[414](#) Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda omit *ch'ao* (transcend, rise above).

[415](#) Section XLVI. Over the past few sections, Mahamati has shown that he is still clinging to words. Words, phrases, letters—these are all traps for meaning. Once you catch the meaning, forget the trap.

[416](#) The Sanskrit is *naman-pada-vyanjana-kaya* (word-phrase-letter-unit), where *kaya* (body) is glossed as *sumukti* (combination).

[417](#) The Sanskrit *vyanjana* refers to a written letter but also to that elementary unit of linguistics known as a “phone,” which includes consonants and vowels.

[418](#) The Sanskrit *pad* means “foot.” Following footprints, the animal is found. Following phrases, the meaning is discovered. But once the meaning is discovered, words and phrases can be forgotten.

[419](#) The formless skandhas include sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness: aspects of our awareness we can name but cannot point to.

[420](#) Section XLVII. Having dealt with speech, the Buddha now

deals with silence. During his years as a teacher, the Buddha declined to answer certain questions as not answerable, such as whether the universe is eternal, or whether the body and soul are one or separate, or whether a tathagata exists after death. But he also used silence when the question was not worthy of a response. Here, however, his silence does not have so much to do with the question as with the questioner.

[421](#) These four possibilities, repeated endlessly throughout this sutra, summarize the views of other paths whose validity the Buddha denied. Thus, the Buddha taught his disciples to avoid them. See also Section L.

[422](#) Referring to the skandhas of form, sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness.

[423](#) Form and the formless skandhas (sensation, perception, memory, consciousness) represent individual characteristics, while whether the skandhas are permanent or impermanent, the same or different, represent shared characteristics.

[424](#) In the abhidharma matrices of various Buddhist sects, the Sanskrit term *samskara* refers to anything created or conditioned and includes everything except space and two kinds of cessation and, according to some sects, nirvana. The same term also refers to one of the five skandhas.

[425](#) Referring to the four elements of earth, water, wind, and fire, or of solidity, fluidity, mobility, and heat.

[426](#) The Buddha only lists one possibility among the many proposed by followers of other paths as to whether one's life/spirit is the same as or different from one's body. As to the origin of our life and body, followers of some schools attributed them to our parents, others to a creator. Hence, it came down to a matter of belief versus a refusal or inability to answer.

[427](#) With those whose roots are mature, the Buddha speaks all day without saying a single word. With those whose roots are immature, the Buddha doesn't speak and yet still speaks.

[428](#) Section XLVIII. The Buddha returns to Mahamati's earlier claim that for things to be both non-arising and illusory is a contradiction. The Buddha likens Mahamati's attachment to words to an elephant in a quagmire and considers the possibility of responding with silence but decides to teach with direct statements instead. Thus, he addresses the major contentions of followers of other paths to which he often remained silent. Not only do projections not arise, nothing arises.

[429](#) Because a characteristic appears, there must be a time when it was not present. Thus, it cannot possibly be permanent.

[430](#) Because a characteristic appears, it is no longer rising. Hence, its non-arising exists.

[431](#) Thus, there is no need to look beyond what exists for what does not arise or for what is permanent.

[432](#) Of the following three verses, the first two refer to the previous section. Hence, the separation of these two sections is artificial.

[433](#) Two prominent schools of Hindu philosophy.

[434](#) Section XLIX. The Buddha introduces the four levels of attainment that characterize the shravaka path. Although shravakas are criticized throughout this sutra as not worthy of emulation, in this section the Buddha treats their attainments, and the relinquishing of their attainments, as stages on the path to personal realization.

[435](#) The two kinds of no-self include no self among persons and no self among dharmas or things, while the two obstructions referred to are those of passion and knowledge.

[436](#) The first fruit of the shravaka path is that of the srota-apanna. The term *srota-apanna* means “those who find the river”—the river of impermanence.

[437](#) These three are selected from a longer list of ten delusions, which include five simple delusions: desire, anger, delusion, pride, and doubt, and five acute delusions: belief in a body, extreme views, heterodoxies, obsessions, attachment to codes. In this case, belief in a body is an elementary problem suffered by all srota-apanas, while attachment to codes bedevils the advanced practitioner.

[438](#) The Sanskrit is *sahaja* (born together, natural). The meaning is that belief in a body is the fundamental ignorance with which each life begins.

[439](#) These are two of the three modes of reality, the third being perfected reality. Belief in a body based on the skandha of form is an example of dependent reality and is innate. Belief in a body based on the four formless skandhas is an example of imagined reality and is a projection.

[440](#) This last clause is not clear in any version. I’ve followed Gunabhadra, I think.

[441](#) In this case, what exists is form and what does not exist are the four formless skandhas. Their non-appearance would be death.

[442](#) There are three objects of doubt: reasoning, doctrines, and teachers.

[443](#) This refers to those who are reborn as a human in the realm of desire once more, after which they attain liberation in one of the heavens in the realm of form.

[444](#) This refers to those who are not reborn in the realm of desire but in the highest heaven in the realm of form, where they

then attain liberation.

[445](#) All translations read this paragraph differently. I've followed Gunabhadra.

[446](#) This refers to those who are free from rebirth in any of the three realms and who attain nirvana at the end of this life.

[447](#) This is how Gunabhadra and Bodhiruchi read this paragraph. Shikshananda reads it differently: "this refers to those who attain meditations, samadhis, liberations, higher powers, and masteries and whose passions, sufferings, and projections no longer exist."

[448](#) These refer to the four boundless meditations (*apramana* or *brahma-vihara*) in which practitioners give rise to feelings of infinite friendship, compassion, joy, and equanimity and to the meditations in the four formless heavens (*arupya-dhatu*).

[449](#) The word *mieh* (cessation) is missing from Gunabhadra's translation. Apparently a copyist error, it appears in Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda. It also appears in Gunabhadra's summarizing verse.

[450](#) The highest of nine meditations (*samjna-vedita-nirodha-samapatti*).

[451](#) This poem also appears at the beginning of Section XXI.

[452](#) Section L. Two kinds of knowing, one that functions in private and leads to liberation, and one that functions in public and leads to attachment. These also refer back, respectively, to object meditation and beginner meditation in Section XXXVII.

[453](#) The Sanskrit is *buddhi*.

[454](#) This is quite a mouthful in Sanskrit: *vikalpa-lakshana-graha-abhinivesha-pratishthapika*.

[455](#) As elsewhere in this sutra, the tetralemma of four possibilities is only applied to the first series. The reader is

expected to fill in the missing possibilities: namely, “both existence and nonexistence” and “both permanence and impermanence, and neither permanence nor impermanence.”

[456](#) These comprise the syllogistic logic used by other paths to establish what is real. Here, however, “characteristics” have been added to the standard trio of proposition, reason/cause, and example/metaphor.

[457](#) The dharma cloud (*dharma-megha*) stage is the tenth and final stage of the bodhisattva path.

[458](#) This is not a reference to the ten vows made by bodhisattvas at the beginning of the path but to a different set of vows made at the end of the path. Focused on the liberation of beings, they begin with: “If beings are inexhaustible, my vow is inexhaustible.” The same vows are then applied to worlds, space, the realm of reality, nirvana, the appearances of buddhas, the knowledge of a tathagata, the objects of the mind, the realms entered by buddha knowledge, and the knowledge that turns the wheel of the Dharma.

[459](#) This list of attainments is a short version of a longer list that appears in the *Mahayana Samparigraha Shashtra*. This last sentence also presents in summary form the characteristics of the three bodies of every buddha.

[460](#) Section LI. The nature of what we consider the material world is explained differently by different schools, Buddhist or otherwise. But a common concept in all their explanations is that of the four elements: water, heat, wind, and earth as the basis of the material world. The Buddha does not deny the material world, only that the way we identify and thus know objects in that world, including the world itself, is a product of our minds. This section, thus, refers back to “object meditation” of Section

XXXVII.

[461](#) The Sanskrit is *bhuta* (or *maha-bhuta*) for the elements and *bhautika* for the elemental forms compounded of the elements, namely the five sense organs and the five sensations.

[462](#) Name, appearance, and projection are the first three of the five dharmas—the other two being correct knowledge and suchness.

[463](#) Consciousness here represents the four formless skandhas (sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness), while the four elements represent the skandha of form. The Buddha mentions consciousness because, if the five skandhas were created by the four elements, when the body dies, consciousness should cease. But it doesn't. Hence, the four elements cannot be the cause of consciousness.

[464](#) The reference here is to the skandhas and back to the statement in the previous paragraph that the skandhas arise from the elements.

[465](#) The Sanskrit is *bhava-linga-lakshana-grahana-samsthana-kriya-yoga-vat*. I've followed Gunabhadra, who takes these as comprising the necessary concomitants of the skandha of form.

[466](#) Even if the four elements could be linked to the skandha of form, they cannot be linked to the four formless skandhas of sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness.

[467](#) Section LII. Having said that the four elements do not give rise to the five skandhas, the Buddha proceeds to review the five skandhas, which turn out to be empty. And although the skandhas or anything else that might be used to characterize the individual are empty of anything that might exist by itself, they also form the basis by means of which bodhisattvas help others.

[468](#) At the beginning of this sentence, Sanskrit texts insert this: “Because they lack anything on which to depend and because they obstruct the practice of buddha knowledge.” However, none of the Chinese translations follows suit.

[469](#) Gunbhadra does not say what to get rid of. I’ve added “projections” from Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda.

[470](#) The Sanskrit is *vivikta* (separation/detachment), which is also used with the meaning of nirvana in LXX and LXXVII.

[471](#) The unshakeable (*acala*) stage is the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path, which is marked by the forbearance of non-arising. However, Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit text all have the distant journey (*duramgama*) stage, which is the seventh stage.

[472](#) The Sanskrit is *mano-maya-kaya* (mind-made body). Some also call it the “astral body.” See Section XLVII as well as Section LVII for more on this.

[473](#) Section LIII. The Buddha reviews four heterodox views of nirvana, all of which involve the end of consciousness. He then presents his own view that it is the cessation of conceptual consciousness. In Section XXXVIII, he says transformation of consciousness is nirvana. Same thing.

[474](#) These four kinds of nirvana present the progressive cessation of the skandhas of form, sensation, perception, and memory.

[475](#) The consciousness that projects is also called conceptual consciousness. It is the sixth form of consciousness whose function is to conceptualize the sensations of the five forms of sensory consciousness.

[476](#) The Sanskrit for conceptual consciousness is *mano-vijnana*.

[477](#) The seventh form of consciousness is the will, or self-consciousness. The Sanskrit is *manas*. Some commentators interpret “seventh” here and throughout this section as referring to “the seven” other forms of consciousness and not just to the seventh. However, this section only talks about the sixth, seventh, and the eighth forms of consciousness and not the other five. Moreover, the Buddha nowhere advocates the cessation of the eighth form of consciousness, only its transformation. Hence, the last line of the text cannot be referring to “the seven” other forms of consciousness.

[478](#) Shikshananda misunderstands the thrust of this line and has the seventh form of consciousness arising.

[479](#) The Sanskrit for repository consciousness is *alaya-vijnana*.

[480](#) The will is the seventh form of consciousness in the scheme of eight forms of consciousness.

[481](#) That is, a body that survives from one life to the next.

[482](#) The Sanskrit is *citta-kalapa* and refers to all eight forms of consciousness. However, in this section only the sixth, seventh, and eighth are mentioned.

[483](#) This poem is handled differently by each translator. I’ve read the entire poem as part of the commentary on conceptual (projecting) consciousness that begins with the previous poem and ends with the following poem.

[484](#) Section LIV. Having said that the cessation of conceptual consciousness, the consciousness that projects, is nirvana, the Buddha now reviews a dozen types of projection. Once one understands that the realms on which they are based have no self-existence, projections no longer arise. And when projections cease, one attains the personal realization of buddha

knowledge. Also of note here is the relationship between imagined reality and dependent reality stated at the end of this section and which dominates the subsequent section. Because imagined reality is based on projections, and projections have no self-existence, it is the same as perfected reality. This was not lost on China's early Zen masters who often turned to this identity in their teaching.

[485](#) Along with the dependent and perfected modes, this is one of the three modes of reality. The Sanskrit is *parikalpita-svabhava*.

[486](#) In Section XXXIX, the Buddha says there are two kinds of self-existence, one of which involves words and the other of which involves objects. The twelve kinds of projection listed here can be subsumed under these two headings.

[487](#) Thus, projections concerning the teachings of buddhas are meant.

[488](#) Referring to the four elements.

[489](#) If I have understood this correctly, and I'm not sure I have, it would seem that the entities that have no cause are projections of non-arising.

[490](#) This "golden thread" was a term used by fortune-tellers in India in reference to good fortune coursing through one's life. Bodhiruchi also has "golden thread." However Shikshananda and the Sanskrit have "needle and thread."

[491](#) Continuity here refers to the belief by followers of other paths in a continuous substance that survives death.

[492](#) This is aimed at Hinayana practitioners, who see samsara as bondage and nirvana as emancipation.

[493](#) This represents the position of Paramartha: that imagined reality and dependent reality are connected. Hsuan-tsang's view

was that they are not connected.

[494](#) Section LV. The Buddha does not so much repeat what was said in the previous section as expound on something that appeared in the background, namely, the three modes of reality. As before, he tells Mahamati to transcend projection. But transcending projection does not mean going beyond it, for there is no place to leave and no place to go to.

[495](#) Imagined reality does not come from dependent reality. It is a misperception of it.

[496](#) Conventional truth is based on a material world, and ultimate truth is based on the emptiness of that world. Meanwhile, the truth of other schools is based on a creator or first cause that is itself free from cause and is the origin of all worlds.

[497](#) This and the previous two comparisons refer to the three modes of reality: imagined reality (someone who contemplates), dependent reality (cataracts), and perfected reality (gold), all of which turn out to be without self-existence and thus not realities at all.

[498](#) An example given by commentators for this last line has flowers in the sky producing fruit.

[499](#) This refers to the twelve projections of the previous section. The Sanskrit text alone has “ten.”

[500](#) The referent of this is uncertain. Some commentators say it refers to mind, will, conceptual consciousness, body, world, and seeds. Others cite the six kinds of causes listed in Section XXXI: immanent, connecting, apparent, instrumental, manifesting, and potential. My own sense is that it refers to the five forms of sensory consciousness along with conceptual consciousness.

[501](#) The Sanskrit is *tathata*, the fifth of the five dharmas. That is, they distinguish them without distinguishing them. There is nothing outside of suchness.

[502](#) This verse summarizes the relationships between the first three of the five dharmas (appearance, name, and projection) and the two modes of imagined and dependent reality.

[503](#) Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit insert the following verse here: “If perfected reality was real / it wouldn’t exist nor not exist / and if it neither existed nor not / where would the two realities be.” I’ve based this translation on Shikshananda’s version. Since it is missing in Gunabhadra and does not follow from the previous verse, I have relegated it to the notes.

[504](#) Referring to views that attribute the origin of the world to a creator or to some form of matter, rather than to projection.

[505](#) This last verse summarizes the views attributed to other paths which are still tied, whether they admit it or not, to the duality of dependent and imagined reality.

[506](#) Section LVI. The Buddha presents the teaching that became the hallmark of Zen, that nonexistent projections and the personal realization of buddha knowledge are one and the same. This is the teaching of one path, the path that points directly to the mind.

[507](#) Gunabadhra adds an extra “as for the personal realization of buddha knowledge and the one path” at this point. Since no other edition follows suit, I’ve deleted it.

[508](#) Buddhists consider Brahma the ruler of the three realms, Brahmans consider him the creator of the world.

[509](#) Shravakas seek to enter nirvana in order to put an end to the endless cycle of life and death. Bodhisattvas vow not to

enter nirvana but rather to seek enlightenment and to liberate all beings.

[510](#) Shikshananda has “obstruction of knowledge.”

[511](#) Gunabhadra has *pu-li fen-duan-szu* (not free of karmic deaths), which most commentators think is a mistake for *pu-li pien-yi-szu* (not free of transformation deaths), as elsewhere in this sutra shravakas are said to be capable of transcending the former but not the latter. Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda try to avoid the problem with “have not yet attained imperceptible transformation deaths,” which is supported by the Sanskrit. I’ve decided to stick with Gunabhadra’s translation, as karmic deaths are based on the habit-energy of karma, which has not yet been eliminated. Hence, to speak of transformation deaths would be premature.

[512](#) Bodhiruchi has “one path.” Apparently a mistake.

[513](#) This is my translation of *wu-lou* (Sanskrit *anasrava*), no outflow, no misery, free from impurity. Normally this is a positive term, but note the view expressed in verse 6, whereby one must transcend even affliction-free realms.

[514](#) The normal definition of the three paths is one for shravakas, one for pratyeka-buddhas, and one for bodhisattvas. Here, the gods of the various pure heavens along with Brahma get their own path, while all Hinayana practitioners are lumped together, as are all followers of the Mayahana.

[515](#) The normal referents of the three liberations are emptiness, formlessness, and intentionlessness. Here, the three paths are apparently meant. In any case, whether paths or liberations, none includes a self.

[516](#) Passion and knowledge are the two obstructions.

[517](#) After *yu-hsi-fan-nao* (remaining habit-energy passion),

Gunabhadra's translation has *yu* (foolish), which is apparently a copyist error for the graphically similar *hsun* (influence/force), which is what Bodhiruchi has. Thus, the meaning is that the influence of the habit-energy of the passions remains active, even though the passions themselves have been suppressed.

CHAPTER THREE:

MORE QUESTIONS¹



LVII²

The Bhagavan then told Mahamati Bodhisattva, “I will now tell you the different characteristics common to the projection body. Listen carefully and ponder this well.”

Mahamati said, “Wonderful, Bhagavan. May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “There are three kinds of projection bodies. And what are the three kinds? They are the projection body that experiences the bliss of samadhi, the projection body that realizes the essential nature of dharmas, and the projection body whose natural state is motionless. Once practitioners reach the first stage, they will obtain these three bodies as they progress through the subsequent stages.

“Mahamati, what is the projection body that experiences the bliss of samadhi? When those at the third, fourth, and fifth stages experience the bliss of samadhi, their myriad thoughts become still. Though they dwell in the ocean of the mind, the waves of consciousness cease,³ and they realize that whatever they perceive is nothing but their own mind and does not exist by itself. This is what is meant by the projection body that experiences the bliss of samadhi.

“Mahamati, what is the projection body that realizes the essential nature of dharmas? When those at the eighth stage

contemplate and understand that all dharmas are illusory and devoid of anything real, they experience a transformation of mind and body and attain the Samadhi of the Illusory. And while in this and other samadhis, they are adorned with the powers, masteries, and knowledge of limitless forms that unfold like flowers as fast as their thoughts. But like illusions or dreams or moonlight on the water or reflections in a mirror, they are not created of or by material elements, though they might seem to be. With their every limb thus adorned by all manner of attributes, they enter the buddha assemblies of every land, where they become versed in the nature of dharmas. This is what is meant by the projection body that realizes the essential nature of dharmas.⁴

“Mahamati, what is the projection body whose natural state is motionless? The realization that the characteristics of all the teachings of all the buddhas are based on the bliss of personal attainment, this is what is meant by the projection body whose natural state is motionless. Mahamati, the contemplation and understanding of the characteristics of these three bodies are something you should cultivate.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “My path is not a great path / nor is it instruction or words / nor is it truth or liberation / nor is it a realm of nothingness
2. The path of the Mahayana / includes the power of samadhi / different projection bodies / adornments of self-mastery.”

LVII⁶

Mahamati Bodhisattva then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, the Bhagavan has said that a man or woman who commits the five avici deeds⁷ does not fall into Avici Hell.⁸ Bhagavan, how is it that a man or woman who commits the five avici deeds does not fall into Avici Hell?”⁹

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen carefully and ponder this well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati said, “Wonderful, Bhagavan. May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “What are the five avici deeds? They are killing one’s father or one’s mother, killing an arhat, disrupting the sangha, and maliciously drawing the blood of a buddha.

“Mahamati, what is the mother of every being? It is desire and joy together with the thirst to be reborn, on which one depends as if on one’s mother. And ignorance is the father by means of which one is born into the village of the senses. Severing these two roots is what is meant by killing one’s mother and one’s father.¹⁰

“And when the passions that lie hidden, like plague-infected rats, are exterminated, this is what is meant by killing an arhat.¹¹

“And what is meant by disrupting the sangha? When the

assembly of different characteristics that form the skandhas is utterly destroyed, this is what is meant by disrupting the sangha.

“Mahamati, because the body of the seven forms of consciousness¹² is unaware that external characteristics, be they individual or shared, are nothing but perceptions of one’s own mind, one uses the merciless purity of the three liberations ¹³ to behead the buddha of the seven forms of consciousness once and for all. This is what is meant by maliciously drawing the blood of a buddha. Mahamati, any man or woman who commits such deeds, namely, the five unrelenting deeds, are themselves called ‘unrelenting.’¹⁴

“Moreover, Mahamati, I will now tell you about the external avici deeds, so that once you and the other bodhisattvas have heard this, you will not be prone to foolishness in the future. And what are these avici deeds? They are the five avici deeds I first spoke of. Anyone who commits these cannot attain any of the three liberations. But aside from such avici deeds as these, there are also avici deeds manifested by spiritual power. This refers to the spiritual power of shravakas, the spiritual power of bodhisattvas, and the spiritual power of tathagatas, who use their powers of transformation to manifest avici deeds in order to encourage others who commit avici crimes to put an end to their transgressions.¹⁵

“However, those who keep committing avici deeds cannot avoid what is unrelenting. ¹⁶ Only if they become aware that these are nothing but perceptions of their own mind, and they abandon projections of a body and what belongs to a body and attachments to a self and what belongs to a self, or they eventually meet a good friend, can they escape their projections of continuity in another existence.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Desire is the mother / ignorance is the father / the buddha is consciousness of objective realms / passions are the arhats

2. And the skandhas are the sangha / who is unrelenting in their extermination / who commits these five avici deeds / doesn’t enter Avici Hell.”

LIX¹⁷

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please tell us about a buddha’s awareness. Bhagavan, what constitutes a buddha’s awareness?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “It consists in realizing that there is no self in beings or things, in understanding the two obstructions,¹⁸ in transcending the two kinds of death,¹⁹ and in putting an end to the two kinds of affliction.²⁰ This is what is meant by the awareness of a buddha. Those shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas capable of this are also called buddhas. This is the reason I teach one path.”²¹

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Knowing the two kinds of no-self / ending the two obstructions and afflictions / transcending forever the two kinds of death / such is the awareness of buddhas.”

LX²²

Mahamati then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, why did the Bhagavan proclaim to the assembly, ‘I am all buddhas of the past’?²³ Or why in recounting the hundreds of thousands of tales about his previous lives²⁴ did he say, ‘I was once King Mandhatri,²⁵ a six-tusked elephant, a parrot, Shakra,²⁶ and Sunetra’?”²⁷

The Buddha told Mahamati, “It was because of the four uniformities that the Tathagata, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One proclaimed to the assembly, ‘I was once Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and Kashyapa Buddha.’²⁸ And what are the four uniformities? They are the uniformity of syllables, the uniformity of voices, the uniformity of teachings, and the uniformity of bodies.²⁹ These are the four uniformities. It was on the basis of these four uniformities that the Tathagata, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One made such a proclamation to the assembly.

“And what is meant by the uniformity of syllables?³⁰ This means that whatever syllables are used in calling me a buddha, those syllables are also used in calling all tathagatas buddhas. The essential nature of the syllables doesn’t differ. This is what is meant by the uniformity of syllables.

“And what is meant by the uniformity of voices? This means

that the sixty-four transcendent sounds³¹ that characterize my voice, those sixty-four transcendent sounds likewise characterize the voices of all tathagatas, arhats, and fully enlightened ones and are neither more nor fewer nor different than the transcendent sounds of the kalavinka.³²

“And what is meant by the uniformity of bodies? This means that there are no differences among the dharma bodies or among the marks and attributes of the physical bodies of myself and other buddhas. It is only in order to instruct beings in different realms that we appear in different guises.³³ This is what is meant by the uniformity of bodies.

“And what is meant by the uniformity of teachings? This refers to teachings regarding the thirty-seven elements of awareness attained by myself and other buddhas.³⁴ In short, we all speak the Dharma with unobstructed wisdom.³⁵

“This is what is meant by the four uniformities. And this is why the Tathagata, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One made such a proclamation to the assembly.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Kashyapa and Krakucchanda / Kanakumuni was
I as well / by means of these four uniformities / I teach all
bodhisattvas.”

LXI 36

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha: “The Bhagavan has said, ‘From the night I attained perfect enlightenment until the night I enter nirvana,³⁷ between the two, I do not speak, nor have I spoken, nor will I speak a single word, for not speaking is how a buddha speaks.’ Bhagavan, why does the Tathagata, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One say ‘not speaking is how a buddha speaks’?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “It is because of two truths that I make such a statement as this. And which two? They are the truth that depends on personal realization and the ever-present truth.³⁸ These are the two truths. It is because of these two truths that I make such a statement.

“And what do I mean by the truth that depends on personal realization? Whatever other tathagatas realize, I also realize, nothing more, nothing less. But the ultimate realm of the truth that depends on personal realization is beyond explanations or distinctions and beyond dualistic terms.

“And what do I mean by the ever-present truth? This refers to the way of the ancient sages. The Dharma Realm³⁹ is ever-present, like the nature of gold or silver. Whether a tathagata appears in the world or does not appear in the world, the Dharma Realm is ever-present. It is like a road that leads to a

city. Imagine a man walking in the wilderness who sees this straight and level road leading toward an ancient city and follows it to that city, where he enjoys whatever he desires. Mahamati, what do you think? Did he make the road or that city's delights?"

Mahamati answered, "No."

The Buddha told Mahamati, "The ever-present Dharma Realm of myself and all buddhas of the past is also like this. This is the reason I say that from the night of my enlightenment until I enter nirvana, between the two, I do not speak, nor have I spoken, nor will I speak a single word."

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. "From the night of my enlightenment / until the night of my nirvana / between these two events / I speak not a word
2. Based on the self-realized and ever-present truths / I therefore make this proclamation / all buddhas and myself / in nothing do we differ."

LXII⁴⁰

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please explain what characterizes the existence and nonexistence⁴¹ of things so that once I and the other bodhisattvas get free of the characteristics of existence and nonexistence, we might quickly attain unexcelled, complete enlightenment.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen carefully and ponder it well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati replied, “Wonderful, Bhagavan. May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “There are two things people in this world depend on. They depend on existence and on nonexistence. And as they fall prey to existence and to nonexistence, they try to imagine escape where there is no escape.

“Mahamati, how do the people of this world depend on existence? They think the world arises from causes and conditions that exist and it does not do so in their absence. It arises from existence. It does not arise from nonexistence. Anyone who would claim that,⁴² Mahamati, says the world has no cause.⁴³

“And how, Mahamati, does the world depend on what does not exist? Once people think of desire, anger, and delusion as

existing, they imagine the nonexistence of desire, anger, and delusion, that by not perceiving their existence, Mahamati, the characteristics of their existence become still. Therefore, they think because they don't perceive the existence of desire, anger, and delusion among tathagatas, shravakas, or pratyeka-buddhas, they exist then don't exist.⁴⁴

“Mahamati, which of these are nihilists?”⁴⁵

Mahamati replied, “Bhagavan, those who perceive the existence of desire, anger, and delusion then don't perceive it.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Well said. It is as you understand, Mahamati. Not only are they nihilists in regard to the existence and nonexistence of desire, anger, and delusion, they are also nihilists in regard to shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, and tathagatas. And how so? Because afflictions cannot be seen internally or externally, and because their existence is different and not different.⁴⁶ Mahamati, desire, anger, and delusion cannot be seen internally or externally because desire, anger, and delusion have no substance and because there is nothing to see.

“It is not tathagatas, shravakas, or pratyeka-buddhas who are nihilists. The essential nature of tathagatas, shravakas, and pratyeka-buddhas is liberation because neither bondage nor the cause of bondage exist. Mahamati, if bondage existed, the cause of such bondage would be bondage. Mahamati, nihilists who speak like this are referring to what has no appearance.

“Mahamati, this is why I say it is better to believe in a self as big as Mount Sumeru than to give rise to the vain and empty view of nothingness. Mahamati, the vanity of nothingness is what characterizes nihilists. Falling prey to views and longings regarding individual or shared characteristics,⁴⁷ they don't

realize these are nothing but the perceptions of their own minds. Meanwhile, they see external existence as impermanent, as disappearing from one moment to the next, and the continuity of the skandhas, the dhatus, and the ayatanas as passing away. And they imagine this is ‘what transcends speech and words.’ But this is what is meant by ‘nihilism.’”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “The extremes of existence and nonexistence /
these are realms of the mind / who purifies these realms /
stills their entire mind

2. When external realms are not perceived / their
cessation does not mean nothingness / everything is real /
as it is in the realm of sages

3. Things not existing then arising / or having arisen
then ceasing / or existing or not due to causes / these have
no place in my teaching

4. Not due to a buddha or some other teacher / not
me or anyone else / things arise when causes combine /
how could they be due to nothing

5. Who says things exist due to causes / then speaks
of their nonexistence / speaks of arising based on wrong
views / falsely imagines things existing then not

6. Who knows that nothing arises / also that nothing
ceases / who sees everything as empty and still /
transcends nonexistence and existence.”

LXII⁴⁸

Mahamati once again asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please tell me and the other bodhisattvas what characterizes the way of attainment,⁴⁹ so that once I and the other bodhisattvas become skilled in understanding what characterizes the way of attainment, we will know its characteristics, and by knowing its characteristics, we will quickly attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment and not be misled by speculations or the maras⁵⁰ of other paths.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen carefully and ponder it well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati replied, “May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Among shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas there are two ways: the way of attainment and the way of instruction.⁵¹

“Mahamati, the way of attainment refers to the distinctive characteristics of personal realization that transcend the projections of speech and words, that lead to the passionless realm and the stages marked by self-awareness, that are free from erroneous speculations, that overcome the maras of other paths, and that shine forth from inner awareness. These are the characteristics of the way of attainment.

“And what are the characteristics of the way of instruction?

This refers to instruction in the nine types of teachings⁵² that is free from such characteristics as sameness and difference or existence and nonexistence and that uses means appropriate to the person in teaching the Dharma to help others attain liberation. These are the characteristics of the way of instruction, Mahamati, and these are what you and the other bodhisattvas should cultivate.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “The ways of attainment and instruction / are based on realization and teaching / those who see and distinguish these clearly / don’t pursue speculation

2. Nonexistence as reality / this is what fools imagine / but why do they imagine / nonexistence as liberation

3. Contemplate conditioned things / the cycle of arising and cessation / the nourishing of dualities / mistaken views and ignorance

4. This one thing is true / freedom from blame is nirvana⁵³ / view projections of the world / as illusions, as dreams, as banana tree trunks

5. Though desire, anger, and delusion exist⁵⁴ / there is no person present / the skandhas arise from thirst / their existence is a dream or illusion.”

LXIV⁵⁵

Mahamati once again asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please explain what characterizes false projections.⁵⁶ How do false projections arise? What constitutes a false projection? And where are false projections found?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Excellent! It is excellent that you are able to ask the Tathagata about this for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of pity for all the gods and people in this world. Listen carefully and ponder this well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati replied, “Wonderful, Bhagavan. May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Projections arise when there is attachment to the misperception of different objects. Mahamati, because people are unaware that their attachments to projections of what they grasp and of the one who grasps are nothing but perceptions of their own minds, they fall prey to views of existence and nonexistence in which they are abetted by the views of followers of other paths and the habit-energy of their projections. And as they become attached to different external objects, the mind, and what belongs to the mind give rise to the projection of a self and what belongs to a self.”⁵⁷

Mahamati said, “Bhagavan, since projections arise when

there is attachment to the misperception of different objects, and people are unaware that the projections of what they grasp and of the one who grasps are nothing but perceptions of their own minds, and they fall prey to views of existence and nonexistence in which they are abetted by the views of followers of other paths and the habit-energy of their projections, and as they become attached to various external objects, the mind, and what belongs to the mind give rise to the projection of a self and what belongs to a self,⁵⁸ since this is so, Bhagavan, when they fall prey to the existence or nonexistence of different external objects that neither exist nor do not exist and that transcend the characteristics of views, Bhagavan, this is also true of ultimate truth, which transcends the characteristics of measurement, sensation, inference, analogy, and causation. Why on the one hand, Bhagavan, does attachment to the discrimination of the existence of an unreal object give rise to projections and on the other hand attachment to ultimate truth not give rise to projections? Are you not teaching a false doctrine of causation, Bhagavan, when you say the one gives rise to them and the other does not?”⁵⁹

The Buddha said, “Mahamati, it is not true that one projection arises and the other does not. And why not? Because projections of existence or nonexistence do not arise. Projections do not arise when the external objects that appear as existing or not existing are seen to be nothing but perceptions of one’s own mind.

“Mahamati, I tell foolish people that because the different projections of their minds appear before them as objects; they become attached to the existence of their projections. So how do they get free of views of attachment to a self or what belongs

to a self and get free of the misconception of causation as cause and effect? By becoming aware that their projections are nothing but mind. Thus, do they transform their body and mind and finally see clearly all the stages and realms of self-awareness of tathagatas and transcend views and projections regarding the five dharmas and modes of reality. This is why I say that projections arise from the attachment to things that are unreal and that once someone knows what is real they free themselves from the various projections of their own mind.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Who says the world arises / from causes and conditions / imagines the four possibilities⁶⁰ / but doesn’t understand my teaching

2. It neither arises nor doesn’t arise / nor both of these nor neither / so why do fools imagine / the world’s causes and conditions⁶¹

3. Who sees the world like this / neither existing nor not existing / nor both of these nor neither / transforms their mind and finds no self

4. Whatever exists does not arise / because it arises from conditions / whatever results from conditions / is a result and not self-existent

5. Nor does a result produce a result / twin results are a fallacy⁶² / since twin results cannot occur / their existence cannot be found

6. Viewing conditioned things / without support and supporting nothing / as nothing but the no-mind mind⁶³ / thus I teach nothing but mind

7. Where only essential nature dwells / free from

existence and conditions / where existence is finally purified / this I say is nothing but mind

8. The conventional self is a fabrication / containing nothing real / the skandhas, too, are fabrications / containing nothing real as well

9. Equalities are fourfold⁶⁴ / characteristics, causes, and results / no self is the third / practice and practitioner are the fourth

10. As the habit-energy of projections change / the mind gives rise to a myriad things / an objective realm appears outside / a world that is nothing but mind⁶⁵

11. What appears outside does not exist / all the things seen by the mind / your abode, body, and possessions / these I teach are nothing but mind⁶⁶

12. Transcending every view / free from conceiving and conception / where nothing arises and nothing is found / this I teach is nothing but mind⁶⁷

13. Neither existing nor not existing / free from existence and nonexistence / the liberation of this mind⁶⁸ / this I teach is nothing but mind

14. Emptiness, suchness and reality / nirvana and the Dharma Realm / the different projection bodies / these, too, I teach are nothing but mind.⁶⁹

LXV⁷⁰

Mahamati once again asked the Buddha, “The Bhagavan has said that bodhisattvas should become versed in speech and meaning.⁷¹ Bhagavan, how should bodhisattvas become versed in speech and meaning? What is speech? And what is meaning?”

The Buddha said, “Listen carefully, Mahamati, and ponder it well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati replied, “Wonderful, Bhagavan. May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “What is speech? It is the combination of projections and of words that rely on the throat and larynx, the tongue and lips, the teeth and gums, and the sides of the mouth. And it arises due to attachment to the habit-energy of the discriminations of one’s own and others’ words. This is what is meant by speech.

“And what is meaning? It is what transcends all the characteristics of projections and the characteristics of speech. This is what is meant by meaning.⁷² It is thus in regard to meaning, Mahamati, that bodhisattvas dwell in solitude and proceed toward the city of nirvana as a result of their own understanding of wisdom from learning, reflection, and meditation.⁷³ And once they have transformed their habit-energy, they contemplate the distinctive characteristics of the

meaning of the various stages leading to the realm of personal realization. This is what is meant by how bodhisattvas become versed in meaning.

“Moreover, Mahamati, bodhisattvas versed in speech and meaning regard speech as neither separate nor not separate from meaning, and they also regard meaning and speech in the same manner. If speech were separate from meaning, meaning would not be expressed by speech. But it is by means of speech that we understand meaning, just as a lamp illuminates forms.⁷⁴

“Moreover, Mahamati, if someone becomes attached to the meaning of such expressions as ‘neither arising nor ceasing,’ ‘self-existence,’ ‘nirvana,’ ‘three paths,’ ‘one path,’ ‘mind,’ or ‘modes of reality,’ they fall prey to views of assertion and denial—assertions of difference and projections of difference, whereby projections appear like so many illusions. As with illusions, fools imagine differences, not the wise.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Those who give rise to projections of speech /
assert all kinds of things / because of their assertions / they
spend their next life in hell

2. “The self isn’t in the skandhas’ / ‘the skandhas
aren’t the self’ / such conceptions are mistaken / ‘nor is
there no self’ as well⁷⁵

3. As for ‘everything exists’ / which is what fools
imagine / if things were as they see them / they would see
the truth

4. And as for ‘nothing at all exists’ / pure and impure
both would vanish⁷⁶ / things are not as they are seen / nor
are there no things.”

LXVI⁷⁷

“Mahamati, I will now explain the characteristics of knowledge and consciousness. For by becoming adept at distinguishing the characteristics of knowledge and consciousness, you and the other bodhisattvas will be able to understand the characteristics of knowledge and consciousness and quickly realize unexcelled, complete enlightenment.⁷⁸

“Mahamati, there are three kinds of knowledge: mundane knowledge, metaphysical knowledge, and transcendent knowledge. What is mundane knowledge? This refers to that of all those ordinary people and followers of other paths who are attached to existence and nonexistence. And what is metaphysical knowledge? This refers to that of those shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas who fall prey to longing for and becoming attached to individual and shared characteristics.⁷⁹ And what is transcendent knowledge? This refers to that of buddhas and bodhisattvas who contemplate what is free from projections and see that it neither arises nor ceases, that it transcends categories of existence and nonexistence, and that the tathagata stage and the absence of a self among persons and things depend on the occurrence of personal attainment.⁸⁰

“Mahamati, what arises and ceases is consciousness. What neither arises nor ceases is knowledge.⁸¹ Furthermore, it is

consciousness that falls prey to characteristics and the absence of characteristics and also falls prey to the causes of the different characteristics of existence and nonexistence, while it is knowledge that transcends the characteristics of existence and nonexistence. Furthermore, consciousness is characterized by increase, while knowledge is not characterized by increase. Also, there are three objects of knowledge: the knowledge of arising and cessation, the knowledge of individual and shared characteristics, and the knowledge of non-arising and non-cessation.

“Moreover, knowledge⁸² is also characterized by the absence of obstructions, while consciousness is characterized by the obstruction of countless external realms. Furthermore, consciousness is characterized by what arises from threefold combinations,⁸³ while knowledge is characterized by the absence of anything self-existent. Furthermore, consciousness is characterized by attainment, while knowledge is characterized by non-attainment, for the realm of buddha knowledge that one attains is neither present nor absent, like the moon in the water.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Consciousness accumulates karma⁸⁴ / knowledge examines dharmas / wisdom penetrates projectionless realms / thereby attaining powers⁸⁵

2. Consciousness is tied to objects / knowledge sees how thoughts are born / from projectionless realms and higher stages⁸⁶ / this is where wisdom rises

3. Whose mind, will, and consciousness / get free of all projections / who grasp the teaching of non-projection / are bodhisattvas, not shravakas

4. Tranquil and supreme forbearance⁸⁷ / the pure knowledge of a buddha / these rise from the best of truths / which transcends every practice

5. I have three kinds of knowledge / whereby the wise reveal the truth / all concern projections / the things that people cling to

6. Unconcerned with lesser paths / such knowledge is free from objective realms / while from shravakas rises / attachment to self-existence / transcendent and nothing but mind / a buddha's knowledge is pure."⁸⁸

LXVII⁸⁹

“Furthermore, Mahamati, the views of change held by followers of other paths come from their nine doctrines about change. These include change of shape, change of characteristic, change of cause, change of connection, change of view, change of existence, change of perceptible condition, change of perceptible function, and change of origin.⁹⁰ Mahamati, these are their nine views of change. It is on the basis of these that followers of other paths produce their doctrines of change concerning existence and nonexistence.

“What is a change of shape? This refers to the view that there is a difference in shape. For example, when gold is turned into utensils or ornaments, it takes on the appearance of different shapes, although the nature of gold doesn’t change. This is how anything that exists changes. And this is how followers of other paths imagine change, up to and including their projection of a change of origin. Something is not as it was. But neither is it different. This is the result of projection. This is how anything that exists changes.

“It is like the aging of milk and curds or of fruit and wine. Followers of other paths imagine change where there is no change. Something seems to be there and seems not to be there. But it is merely the perception of their own minds of an external

entity that does not exist, which foolish people give rise to, Mahamati, due to the habit-energy of their own projections. Mahamati, though something seems to arise and seems to cease, there is nothing there. It is like seeing an image appear in a magic trick or a dream.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “A shape that changes over time / four elements and five senses / slowly rising in the skandhas / a fantasy not knowledge
2. Sages regard what comes from causes / unlike others imagine / the world that comes from causes / is a city of gandharvas.”⁹¹

LXVIII⁹²

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, would you please explain the meaning of the continuity and non-continuity of things?⁹³ For once I and the other bodhisattvas become adept at distinguishing the characteristics of the continuity and non-continuity of things, we will better understand how all continuities work and will not become attached to a continuity because of how its meaning is expressed in words. For once we are versed in the characteristics of the continuity and non-continuity of things, and we transcend the erroneous projections⁹⁴ of language, we will know how to travel to all buddhalands and to their countless assemblies, where our myriad transformations will be marked by spiritual powers, masteries, faculties, and spells and will shine like so many suns or moons or magic gems upon the four elements with the refulgent light of wisdom gained from the effortless exercise of the ten inexhaustible vows.⁹⁵ And wherever we dwell, we will look upon everything as an illusion or a dream and will avoid views characterized by the projection of a self. And upon reaching the stage of buddhas, in every realm where there are beings, we will teach whatever teaching they respond to and lead them to transform themselves⁹⁶ by accepting that everything is like a dream or illusion and by avoiding categories of existence

and nonexistence and projections of arising and cessation or the teachings of other paths.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Well said, well said. Listen carefully and ponder it well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati replied, “May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Attachments to continuities based on how their meaning is expressed in words are limitless.⁹⁷ There is attachment to the continuity of characteristics, attachment to the continuity of conditions, attachment to the continuity of existence and nonexistence, attachment to the continuity of the projection of arising and non-arising, attachment to the continuity of the projection of cessation and non-cessation, attachment to the continuity of the projection of a path and no path, attachment to the continuity of the projection of the created and the uncreated, attachment to the continuity of the projection of the individual characteristics of the stages,⁹⁸ attachment to the continuity of the projection of attainment and of projection itself, attachment to the continuity of the projection of categories of existence and nonexistence on which other paths depend, and attachment to the continuity of the projection of attainment of the three paths or the one path.

“Furthermore, Mahamati, foolish beings project continuities other than these. But it is because of their projection of such continuities that they are like silkworms making cocoons, using the thread of projection to envelop themselves and others in attachments to the characteristics of continuities of existence and nonexistence.

“Furthermore, Mahamati, for those who see that everything is still, there are no characteristics of continuity or non-continuity in any of this. But it is due to the non-arising of projections that

bodhisattvas see that everything is still.

“Moreover, Mahamati, know that external entities do not exist, that their characteristics are perceptions of your own mind and free of projections. Accordingly, when you see that whatever exists or does not exist is simply a perception of your own mind and without form, continuities become still. Thus, there are no characteristics of the continuity or non-continuity of anything. Moreover, Mahamati, although others, given to falsehood, think bondage and emancipation exist, there is nothing in any of this to be bound to or emancipated from. And why is this so? Because among what exists or does not exist, no beings can be found.

“Furthermore, Mahamati, the ignorant possess three continuities:⁹⁹ greed, anger, and delusion, together with the desire for happiness in a future existence. Because of such continuities, there is the continuity of existence, and among these continuities are links to the five destinies.¹⁰⁰ However, Mahamati, for those who put an end to continuities, there are no characteristics of continuity or non-continuity.

“Moreover, Mahamati, because of the active grasping of consciousness based on threefold combinations,¹⁰¹ continuities arise without interruption. It is because of such active grasping that continuities exist. Meanwhile, those who put an end to those forms of consciousness dependent on threefold combinations witness the threefold liberation¹⁰² and the non-arising of continuities.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Projections that are false / these characterize
continuities / once you know what is real / continuity’s net

is cut

2. Fools don't understand / they look for meaning in words / like silkworms in cocoons / wrapped in their own imaginations. [103](#)

LXIX¹⁰⁴

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “The Bhagavan has said it is due to projections that we imagine the existence of different things and it isn’t they themselves that exist but only the projection of them that exists. Bhagavan, if it is only the projection of them that exists and their own corresponding existence does not exist, would not the affliction and purification of which the Bhagavan speaks also suffer from nonexistence, since the existence of whatever is imagined does not itself exist?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “So it is. So it is. It is as you say, Mahamati. What is real is not what fools imagine as existing. What they imagine as existing lacks any characteristic of its own existence. However, Mahamati, according to buddha knowledge there is something that exists, something the existence of which is known by means of the noble insight and noble vision of the eye of noble wisdom.”

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “Although those who are wise thus know what exists by means of the noble insight and noble vision of the eye of noble wisdom and not by means of any kind of divine or physical eye,¹⁰⁵ this is not what fools imagine, Bhagavan. How then do fools get free from such projections if they are unaware of a higher reality?¹⁰⁶ For they are neither deluded, Bhagavan, nor are they not deluded.¹⁰⁷ And how so?

Because they are not aware of the existence of a higher reality, and because they do not see what transcends the characteristics of existence and nonexistence.¹⁰⁸

“Bhagavan, the wise do not view what they imagine as real in this manner because they do not consider the individual characteristics of an external realm as external. Bhagavan, they thus perceive the characteristics of self-existence as an imagined reality and do not say it is due to the presence or absence of causes but due to falling prey to views of existence and that theirs is a different realm unlike that. But this is a circular argument, Bhagavan, because the characteristics of self-existence are not known. Also, Bhagavan, if the characteristics of self-existence are not the result of an imagined reality, how is their projection not a projection but rather a discrimination of suchness?¹⁰⁹

“Bhagavan, projections differ, and the characteristics of self-existence differ. Bhagavan, because the characteristics of self-existence and their projections are not the same, how do people know what is not real if they don’t imagine anything? But you say what beings imagine does not really exist in order to free them from projections. Bhagavan, why prevent beings from becoming attached to views of existence and nonexistence if they then end up becoming attached to views of the existence of the realm in which buddha knowledge functions? Why teach the nonexistence of detachment¹¹⁰ and then teach the existence of buddha knowledge?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “I do not teach the nonexistence of detachment, nor do I fall prey to views of existence in speaking of the higher reality of buddha knowledge. Rather, it is to help beings who have been attached to existence since time

without beginning overcome their fears. To those attached to views of the existence of a higher reality, I teach detachment, Mahamati. I do not teach characteristics of self-existence. Rather, Mahamati, I focus on the personal realization of detachment, on transcending deluded views, on transcending views of what exists or does not exist that are perceptions of one's own mind, on obtaining the threefold liberation, on being marked with the mark of suchness, on examining self-existence based on personal realization, and on transcending views of the existence or nonexistence of what is real.

LXX¹¹¹

“Furthermore, Mahamati, bodhisattvas should not maintain the proposition: ‘Whatever exists does not arise.’ And why not? Because the proposition about the existence of things would not exist, and because its reason¹¹² would be characterized by arising. To state the proposition ‘whatever exists does not arise’ contradicts itself. The proposition ‘whatever exists does not arise’ contradicts itself because the proposition would arise in relation to something,¹¹³ and also because a proposition concerning the non-arising of things would be among those things, and because its cessation would not arise. Thus, to maintain the proposition ‘whatever exists does not arise’ is contradicted by the proposition itself.

“Mahamati, as for the proposition ‘existence and nonexistence do not arise,’ such a proposition would be among the things that exist, although characteristics of its existence or nonexistence would not. Mahamati, even if in regard to the proposition of non-arising one could maintain the proposition ‘whatever exists does not arise,’ this proposition is contradicted because the characteristics of its existence or nonexistence do not arise. You should not maintain propositions. The five-part syllogism¹¹⁴ produces numerous errors due to differing characteristics and changing reasons and because they are

fabrications. Hence, you should not maintain propositions. As with ‘whatever exists does not arise,’ likewise in regard to ‘whatever exists is empty’ or ‘whatever exists has no self existence,’ you should not maintain propositions.

“Mahamati, bodhisattvas say instead, ‘Whatever exists is like an illusion or a dream,’ because it is seen and not seen,¹¹⁵ and because it is a mistake of perception. You should say that the existence of everything is like that of an illusion or a dream, unless it makes people turn away in fear. Mahamati, foolish people are given to views of existence and nonexistence. Don’t make them turn away in fear from the Mahayana.”¹¹⁶

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “There is no teaching and no self-existence / no objects and no attachments¹¹⁷ / these are the projections of fools / the misperceptions of corpses
2. ‘Whatever exists does not arise’ / this doctrine of other schools is wrong / nothing at all arises / what exists results from conditions
3. ‘Whatever exists does not arise’ / the wise hold no such conception / because propositions arise from reasons / the wise get rid of them all
4. Like seeing through a cataract / the distorted view through strands of hair / projections of existence / are the misperceptions of fools
5. Fabrications fill the three realms / self-existent objects don’t exist / fabricating self-existent objects / projection gives rise to projection
6. The forms and objects of fabrication / utterly confuse the mind / bodhisattvas who see past these /

dispense with all projections

7. Perceiving water where there is none / the result of thirst and desire / fools are thus bewildered / unlike the wise who see

8. The vision of the wise is clear / rising from samadhis of the three liberations¹¹⁸ / beyond the reach of birth or death / they wander in a realm of no projection

9. Practitioners dwell in a projectionless realm / free from existence and nonexistence / where existence and nonexistence merge / and the fruit of buddhahood grows

10. As for existence and nonexistence / as for how they merge / because the mind doesn't know / confusion swirls inside and out / once you make them stop / your mind will behold their identity.”¹¹⁹

Mahamati once more asked, “The Bhagavan has said knowledge is not obtained from an objectified world because it would consist in nothing more than the assertion of projections. Since a projection that can be grasped does not exist nor does the one who grasps, grasping does not occur. Thus, knowledge does not arise, only the names of projections.

“But how is it, Bhagavan, is it because we do not perceive whether the individual or shared characteristics of what exists are different or not that knowledge is not obtained? Or is it because it is obscured by the variety of the individual or shared characteristics of what exists that knowledge is not obtained? Or is it because it is blocked by mountains or walls or by the elements of earth, water, fire, or wind that knowledge is not obtained? Or is it because it is too distant or too near that knowledge is not obtained? Or is it because of blindness or dimness of wit or impaired senses due to immaturity or old age that knowledge is not obtained?

“Bhagavan, if it is because we don’t perceive whether the individual or shared characteristics of what exists are different or not that knowledge is not obtained, then we should not speak of knowledge but of an absence of knowledge because something exists but isn’t perceived. Or if it is because it is obscured by the

variety of the individual and shared characteristics of what exists that knowledge is not obtained, that too is an absence of knowledge not knowledge. Bhagavan, knowledge arises where there is something knowable,¹²¹ not where nothing exists. It is because we encounter what is knowable that we speak of knowledge. If it is because it is blocked by mountains or walls or by the elements of earth, water, fire, or wind, or because it is too distant or too close, or because of blindness or dimness of wit or impaired senses due to immaturity or old age that knowledge is not obtained, that too is not knowledge, but an absence of knowledge, because something exists but cannot be perceived.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “It is not so. The absence of knowledge is knowledge not no knowledge. I am not concealing anything when I say that knowledge is not obtained from an objectified world because it would consist in nothing but the assertion of projections. When you perceive that what exists or does not exist is nothing but a perception of your own mind and that external existence does not exist, you know without perceiving objects. It is because nothing is perceived that the knowledge of something knowable does not arise. Even among the three liberations, knowledge is not obtained. Those whose discriminations consist in the habit-energy of beginningless fabrications of existence and nonexistence would not know something like this. They are unaware of such knowledge.

“Therefore, I teach that the ceaseless projection of the existence or nonexistence of an external world of objects is based on nothing but the perceptions of one’s own mind. But because beings are attached to grasping the characteristics of a self and what belongs to a self, they do not perceive that these

are nothing but perceptions of their own minds and give rise instead to projections of knowledge and something knowable. Because of such projections, they are unable to ascertain the existence or nonexistence of anything external and base themselves on nihilistic views.”¹²²

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “‘There is an objectified world / beyond the reach of knowledge’ / and ‘the absence of knowledge isn’t knowledge’ / this is what those who imagine things say

2. ‘Something exists without distinctions / beyond the reach of knowledge / too near, too far, or somehow obstructed’ / this I call false knowledge

3. ‘Among the young, the old, or impaired / knowledge doesn’t arise / yet something exists as knowable’ / this, too, I call false knowledge.”

LXXII¹²³

“Furthermore, Mahamati, foolish beings are confused¹²⁴ by the habit-energy of beginningless fabrications and projections. And once they are confused, they do not easily understand the way of personal attainment or the way of instruction. Because they are attached to characteristics of external existence that are perceptions of their own minds and attached to explanations of expedience, they are not adept at distinguishing the characteristics of a way of personal attainment that does not include the four possibilities.”¹²⁵

Mahamati addressed the Buddha, “It is, indeed, as the Bhagavan teaches. May the Bhagavan please distinguish the way of instruction and the way of attainment for us, so that I and the other bodhisattvas will become adept at both, and so that the foolish people, shravakas, and pratyeka-buddhas of future ages will not be left wanting?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Well said, well said. Listen carefully and ponder it well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati said, “May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “The tathagatas of the three ages¹²⁶ teach two ways: the way of instruction and the way of personal attainment. The way of instruction means teaching the different texts and sutras appropriate to the minds of beings.

This is what is meant by the way of instruction.

“The way of personal attainment is for practitioners who free themselves from the different projections that are perceptions of their own minds. This means not falling prey to categories of sameness or difference or both or neither, transcending completely the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness, and avoiding views of what brings about the personal realization of the realm of buddha knowledge, which shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and followers of other paths given to dualistic views cannot possibly know. This is what I mean by the teaching of the way of personal attainment. Mahamati, this is what characterizes the way of personal attainment and the way of instruction, and this is what you and the other bodhisattvas should cultivate.”

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “My teaching includes two ways / attainment and instruction / instruction for beginners / attainment for practitioners.”

LXXIII¹²⁷

Mahamati again asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, the Tathagata once said, ‘Do not associate with those who engage in the various kinds of materialist¹²⁸ eloquence. Whoever associates with them will embrace desires of the flesh¹²⁹ and will not embrace the Dharma.’ Bhagavan, why did you say this?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Materialists employ all manner of expressions, arguments, metaphors, and embellishments to attract and deceive foolish people. They do not accept the personal understanding¹³⁰ of what is real, nor are they aware that their projection of what exists is a delusion. Falling prey to dualities, they confuse simpleminded people and also harm themselves and cannot escape their continuation in other forms of existence. Unable to understand what are nothing but perceptions of their own mind, they do not get free of their attachment to projections of external existence. Thus, those who engage in materialist eloquence do not escape deception and confusion or the sorrows and afflictions of birth, old age, illness, and death.

“Mahamati, Shakra¹³¹ was versed in a wide range of discourse and himself authored a treatise on speech. There once was a proponent of materialism who assumed the form of a serpent¹³² and entered Shakra’s palace and proposed a debate:

‘I have come to destroy Shakra’s thousand-spoked chariot. If I lose, I will acknowledge his superiority, and he can cut off every one of my heads.’ Once he declared his intentions, he used Shakra’s own arguments to overwhelm him. When Shakra acknowledged defeat, he smashed Shakra’s chariot then returned to the human world. Thus, Mahamati, the arguments, metaphors, and embellishments of materialists, the expressions of which even beasts are able to employ, mislead gods and asuras into becoming attached to views of arising and cessation—how much more so humans. Therefore, Mahamati, you should keep your distance from materialists because they are able to promote the causes of suffering. Don’t associate with them.

“Mahamati, even though materialist doctrines number in the hundreds of thousands, Mahamati, materialists only speak about the realm of sensory awareness. And it will only be in the final five hundred years of later ages¹³³ that they will create schisms and their mistaken views of causation will flourish and be accepted by false disciples. Mahamati, when materialists thus create schisms using the expressions, metaphors, and embellishments of other schools, they will do so based on their own reasoning, not on their own understanding. Mahamati, followers of other paths have no doctrines concerning personal understanding. Nor do any of the countless hundreds of thousands of other teachings expounded by materialists teach personal understanding. Nor do they themselves realize the foolishness of materialism.”

Mahamati then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, while the various expressions, metaphors, and embellishments used by materialists and followers of other paths do not involve personal

understanding but rather attachment to their own reasoning, does the Bhagavan not also teach materialism in his exposition of countless different terms to the gods, humans, and asuras who come here from different realms, and not personal understanding? And does he not include arguments that are counted among the wisdom of other schools?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “I do not teach materialism. Nor that anything comes or goes.¹³⁴ I only teach what does not come and what does not go. Mahamati, what comes refers to what gathers and appears. What goes refers to what scatters and disappears. What neither comes nor goes does not arise and does not cease. The meaning of what I teach cannot be counted among the fabrications of materialists. And how so? Because it is not attached to an external existence that does not exist. Dualistic fabrications cannot affect those who dwell on the perceptions of their own mind. The external world and its forms do not exist. Once you see they are perceptions of your own mind, fabrications that are perceptions of your own mind do not arise. And when fabrications do not arise, you enter the empty, formless, effortless threefold gate of liberation,¹³⁵ which is why it is called liberation.

“Mahamati, I recall once a materialist Brahman¹³⁶ came to where I was staying and without waiting asked, ‘Gautama, is everything created?’

“I answered, ‘Brahman, that everything is created is the most rudimentary kind of materialism.’

“He asked again, ‘Is everything not created?’

“I answered, ‘That everything is not created is the second kind of materialism.’

“He asked again, ‘Is everything permanent? Or is everything

impermanent? Does everything arise? Or does everything not arise?’

‘I answered, ‘That makes six kinds of materialism.’

‘Mahamati, he asked again, ‘Is everything the same? Or is everything different? Is everything both of these? Or is everything neither of these? Or does everything appear due to multiple causes?’

‘I answered, ‘That makes eleven kinds of materialism.’

‘Mahamati, he asked again, ‘Is everything neutral? Or is everything karmic? Is there a self? Or is there no self? Does this world exist? Or does this world not exist? Or is there another world? Or is there no other world? Is there liberation? Or is there no liberation? Is everything momentary? Or is everything not momentary? And are space, cessation, and nirvana¹³⁷ created, Gautama? Or are they not created? And is there an intermediate existence?¹³⁸ Or is there no intermediate existence?’

‘Mahamati, I answered, ‘Brahman, all these things of which you speak are materialism. This materialism of yours is not what I teach. I only teach that the cause of the three realms and their various ills is the habit-energy of fabrications and projections without beginning. But because you are unable to see that they are merely perceptions of your own mind, you give rise to projections and objectify an external existence. According to followers of other paths, awareness arises from the threefold combination of a self, sense organs, and sense objects, but not according to me. Brahman, I do not teach that there are causes, nor do I do teach that there are no causes.¹³⁹ I only teach causation as a fabrication of projecting the existence of a subject and an object. This is not something you or others who accept

the continuity of a self can understand.’

‘Mahamati, nirvana, space, and cessation are not three things. They are only counted as three things.’¹⁴⁰

‘Furthermore, Mahamati, this materialist Brahman asked me again, ‘Are ignorance, desire, and karma the cause of the three realms? Or are they not the cause?’

‘I answered, ‘Both of these are also materialism.’

‘He asked again, ‘Does everything have individual and shared characteristics?’

‘I answered, ‘This is also materialism. Brahman, any movement of the mind involving projection of an external object is materialism.’

‘Again, Mahamati, the Brahman asked, ‘Is there any teaching that is not materialism? I am versed in all the doctrines of other schools and in the different expressions, arguments, metaphors, and embellishments of their teachings.’

‘I answered, ‘There is, Brahman, but it is not one of yours. It is not a fabrication, and it is not a doctrine, and it is not a teaching. But it is not not a teaching, and its various expressions are not not embellished with arguments and metaphors.’

‘The Brahman asked, ‘hat is it that is not materialism, not not a doctrine, and not not a teaching?’

‘I answered, ‘Brahman, there is something that is not materialism, but it is something you followers of other paths cannot understand due to your mistaken attachment to the fabrication and projection of external existence. Projections do not arise when you understand that existence and nonexistence are nothing but perceptions of your own mind. And projections do not arise when you do not grasp external objects. The permanent cessation of projection, this is what I mean by ‘what

is not materialism.’ This is my teaching and not yours. Briefly, Brahman, if consciousness involves coming or going, birth or death, joy or suffering, disappearance or appearance, contact or grasping, or if it involves attachment to a combination or a continuity or to a desire or a cause, Brahman, if it involves anything like this, it is your materialism and not mine.’

‘Mahamati, after this materialist Brahman had asked in this manner, and I had answered in this manner, he was silent. Then he left without saying another word.¹⁴¹ But he thought about his own understanding and said to himself, ‘This Buddhist monk is incomprehensible. He teaches no arising, no form, no cause, and that once someone becomes aware that what they perceive are their own projections, projections do not arise.’

‘Mahamati, you asked me earlier why I said anyone who associated with those who engage in materialist eloquence would embrace desires of the flesh and not the Dharma. This is why.’

Mahamati asked the Buddha, ‘Bhagavan, what does it mean to embrace desires of the flesh or the Dharma?’

The Buddha told Mahamati, ‘It is excellent, excellent, indeed, that you should think to ask about the meaning of such expressions on behalf of beings in the future. Listen carefully, and ponder it well, and I will tell you.’

Mahamati bowed and said, ‘May we be so instructed.’

The Buddha told Mahamati, ‘Desires of the flesh refer to those that involve clutching or letting go, touching or tasting, attachment to external sensation, addiction to dualistic views, and rebirth once more in a suffering body along with the anxiety, grief and affliction of birth, old age, and death. All such tribulations arise from desire and from associating with

materialism or materialists. This is what I and other buddhas refer to as ‘desires of the flesh.’ This is what is meant by embracing desires of the flesh and not embracing the Dharma.

“And to what, Mahamati, does embracing the Dharma refer? This means understanding what are nothing but perceptions of one’s own mind, seeing that beings have no self and that dharmas have no self, not giving rise to projections, becoming versed in the higher stages, transcending the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness, having one’s forehead anointed with wisdom by all the buddhas, embracing and fulfilling the ten inexhaustible vows,¹⁴² and gaining effortless mastery of all teachings. This is what is meant by the Dharma. It means not falling prey to any view, any fabrication, any projection, any existence or duality.

“Mahamati, foolish people and most followers of other paths fall prey to such dualities as permanence and annihilation, but not the wise. Those who accept the doctrine of no causation give rise to views of permanence, while those who accept the destruction of external causes and the nonexistence of conditions give rise to views of annihilation. Mahamati, not seeing anything originate or persist or cease is what I mean by the Dharma. Mahamati, you and the other bodhisattvas should reflect on what is meant by desires of the flesh and the Dharma.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “The different kinds of materialism / the false teachings of other paths / projections of cause and effect / include no personal attainment
2. Only this personal attainment of mine / transcends cause and effect / thus I tell disciples / avoid materialist

views

3. What is only mind cannot be seen / nor is a divided mind perceived / when grasper and grasped do not exist / the eternal and momentary are both transcended

4. The slightest movement of the mind / this is what materialism is / unmoved by projections / are those who see their own mind

5. 'It comes' means something appears / 'it goes' means something disappears / those who know what comes and goes / stop giving rise to projections

6. Permanence or impermanence / effects or no effects / this world or another world / these comprise the materialist way."

LXXIVIV¹⁴⁴

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, when you speak of nirvana, what do you mean by nirvana, as followers of other paths also imagine something?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen carefully and ponder it well, and I will explain this to you.

“Followers of other paths do, indeed, imagine something as nirvana. But what they imagine does not accord with nirvana.”

Mahamati said, “May we be so instructed, Bhagavan.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “For followers of some paths it is the cessation of the skandhas, the dhatus, and the ayatanas, or the absence of worldly desires, or the impermanence of everything they see, or the non-arising of any and all mental activity, or not thinking about past, future, or present states, or putting an end to all sensation, like the extinguishing of a lamp or a fire or the destruction of a seed, or not giving rise to projections. These are among their conceptions of nirvana. But nirvana, Mahamati, is not the destruction of anything.¹⁴⁵

“Mahamati, some think liberation is going from one place to another place, a place where thoughts of an external world cease, like when the wind stops. Some think eliminating the view of the knower and the known is liberation. Some see¹⁴⁶ permanence and impermanence as liberation. Some see the

different forms they perceive as the cause that gives rise to suffering, and they envision them ending. Unaware that these are nothing but perceptions of their own mind, they become afraid of forms and develop a deep desire to see no form, which they think of as nirvana.

“Some think nirvana is knowing what is indestructible among the individual or shared characteristics of internal or external dharmas of the past, the present, or the future. Some think of nirvana as the destruction¹⁴⁷ of everything, including one’s self, person, being, and life. Relying on the immature wisdom of followers of other paths, some see a primordial nature and a cosmic being,¹⁴⁸ and between the two the cosmic being producing an underlying nature, which is likened to a kind of primordial force, which then transforms into tendencies, and the tendencies then acting as the creator, which they view as nirvana.¹⁴⁹ Some say it is the end of good and bad karma, some say it is the end of affliction, and some say it is wisdom. ¹⁵⁰ Some see a supreme power¹⁵¹ actually responsible for birth and death as nirvana. And some say there is no other cause of birth and death than giving birth to one another, and, due to their ignorance, they think this is nirvana. That this very attachment is the cause is lost on these ignorant beings.

“Followers of still other paths say finding what leads to truth is nirvana. Some see tendencies¹⁵² and the sameness of the combinations that tendencies give rise to or their difference or both of these or neither and think this is nirvana. And some see what nature gives rise to as nirvana, things such as the patterns in a peacock feather or a gemstone or the sharpness of a thorn.

“Mahamati, some think nirvana is understanding the twenty-

five realities¹⁵³ or upholding the six virtues that protect king and kingdom.¹⁵⁴ Some see time as the creator and the seasons as the world and knowing this as nirvana. Some say it is something that exists, some say it is something that does not exist, and some say it is knowing what exists and what does not exist. And some imagine nirvana as seeing the difference between nirvana and whatever one is aware of.¹⁵⁵

“All these different fantasies advanced by followers of other paths fail to establish what they aim to establish and are rejected by the wise. Mahamati, all these conceptions of nirvana suffer from duality, and none of these conceptions of nirvana of other paths includes anything that arises or ceases. Mahamati, each of these nirvanas of other paths has its own doctrine, but none of them are based on the examination of wisdom. Such conceptions unsettle and disturb the mind, and none of them results in nirvana.

“According to what I teach, Mahamati, nirvana means fully understanding that it is nothing but the perception of one’s own mind and is not something that exists externally and that it transcends the four possibilities. It is seeing what is real without falling prey to dualistic projections that are perceptions of one’s own mind and that are devoid of perceiver or perceived. It is not accepting the validity of any rule or measure or following anyone ignorant of reality. Rather, it is letting everything go in favor of attaining the personal realization of buddha knowledge whereby one knows the two kinds of no-self, avoids the two afflictions, removes the two obstructions, gets free of the two kinds of death,¹⁵⁶ advances to the higher stages and the profound Samadhi of the Illusory of the tathagata stage, and transcends the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness.

What I call nirvana, Mahamati, is what you and the other bodhisattvas should cultivate. And you should distance yourselves at once from the views of nirvana held by followers of other paths.”

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “When followers of other paths view nirvana / they all give rise to fantasies / but the products of imagination / are not the means to liberation

2. Blind to bondage and the one who binds / no skillful means in sight / such people imagine liberation / but a liberation that never arrives

3. The different means to knowledge / the philosophies of other schools / all are foolish fantasies / none leads to liberation

4. All these fools of other paths / misperceive cause and effect / preach existence and nonexistence / from which there is no liberation

5. Fools delight in fantasies / not in hearing about the truth / words produce three kinds of pain¹⁵⁷ / which only truth can eradicate

6. Like an image in a mirror / appears but isn't there / in the mirror of projection / fools all see their double

7. Who doesn't know the mind or conditions / gives rise to projections of duality / once they know the mind and the world¹⁵⁸ / projections no longer arise

8. The mind is a multiplicity / devoid of seeing or what is seen / objects appear and disappear / or so fools imagine

9. The three realms as projections / external objects

as not existing / perceptions as fabrications / fools can't comprehend

10. All sutras speak of projection / but never get free of words / because apart from language / there is nothing of which to speak.”

Mahamati then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please tell us about complete enlightenment so that by better understanding the essential nature of a tathagata, I and the other bodhisattvas might enlighten ourselves and also enlighten others.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Ask whatever you want, and I will answer accordingly.”

Mahamati said, “Bhagavan, are the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones created or not created, the result or the cause, what sees or what is seen, what teaches or what is taught, what knows or what is known? Or are they different or not different from such terms as these?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “In regard to such terms as these, the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones are neither the result nor the cause. And why not? Because both would be wrong. Mahamati, if tathagatas were the result, they would be created and would be impermanent. And if they were impermanent, then every result would be a tathagata, which is something neither I nor any other buddha would want.¹⁶⁰ But if they were not created, they would not attain anything, and their cultivation would be empty, like a rabbit’s horns or a barren woman’s child, because it would not exist.

“Mahamati, if they are not the result and not the cause, then

they neither exist nor do not exist. And if they neither exist nor do not exist, then they are beyond the four possibilities. The four possibilities refer to the mundane world. If they are beyond the four possibilities, then they are not subject to the four possibilities. And it is because they are not subject to the four possibilities that they are perceived by the wise. This is how the meaning of all expressions about a tathagata should be understood by the wise.

“As I have said, there is no self in anything, by which you should understand that by no self what I mean is the nonexistence of a self. Everything exists as itself and does not exist as another, like a cow or a horse. For example, Mahamati, a cow does not exist as a horse. And a horse does not exist as a cow. In reality, they neither exist nor do not exist, but they do not not exist as themselves. Thus, Mahamati, there is nothing that does not have its own characteristics or that does have its own characteristics. But that they have no self is something foolish people cannot understand due to their projections. Thus, the emptiness, the non-arising, and the absence of the self-existence of things are to be understood like this.

“In the same manner, tathagatas are neither different from the skandhas, nor are they not different.¹⁶¹ If they were not different from the skandhas, they would be impermanent. And if they were different, then their practice would be useless. Now two of anything are necessarily different. For example, a bull’s horns are alike. Thus, they aren’t different. But because their dimensions vary, they are different. This is true of everything. Mahamati, if a bull’s right horn is different from its left horn, then the left horn is different from its right horn. Thus, in terms of dimensions, every form is different. But tathagatas, Mahamati,

are neither different nor not different from the skandhas, the dhatus, or the ayatanas.

“In the same manner, tathagatas and liberation are neither different nor not different. Thus tathagatas are said to be liberated. If tathagatas were different from liberation, they would be composed of material characteristics. And if they were composed of material characteristics, they would be impermanent. However, if they were not different, there would be no distinctions among the attainments of practitioners. But distinctions are seen among practitioners. Hence, they are neither different, nor are they not different.

“In the same manner, what knows and what is known are neither different nor not different. Mahamati, if what knows and what is known are neither different nor not different,¹⁶² then they are neither permanent nor not permanent, neither cause nor effect, neither created nor not created, neither perceiving nor perceived, neither characterizing nor characterized, neither the skandhas nor different from the skandhas, neither what speaks nor what is spoken, neither the same nor different nor both nor neither. And because they are neither the same nor different nor both nor neither, they are beyond all measure. What is beyond all measure is inexpressible. And what is inexpressible does not arise. And what does not arise does not cease. And what does not cease is completely still. And what is completely still is essentially nirvana.¹⁶³ And what is essentially nirvana is neither a result nor a cause. And what is neither a result nor a cause has no objective support. And what has no objective support is beyond the reach of all fabrications. And what is beyond the reach of all fabrications is a tathagata. A tathagata is complete enlightenment. Mahamati, this is what is meant by the complete

enlightenment of a buddha. The complete enlightenment of a buddha, Mahamati, is beyond the reach of the senses.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Beyond the reach of the senses / neither a result nor a cause / beyond what perceives and what is perceived / beyond what sees and what is seen [164](#)

2. The skandhas, the nidanas, and enlightenment [165](#) / don’t view them as the same or different / if there is nothing to see / how can anything be distinguished

3. It isn’t created or not created / it isn’t a result or a cause / it isn’t the skandhas or inside the skandhas [166](#) / nor is it anywhere else

4. Nor is it something that exists / something someone imagines / nor does it not exist / it is just like everything else

5. Because it exists it doesn’t / because it doesn’t it does / its nonexistence cannot be grasped / nor can its existence be imagined

6. Confused about self and no self / mired in nothing but words / those who drown in dualities / harm themselves and the world

7. Who gets free from all errors / truly sees my way / this is called seeing truly / not slandering the guide.”

LXXVI¹⁶⁷

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, according to the Bhagavan, the sutras are concerned with what neither arises nor ceases. The Bhagavan has also said ‘what neither arises nor ceases’¹⁶⁸ is another name for tathagatas. Bhagavan, is it because of their nonexistence that he says they neither arise nor cease? Or is it because it is another name for tathagatas?”¹⁶⁹

The Buddha replied, “I say nothing arises or ceases because the categories of existence and nonexistence do not apply.”¹⁷⁰

Mahamati replied, “Bhagavan, if nothing arises, then there is nothing for us to grasp. But if nothing arises, is there not something in the name? Could you please explain this?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Excellent. Excellent, indeed. Listen carefully and ponder this well, and I will explain and clarify this for you.”

Mahamati replied, “May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “I teach that ‘tathagata’ does not exist but also that nothing can be grasped in what neither arises nor ceases. Also, it neither arises nor ceases because it is not dependent on conditions. And yet, neither is it without meaning. What I teach, Mahamati, is that this is the name for a tathagata’s projection body.¹⁷¹ What does not arise is beyond

the understanding of followers of other paths, shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, or bodhisattvas of the first seven stages. Mahamati, 'what does not arise' is another name for a tathagata.

'Mahamati, it is like with 'Indra,' 'Shakra,' and 'Purandara.'¹⁷² Every such entity has multiple names. But because they have multiple names does not mean they have multiple existences or that they don't have their own existence. In the same manner, Mahamati, I have had countless hundreds of thousands of names in this karmic world. But when foolish people hear someone speak my names, they do not know they are different names of the Tathagata.

'Mahamati, some beings know me as Tathagata, others know me as Sar-vajna the All Knowing, or as Buddha the Enlightened, or as Natha the Refuge, or as Svayambhu the Self-Aware, or as Nayaka the Teacher, or as Vinayaka the Philosopher, or as Parinayaka the Guide, or as Rishi the Ascetic, or as Brahma, or as Vishnu, or as Ishvara, or as Pradhana the Victor, or as Kapila, or as Bhutanta the Real, or as Soma the Moon, or as Surya the Sun, or as Rama the King, or as Anutpada the Non-Arising, or as Anirodha the Unceasing, or as Sunyata the Empty, or as Thatata the Thus, or as Satya the Truth, or as Bhutatathata the Reality, or as Dharmata the True Nature, or as Nirvana, or as Nitya the Eternal, or as Samata the Impartial, or as Advaya the Non-Dual, or as Nirabhasa the Imageless, or as Mukti the Liberated, or as Yana the Path, or as Manomaya the Projection.

'Mahamati, like the moon in the water,¹⁷³ which is neither in nor not in the water, I have been known in this and other worlds by neither more nor less than countless hundreds of thousands of names such as these. The ignorant, however, fall prey to dualities

and are thus incapable of knowing me. Though they might revere and honor me, they do not understand the meaning of terms or know how to distinguish names and do not understand the way of personal understanding but cling instead to various texts and explanations. They imagine ‘what neither arises nor ceases’ is something that does not exist and do not realize it is another name for a tathagata, as with ‘Indra,’ ‘Shakra,’ and ‘Purandara.’ Because they do not understand where the way of personal understanding eventually leads, they become attached instead to whatever is said about things.

“Mahamati, such fools say things like this, ‘The meaning is like the words. Words and meaning are not separate. And how so? Because meaning has no substance. There is no meaning outside of words but only what resides in words.’”

“Mahamati, those in possession of such immature wisdom do not understand the essential nature of words. They do not understand that words arise and cease, while meaning does not arise or cease. Mahamati, all words are dependent on language. Meaning is not because it transcends existence and nonexistence. It is not subject to arising, and it has no substance. Mahamati, the tathagatas do not teach teachings dependent on language because what exists or does not exist cannot be found in language, but only by those who do not depend on language.

“Mahamati, if someone says what is taught by a tathagata is dependent on language, they speak falsely. The Dharma transcends language. Therefore, Mahamati, neither I nor any other buddha or bodhisattva speaks a single word or responds with a single word. And why not? Because the Dharma transcends language. It is not that we teach a meaningless meaning but that words are the projections of beings.¹⁷⁴ Still,

Mahamati, if we did not say anything, our teaching would come to an end. And if our teaching came to an end, there would be no buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyeka-buddhas, or shravakas. And if there were none, who would teach and who would listen?

“Therefore, Mahamati, bodhisattvas are not attached to words but expound the teaching of the sutras according to what is appropriate. Because the longings and afflictions of beings are not the same, I and other buddhas teach different teachings to beings with different levels of understanding so that they will get free of the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness, not so that they will attain the personal realization of buddha knowledge.¹⁷⁵ Mahamati, to understand that nothing exists except as a perception of one’s own mind and to transcend dualistic projections, bodhisattvas rely on meaning and not on language.

“If a noble son or daughter relies on language, they will not only harm their own understanding of ultimate truth, they will not be able to awaken others. As long as they rely on their attachment to mistaken views, they might teach others but without understanding the characteristics or stages of the different teachings and without understanding their expressions. But once they understand the characteristics and stages of the different teachings and understand their expressions and become fully versed in their essential meaning, they will be able to use the bliss of true freedom from projections and their own delight therein to establish beings everywhere in the Mahayana.

“Mahamati, those who embrace the Mahayana embrace buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyeka-buddhas, and shravakas. Those who embrace buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyeka-buddhas, and shravakas, embrace all beings. Those who embrace all

beings embrace the Dharma. Those who embrace the Dharma, do not bring an end to the lineage of buddhas. Those who do not bring an end to the lineage of buddhas know how to enter the most exalted of abodes. And knowing how to enter the most exalted of abodes, bodhisattvas are able to constantly teach others and establish them in the Mahayana. By their mastery of the ten powers,¹⁷⁶ they manifest different guises based on their understanding of the characteristics of the physical types, aspirations, and afflictions of other beings, and they teach them what is truly so. What is truly so does not vary. What is truly so does not come or go. What puts an end to all fabrications, this is what is truly so. Mahamati, a noble son or daughter should not embrace or cling to anything that is said because what is real is beyond language.

“Mahamati, if one person¹⁷⁷ points to something with their finger, and a foolish person looks at their finger, they won’t know what they really mean. In the same manner, foolish people become attached to the finger of words. And because they never look away from it, they are never able to discover the true meaning beyond the finger of words. Likewise, Mahamati, an infant should eat cooked rice, not uncooked rice. If someone feeds it uncooked rice, that person must either be mad or not know how to prepare rice.¹⁷⁸ Mahamati, the same is true of ‘what neither arises nor ceases.’ Those who don’t make an effort don’t become skilled. Thus, you should focus your efforts on becoming skilled and not on words, as if you were looking at someone’s fingertip.

“Thus, Mahamati, you should focus your efforts on the true meaning.¹⁷⁹ The true meaning is subtle and silent. It is the cause of nirvana. Words are linked to projections, and projections are

tied to birth and death. Mahamati, the true meaning is learned from the learned. Mahamati, those who are learned esteem meaning and not words. Those who esteem meaning don't accept the scriptures and doctrines of other schools. They don't accept them for themselves, nor do they cause others to accept them. Thus they are called 'learned and virtuous.' Hence, those who seek meaning should approach those who are learned, those who esteem meaning. And they should distance themselves from those who do the opposite and who attach themselves to words.”

LXXVII¹⁸⁰

Once again by means of the Buddha's spiritual power,¹⁸¹ Mahamati Bodhisattva asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, your proclamation of 'what neither arises nor ceases' is not unique. And why not? Because there are other schools whose causes¹⁸² neither arise nor cease. Also, the Bhagavan teaches that the realms of space, nonanalytic cessation¹⁸³ and nirvana neither arise nor cease.

"Bhagavan, other schools teach that every world arises from causes, while the Bhagavan teaches that every world arises from the conditions of ignorance, desire, karma, and projection. But the causes of the one and the conditions of the other are merely different words.

"The same is true for the causes and conditions of external objects, for which there is no difference between the explanations of the Bhagavan and those of other schools. Instead of their nine things¹⁸⁴ that neither arise nor cease, such as elementary particles, a first cause, a paramount power, or a creator, the Bhagavan also teaches that whatever exists neither arises nor ceases because its existence or nonexistence cannot be determined.

"Other schools also teach that the four elements are indestructible, that their essential nature neither arises nor

ceases, that they are eternal, and that the four elements extend everywhere without losing their essential nature. What the Bhagavan teaches is also like this, which is why I said it was not unique. I hope the Bhagavan can explain how it differs, how it is unique, and how it excels that of other schools. But if there isn't any difference, then the teachers of other schools must also be buddhas based on their teaching of 'what neither arises nor ceases.' The Bhagavan has said it is impossible for multiple buddhas to appear in the world at the same time. But according to the foregoing, if there isn't any difference, there would be multiple buddhas at the same time."

The Buddha told Mahamati, "My teaching of what neither arises nor ceases is not the same as the teaching of what neither arises nor ceases taught by members of other schools. And how so? According to these members of other schools, there is something that exists that has the characteristics of neither arising nor changing. ¹⁸⁵ Mine does not fall prey to such categories as existence or nonexistence. Mahamati, mine transcends the categories of existence and nonexistence. It is not subject to arising or ceasing. Neither does it exist, nor does it not exist.

"It does not not exist because it appears just as an illusion or a dream does. But then how does it not exist? Because form lacks any perceptible characteristics of self-existence, it appears but does not appear. It is perceived but is not perceived. Therefore whatever exists neither exists nor does not exist. Once you realize it is nothing but the perception of your own mind, its projections do not arise, you dwell in peace and happiness, and worldly concerns cease.

"What ignorant and foolish people do is give rise to projections, but not the wise. Projections are not real, like cities

of gandharvas or their conjured residents. Mahamati, foolish people imagine their conjured residents, such as merchants and shopkeepers, entering and leaving those gandharvan cities and that they really enter and leave, when, in fact, no one enters or leaves. It is merely due to their projections.

“Likewise, Mahamati, the confusion foolish people give rise to about what neither arises nor ceases is neither created nor not created. It is like the appearance of conjured beings. In truth, nothing arises or ceases. There is no existence or nonexistence. This is true of all things. They neither arise nor cease. Foolish people fall prey to falsehood and give rise to projections of arising and ceasing, but not the wise.

“What is false is not so, and it is no different with the projection of self existence. Though projections seem to be different,¹⁸⁶ they are attachments to the self-existence of things due to not seeing clearly.¹⁸⁷ Those who do not see clearly never get free of projections.

“Therefore, Mahamati, seeing what has no form is better than not seeing what has form. Seeing what has form is the cause of rebirth. Hence, it isn’t better. Mahamati, where there is no form, projections do not arise. What neither arises nor ceases is what I call nirvana. Mahamati, nirvana is to see the meaning of what is truly so and to get free from the net of thoughts of previous projections. To attain the personal realization of the noble knowledge of a tathagata, this is what I call nirvana.”

LXXVIII¹⁸⁸

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “To refute the doctrine of arising / to establish the truth of non-arising / I explain this teaching¹⁸⁹ / fools can’t understand

2. Although things don’t arise / they don’t exist as nothing¹⁹⁰ / as gandharvan cities, illusions, or dreams / they exist but without a cause

3. Why don’t things arise or exist by themselves / why are they empty / because apart from combinations / nothing appears to wisdom / thus I teach what is empty / what doesn’t arise and is not self-existent¹⁹¹

4. When this and that combine / something appears but doesn’t exist / analysis finds no combination / despite what other schools claim

5. As dreams, illusions, or strands of hair / mirages or gandharvan cities / such are the things of the world / they appear but without a cause

6. To refute doctrines of causation / I proclaim the truth of non-arising / because I proclaim non-arising / the Dharma continues unbroken / but the radiance of no causation / frightens the followers of other paths.”¹⁹²

Mahamati then asked in verse:

7. “How and caused by what / and why do things arise / and how do they come together / according to this doctrine of no causation?”

The Bhagavan then replied in verse:

8. “When created things are examined / as neither having nor not having a cause / the doctrine of arising and cessation / is undone by what one sees.”

Mahamati then asked in verse:

9. “Does non-arising mean nonexistence / or does it wait upon a cause / a name should not mean nothing / could you please explain?”¹⁹³

The Bhagavan then replied in verse:

10. “Non-arising isn’t due to nonexistence / nor does it wait upon a cause / nor does a name mean something exists / nor does a name have no meaning

11. Beyond the reach of other paths / pratyekabuddhas and shravakas / beyond the seven stages / this is the realm of non-arising¹⁹⁴

12. Beyond causes and conditions / likewise beyond all actions / resting on nothing but mind / this I say is non-arising¹⁹⁵

13. Things not arising from causes / neither existing nor not existing / beyond perceiver and perceived / this I say is non-arising¹⁹⁶

14. The mind without an object / beyond the two modes of reality¹⁹⁷ / transforming one’s very ground¹⁹⁸ / this I say is non-arising

15. No external existence or nonexistence / no grasping by the mind / putting an end to every view / this I say is non-arising

16. When something is thus distinguished / as empty and without self-existence / it isn't empty because it's empty / it's empty because it doesn't arise

17. When causes and conditions combine/ something arises and something ceases / aside from causes and conditions / nothing else arises or ceases

18. Aside from causes and conditions / there isn't something else that exists / something the same or different / despite what other schools say

19. Existence or nonexistence doesn't arise / there is no existence or nonexistence / except when combinations change / neither of these apply¹⁹⁹

20. It is only according to convention / mutual dependence becomes a chain / apart from the chain of causation / arising has no meaning

21. Arising doesn't arise if it doesn't exist / the error of other paths is thus avoided / I only speak of a chain of causation / when fools can't understand

22. As for something else arising / apart from the chain of causation / this is the doctrine of no causation / which denies the meaning of the chain

23. Just as a lamp illuminates forms / perception of the chain does the same / thus apart from the chain / something else would exist²⁰⁰

24. What doesn't arise doesn't exist / its existence is like that of space / apart from the chain of causation / the wise find nothing to see²⁰¹

25. But there is something that doesn't arise / something attained by the wise / the arising of which doesn't arise / the forbearance of non-arising²⁰²

26. If in every world / whatever you see is a chain /
everything as a chain / from this you will attain samadhi²⁰³

27. Ignorance, desire, and karma / these are the
interior chain / a bow drill, a lump of clay, a wheel / and
seeds make up the outsides²⁰⁴

28. If something else existed / something arising from
causes / this would negate the chain's meaning / and thus it
wouldn't succeed²⁰⁵

29. If something arose that didn't exist / which link
would be its cause / things give rise to each other / this is
what causation means

30. Solidity, moisture, heat, and movement²⁰⁶ / these
are the projections of fools / nothing else exists but their
combinations / thus I teach no self-existence

31. Like doctors who treat diseases / don't have
particular doctrines / because diseases differ / they
prescribe different cures

32. For the sake of other beings / to rid them of
afflictions / I gauge their level of understanding / before I
decide what to teach

33. But different afflictions and understandings / don't
mean different teachings / I only teach one path / the path
of the Mahayana. ”²⁰⁷

LXXIX 208

Mahamati Bodhisattva once more asked the Buddha, “Followers of other paths all give rise to projections of impermanence. The Bhagavan also teaches that all phenomena are impermanent, that they arise and they cease. What does this mean? Is this wrong? Or is this right? And how many kinds of impermanence are there?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Followers of other paths have seven kinds²⁰⁹ of impermanence, none of which are taught by me. And what are the seven? Some say impermanence is when something is created and then abandoned.²¹⁰ Some say impermanence is the destruction of shape. Some say impermanence is form.²¹¹

Some say impermanence is the process during which form changes and that because it involves an uninterrupted dissolution, like the transformation of milk to curds, the process of change is imperceptible but that impermanence destroys whatever is there. Some say impermanence is something that exists. Some say impermanence is something that exists and does not exist. And some say impermanence is something that does not arise but is inherent in all phenomena.²¹²

“Mahamati, according to impermanence as something that

exists and does not exist, the individual characteristics of the four elements and what they comprise are destroyed, but the self-existence of the four elements is imperceptible and does not arise.

“According to impermanence as something that does not arise, neither the existence nor nonexistence of anything arises, and even the most careful analysis yields nothing, neither permanence nor impermanence. This is the meaning of what does not arise, not of what does arise. This is what characterizes impermanence as something that does not arise. Those who don’t understand this fall prey to the view of followers of other paths that impermanence is something that arises.

“Mahamati, as for impermanence being something that exists, this is a projection of one’s own mind and not of the existence of permanence or impermanence. What does this mean? It means that the existence of impermanence itself is not destroyed. Mahamati, the nonexistence of what exists is the result of impermanence. Except for impermanence, there is nothing that can cause what exists not to exist. It is like a club or a roof tile²¹³ or a rock. It breaks things.

“Clearly it is no different for anything else. For in terms of existence and impermanence, there is no difference between cause and effect. If this is impermanence, and this is the effect, and there is no difference between cause and effect, then everything that exists would be permanent, as nothing would exist as a cause. Mahamati, the nonexistence of what exists does have a cause, but not one fools are aware of. A cause does not produce an unrelated effect. If it did, anything that exists could be impermanence. And if the effect were unrelated, there would be no difference between cause and effect, even though they

were clearly different.

“In the case of impermanence as something that exists, this would amount to the existence of an effect-producing cause. But if that were so, whatever exists would never end. If everything that exists amounted to an effect-producing cause, then impermanence itself would be impermanent. And because impermanence would be impermanent, everything that exists would not be impermanent but permanent.

“As for impermanence being inherent in whatever exists, this is contradicted by the three periods of time. Either it is destroyed along with past forms, or it does not arise in the future because such forms do not arise, or it is destroyed along with present forms. Forms are different combinations of the four elements, and the essential nature of the four elements and what they comprise is not subject to destruction, as it neither varies nor does it not vary. But while according to followers of other paths, the four elements are indestructible, it is common knowledge that the four elements and all the forms they comprise throughout the three realms arise and cease to exist. Where then do the followers of such paths conceive of impermanence as existing apart from the four elements and what they comprise if the four elements do not arise and their essential nature is not subject to destruction?

“As for impermanence existing apart from initial creation, there are no other four elements than the four elements because among the individual characteristics of their different characteristics, no differences can be found. Since they don't differ, they don't create something that does. This kind of impermanence, you should know, involves the non-arising of dualities.

“As for impermanence being the destruction of shape, this means that the four elements and what they comprise are not destroyed. They are never destroyed. Mahamati, if one analyzes objects into the finest particles, one observes their destruction, as the shapes of the four elements and what they comprise cannot avoid appearing to differ in terms of their dimensions. But this is not true of the four elements. The four elements are not destroyed. It is the shapes that appear to be destroyed. This falls under the doctrine of the Samkhyas.²¹⁴

“As for impermanence consisting in form, this means form itself is impermanence. But what is impermanent are shapes, not the four elements. If the four elements were impermanent, this would deny worldly convention. The denial of worldly convention falls under the doctrines of the Lokayatas,²¹⁵ who view whatever exists as nothing but words and individual characteristics as not arising.

“As for impermanence consisting in change,²¹⁶ this means that the existence of form appears to differ, not the four elements. For example, when we use gold to make ornaments, its appearance changes, but the nature of gold is not destroyed. It is only the ornaments that are subject to destruction. Thus, changes in whatever else exists are also like this.

“Such are the various views of impermanence held by followers of other paths who imagine that when fire destroys the four elements,²¹⁷ their individual characteristics are not destroyed. If their individual characteristics were destroyed, the four elements and what they comprise would cease to exist.

“Mahamati, my teaching is that what arises is neither permanent nor impermanent. And how so? Because external existence cannot be determined, I teach that the three realms are

nothing but mind and do not teach the arising or ceasing of their different characteristics. As for the four elements coming together and differentiating, the four elements and what they comprise are projections of the duality of subject and object. By understanding that dualistic views are projections, one gets free from the dualistic views of external existence and nonexistence, and one sees them as nothing but perceptions of one's own mind.

“Projections arise when you think about doing something, not when you do nothing. Avoid projections of the existence or nonexistence of the mind. All mundane, metaphysical, and transcendent dharmas are neither permanent nor impermanent. Those who fail to perceive them as merely perceptions of their own mind end up attached to erroneous, dualistic views. But because followers of other paths do not perceive them as their own projections, such fools have no means by which to know that all mundane, metaphysical, and transcendent dharmas are the result of their own projection of words. This is not something fools are aware of.”

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Something separate from what is created /
differences of shape / impermanence of form or existence /
these are what other schools see²¹⁸

2. In the indestructibility of what exists / the
persistence of the elements / other schools see
impermanence / immersed in a myriad views

3. For all such schools as these / there is no arising or
cessation / but if the elements last forever / what does
impermanence mean?

4. Everything is nothing but mind / from this dualities flow / among the grasping and the grasped / there is no self or its possessions

5. From Brahma's heaven to the roots of trees / throughout their world-encircling branches / what I teach is this / it is all nothing but mind."²¹⁹

1 Chapter Three. We hear more about what distinguishes buddhahood and the path leading thereto, with the Buddha taking the lead and Mahamati continuing to ask questions.

2 Section LVII. The Buddha doesn't wait for a question but explains one of the fruits of the bodhisattva path: the transformation of the body. Earlier, in sections XXX and LII he linked attainment of a projection body to the eighth stage of the path. Here, he identifies three kinds of such bodies, one attained prior to the eighth stage that realizes the nature of mind, one attained at the eighth stage that realizes the nature of dharmas, and one that realizes the nature of realization and is not associated with any stage—although it could be linked with any or all of the final three stages.

3 The ocean here represents the eighth, or repository, consciousness, while the waves represent the other seven forms of consciousness.

4 While emptiness is often listed as the essential nature of all dharmas, in the foregoing sections emphasis is placed on non-arising and illusoriness. This is the *Lankavatara's* solution to spiritual cultivation in light of the absence of a self.

5 In these two verses, the Buddha keeps a foot on either side of the path: self-realization and the liberation of others.

6 Section LVIII. Besides transformation of body, another fruit of the path is transformation of deed. Here the Buddha reinterprets

harmful acts committed against our greatest benefactors and redirects them toward our greatest enemies. As Pogo Possum once said, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

[7](#) As listed throughout the Buddhist Canon, these are the deeds that guarantee rebirth in Avici Hell and that prevent a person from attaining enlightenment in this life.

[8](#) The Sanskrit *avici* means “uninterrupted” or “unrelenting.” This is not only the hell in which there is no respite from suffering, it is also the hottest of all hells.

[9](#) Gunabhadra alone has people committing the five avici deeds and *not* falling into Avici Hell. All other translators and the Sanskrit have the expected: “Those who commit the five avici deeds fall into Avici Hell.” The Buddha’s explanation, however, clearly supports Gunabhadra.

[10](#) Thirst and ignorance are the cause of our appearance on the wheel of life and death. Hence, they are likened to our parents.

[11](#) Our passions lie in hiding until conditions encourage their appearance, which is why they are likened to disease-carrying rodents.

[12](#) Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit have “eight forms of consciousness.” But this must be a mistake, as the teaching of the *Lankavatara* involves putting an end to the first seven forms of consciousness and in transforming, not destroying, the eighth form of consciousness into buddha knowledge. Here, the seven forms of consciousness embody the buddha one imagines becoming as the result of cultivation.

[13](#) Emptiness, formlessness, and intentionlessness are the three gates of liberation. Our false awareness cannot be killed with kindness. Hence, practitioners show it no mercy.

[14](#) There is a play on words here (and also in the second of the

two verses in this section), as *avici* means “unrelenting.” Apparently the Sanskrit text changed. Bodhiruchi has “this is called realizing the true dharma,” and Shikshananda has “they are able to realize the true dharma.” Suzuki has “there is . . . realization as regards the Dharma.” As elsewhere, I’ve followed Gunabhadra.

[15](#) The idea here is that showing people how reprehensible such deeds are by projecting their appearance, they will not commit them. Here, we see the projection bodies of the previous section in action.

[16](#) Namely, Avici Hell.

[17](#) Section LIX. Implicit in this definition of buddhahood is a reinterpretation of the Four Noble Truths: how can there be suffering if there is no self; how can there be a cause of suffering if there is no obstruction; how can there be a cessation of suffering if there is no death; and how can there be a path leading to the cessation of suffering if there is no affliction.

[18](#) The two obstructions are passion and knowledge. Passion is the cause of karmic death. Knowledge is the cause of transformation death.

[19](#) The two kinds of death are karmic death and transformation death, the latter of which is so subtle it is barely noticed.

[20](#) The two afflictions are the senses and what the senses give rise to. It is on the basis of these that attachment to the two kinds of self exist and that the two kinds of obstructions appear and that the two kinds of death occur.

[21](#) In Section LVI, the Buddha says this about the one path: “By the one path I mean the one path to realization. And what does the one path to realization mean? Projections of subject or object do not arise in suchness. This is what the one path to

realization means.” Realization changes everything. It changes who or what we are. Thus, shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas also travel the one path because there are no shravakas or pratyeka-buddhas.

[22](#) Section LX. If a buddha’s awareness is based on no self, Mahamati wonders why the Buddha seems to talk in terms of a self, especially a self not limited by space or time. The Buddha sidesteps the issue of personal identity and points Mahamati instead to the nature of buddhahood, about which he just asked. As the Buddha notes in the second verse of the next section, buddhas are buddhas because they are buddhas and not other than buddhas.

[23](#) Once when the Buddha was walking with Ananda, he came upon a stupa and bowed down to pay his respects. When Ananda asked whose stupa this was, the Buddha replied, “This is the stupa of all past buddhas.” Ananda then asked, “And whose disciples were they?” The Buddha replied, “My disciples.” (Quoted by Tseng Feng-yi, pg. 468)

[24](#) The present Buddhist Canon contains hundreds of tales about Shakyamuni’s former lives in which he does not always appear as a human.

[25](#) This is the name of the first king of Shakyamuni’s clan.

[26](#) Chief of the gods, also known as Indra.

[27](#) The appearance of Sunetra here is not accidental. The Buddha’s statement that he was previously the sage, Sunetra, was used in several early texts, including Vasubandhu’s *Atmavadapratishedha*, as an example about which the existence or nonexistence of a permanent self was argued.

[28](#) These are the names of the first three buddhas of the present kalpa, Shakyamuni being the fourth. They are mentioned earlier

in Mahamati's questions in Section II, verse 48.

[29](#) In his explanations of these four, Gunabhadra inverts the order of the last two. The Sanskrit for these four is *akshara*, *vak*, *dharma*, and *kaya*.

[30](#) The Sanskrit for syllable is *akshara*, which means "imperishable," as syllables were thought to be the "atoms" of speech.

[31](#) The Buddha's voice was said to include eight tones, each of which possessed eight qualities. Thus, his voice was characterized by sixty-four transcendent sounds.

[32](#) A bird whose melodious voice is rarely, if ever, heard by humans, as it dwells beyond the red dust of the mundane world.

[33](#) Such bodies include those of humans but also those of elephants or parrots. The Buddha's mention of such bodies here is in response to the second part of Mahamati's question. While their bodies might differ in outward appearance, the marks and attributes that distinguish them as buddhas do not.

[34](#) These thirty-seven elements are often linked together with the earth representing the nature of reality, the seeds as the four subjects of mindfulness (*smirti-upasthana*), the planting of the seeds as the four right exertions (*samyak-prahanani*), the sprouting of the seeds as the four supernatural abilities (*riddhi-padah*), the sending down of roots as the five psychic faculties (*indriyani*), the sending forth of stems and leaves as the five higher powers (*balani*), the flower as the seven aids of enlightenment (*bodhi-angani*), and the fruit as the eightfold noble path.

[35](#) This refers to the four unhindered powers of teaching regarding subject, meaning, expression, and eloquence. The Buddha says "in short" here because these are but four of the

eighteen *avenika-dharmas*, or characteristics unique to buddhas.

[36](#) Section LXI. Mahamati continues his inquiry into the nature of buddhahood. If the Buddha's voice is like that of a kalavinka, and he teaches the thirty-seven elements of awareness, why does he say he doesn't speak? This was another section of the *Lanka* popular among early Zen masters.

[37](#) The usual span given for the period during which the Buddha taught is forty-nine years.

[38](#) The Sanskrit for these two terms is *sva-pratyatma-dharmata* and *paurana-sthiti-dharmata*. The essential truth (*dharmata*) cannot be known through words but must be realized. And what is realized doesn't depend on realization, much less words, to be true.

[39](#) The Sanskrit is *dharmadhatu*. This is one of a dozen terms for reality. What is real is not created by a buddha, nor does it depend on the appearance of a buddha.

[40](#) Section LXII. In a previous section, the Buddha said tathagatas are free from existence and nonexistence. Mahamati still doesn't understand the Buddha's teaching of mind and asks how to get free of this duality. The Buddha explains that while these two conceptions dominate people's thinking, including the thinking of would-be practitioners seeking to render the existence of their afflictions nonexistent, his teaching does not recognize the existence of afflictions much less their annihilation. To Hui-k'o, Bodhidharma said, "Show me this mind of yours, and I will calm it for you."

[41](#) In place of the usual *bhava-abhava*, the Sanskrit here is *astitva-nastitva*, which have roughly the same meaning: "existence and nonexistence."

[42](#) Referring to the second view that the world arises from nonexistence.

[43](#) The Sanskrit, as is evident in Suzuki's translation, adds the following: "They thus talk of the really-existing world as arising from the reality of causation. This is the realistic view of causation as held by some people." (ibid. pg. 125)

[44](#) The idea here is that afflictions previously existed but due to cultivation they ceased to exist. Hence, this is extrapolated into the general statement that "they exist then don't exist."

[45](#) The Sanskrit is *vainashika*. See Edgerton, page 510, where he applies the term here to "destructionists," those who maintain that all entities in the world cease to exist.

[46](#) The logic in this and the following sentence is that because the afflictions of desire, anger, and delusion cannot be found inside or outside practitioners, they cannot be seen to change from existing to not existing. Hence, to make assertions about their existence turning into nonexistence is to falsify the reality of enlightenment as well as to falsify the reality of afflictions. Thus, they are nihilists on both accounts. For the last line, Bodhiruchi has "afflictions are not one and not different." Shikshananda has "their existence is neither different nor not different."

[47](#) Referring to the characteristics of the skandhas, etc. as well as nirvana.

[48](#) Section LXIII. Turning from belief in existence or nonexistence, Mahamati asks about a way that transcends such dualities. The Buddha responds by outlining the way realized by and for oneself and the way as taught to others.

[49](#) The Sanskrit is *siddhanta-naya*. Normally, *siddhanta* refers to a conclusion established as the result of inquiry or logic, but here, as elsewhere in this sutra, it refers to a conclusion based

on spiritual insight rather than logic, thus an established truth, but one that must be realized and one that cannot be put into words. See also Section LXXII.

[50](#) Mara was the name of the demon that tried to tempt Shakyamuni the night of his Enlightenment. The term is also applied to any of Mara's host of demons that tries to distract practitioners.

[51](#) The Sanskrit for "way of instruction" is *deshana-naya*.

[52](#) The Mahayana Canon is usually described as having twelve divisions. This ninefold classification includes sermons of the Buddha (*sutras*), metrical pieces (*geyas*), prophecies (*vyakaranas*), poems (*gathas*), impromptu statements (*udanas*), narratives (*ityuktas*), stories of the Buddha's previous lives (*jatakas*), expanded sutras (*vaipulyas*), and miracles (*adbhuta-dharmas*), but it excludes causal conditions (*nidanas*), parables (*avadanas*), and treatises (*upadeshas*).

[53](#) Gunabhadra has *wu-ts'ui*, meaning "blameless." Hence, his text must have involved the alliteration: *niravadya* (blamelessness/stainlessness) is nirvana. Apparently, the Sanskrit text changed. Bodhiruchi has "freedom from consciousness," Shikshananda has "freedom from will," and Suzuki has "nothing to do with intellection (*manas*)." If Gunabhadra is correct, the "blame" would refer to the subject of the previous verse.

[54](#) In Shikshananda and the Sanskrit, this first line is: "There is no desire, anger, or delusion."

[55](#) Section LXIV. If our projections are unreal, as noted in the final verses of the last section, where do they come from and why? And why is ultimate reality not likewise subject to projections?

[56](#) The Sanskrit is *abhuta-parikalpita*, where *abhuta* means

“what has no foundation in reality,” and where *parikalpita* means “projection.” Thus, this term is redundant, as projections are necessarily without foundation.

[57](#) In his answer, the Buddha responds to Mahamati’s three questions: how do such projections arise, in what do they consist, and where do they reside—the answer to the last being the repository consciousness, where the habit-energy of such projections collects.

[58](#) This preamble to Mahamati’s question that repeats what the Buddha has just stated is missing in Shikshananda.

[59](#) Following the Sanskrit and the Chinese of Shikshananda, Suzuki adds several more lines to this paragraph. I’ve followed Gunabhadra.

[60](#) The four possibilities in this case refer to existence, nonexistence, both existence and nonexistence, and neither existence nor nonexistence. The meaning here is that since causes and conditions only exist as projections, it is projection from which the world actually arises.

[61](#) Gunabhadra expands this verse into six lines. I’ve condensed it to the standard four-line format based on the translations of Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda.

[62](#) Commentators describe this as a fruit producing a fruit, rather than a flower producing a fruit.

[63](#) For this line, Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit have variations of “determine/see they are nothing but mind.” But Gunabhadra’s version is much more interesting.

[64](#) These are different from the four uniformities listed in Section LX and include opposite pairs, not all of which are mentioned in the poem due to limitations of meter. The four, which only Gunabhdara seems aware of, include: characteristics and no

characteristics, causes and results, self and no self, practice and practitioner.

[65](#) This verse appears as this section's penultimate verse in the Sanskrit. The view that the world is a manifestation of the mind is not supported by this sutra. This and the verses that follow state the position upheld in the *Lankavatara*: that our mind is the world and the world is our mind. If the world were a manifestation of the mind, they would be different. But they are neither one nor different. Time for tea.

[66](#) This verse appears as this section's final verse in the Sanskrit.

[67](#) In the Sanskrit text, these last three verses appear between verse 9 and verse 10.

[68](#) The Sanskrit must have changed. Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda read this line differently: "thus transcending the mind as well," while Suzuki renders the Sanskrit: "which is thus free from intellection."

[69](#) These last four verses deal with the transformation of the five forms of sensory consciousness, the sixth, the seventh, and the eighth into the four kinds of knowledge. They also refer back to the four equalities: characteristics and no characteristics, cause and result, self and no self, practice and practitioner.

[70](#) Section LXV. The inquiry into the misconceptions and projections of the mind continues with speech (*ruta*) and meaning (*artha*). The Buddha has previously told Mahamati to rely on meaning and not on words. But without relying on words, how are we to understand meaning? The Buddha's only concern is our differentiation of speech and meaning and our attachment to one or the other. Thus, he tells Mahamati they are neither different nor not different. If you want to see what is in a room, you need a lamp. But viewing the lamp as different from

what is in the room is a mistake and only leads to the need for another lamp. Meaning isn't in the words, just as the room isn't in the lamp.

[71](#) In sections XXXII and XXXIII, the Buddha explains how word projection fails to express ultimate truth. Here, the focus is similar but different.

[72](#) This and the previous sentence are missing in Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit.

[73](#) Instruction, reflection, and meditation comprise the three sources of wisdom.

[74](#) Following this sentence there are several lines not present in Gunabhadra but present in the texts of Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit: "Mahamati, it is like someone who uses a lamp to examine his possessions and knows such and such a thing is like this and in such and such a place. Mahamati, bodhisattvas likewise rely on the lamp of speech to enter the realm of self-realization that is free from speech."

[75](#) See the passage quoted from the *Samyuktagama* in the note to Section LXXV, in which the validity of these positions are all denied.

[76](#) If nothing exists, then spiritual cultivation is meaningless.

[77](#) Section LXVI. From speech and meaning, the Buddha proceeds to consciousness and knowledge, on which the foregoing pair is based. It is the transformation of consciousness that constitutes knowledge, but there is no knowledge outside consciousness.

[78](#) The Buddha focuses on knowledge here. For more on consciousness, see Section IV in Chapter Two, where the Buddha outlines three kinds of consciousness: "Mahamati, we generally speak of eight forms of consciousness. But these can

be summarized under three headings: true consciousness, perceiving consciousness, and object-projecting consciousness.”

[79](#) As elsewhere in this sutra, individual characteristics refer to what distinguish one entity from another, while shared characteristics include such aspects as emptiness and the absence of a self shared by more than one entity, if not all entities. Here, the characteristics that are wished for refer to the end of samsara and the attainment of nirvana.

[80](#) The phrase “depends on personal attainment” is only present in Gunabhadra. The Sanskrit puts this paragraph after the next two.

[81](#) Throughout the rest of this section “knowledge” refers to transcendent knowledge.

[82](#) As in the previous paragraph, this refers to transcendent knowledge, not mundane or metaphysical knowledge.

[83](#) According to most commentators, the “threefold combination” refers to the powers and domains of sensation and the forms of consciousness that arise upon their conjunction. This term is also mentioned in sections LXVIII and LXXXII. In Section LXXIII, however, the Buddha says followers of other paths attribute awareness to the conjunction of self, sense organs, and sense objects, replacing consciousness with self.

[84](#) This line also appears in the eighth verse of Section X.

[85](#) Gunabhadra renders this verse in six lines. I’ve condensed it into the standard four-line format and relied on the translation of Shikshananda in doing so.

[86](#) Freedom from projections (*nirabhasa*) is a characteristic of the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path. Thus, the “higher stages” here refer to the ninth and tenth stages, where buddhahood occurs.

[87](#) This refers to the forbearance of non-arising, which is also a characteristic of the eighth stage.

[88](#) All three Chinese translations render this verse in six lines, as does the Sanskrit.

[89](#) Section LXVII. In the previous section, the Buddha indicated that the culmination of knowledge consisted in an understanding that nothing arises and nothing ceases. But such an understanding is not possible if someone believes something changes. Hence, the Buddha considers this subject in order to lead his audience from consciousness (and projection) to knowledge (and non-projection).

[90](#) Where I have “origin,” Gunabhadra has *shih*, which is his usual translation for *vastu* or *dravya*, meaning “object,” or *kriya*, “action.” Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda, however, have *sheng*, meaning “birth/rising,” and the Sanskrit has *utpada*, meaning “rising/origin.” In this case, I’ve followed Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit.

[91](#) As elsewhere, a city of gandharvas is made of clouds.

[92](#) Section LXVIII. The reason people believe something changes is because of their attachment to the projection that something exists or does not exist. But because their underlying projections are flawed, because they don’t realize they are nothing but the perceptions of their own mind, they struggle to get free in vain. The Buddha likens such people to silkworms wrapping themselves in cocoons of delusion.

[93](#) The Sanskrit here is *sandhi*, meaning “connection” or “continuity.”

[94](#) Gunabhadra renders *vikalpa-buddhi* (projections-awareness) quite literally as *wang-hsiang chueh* (awareness of projections). Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda ignore *buddhi* and

have simply *wang-hsiang* (projections). Suzuki puts *buddhi* (to be aware, to know) at the beginning of the next sentence, where it makes better sense. In this case, I've followed Suzuki.

[95](#) These ten include vows to liberate beings regardless of the unlimited nature of beings, worlds, space, reality, nirvana, buddha realms, tathagata knowledge, conditions of the mind, realms entered by buddha knowledge, and the transformation of worlds, dharmas, and knowledge.

[96](#) The Sanskrit is our old friend *paravrtti* (to overturn/transform).

[97](#) Such attachments as these constitute the obstruction of knowledge and the cause of transformation death.

[98](#) The Sanskrit adds “and of no-stages.”

[99](#) The previous eleven continuities are those of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, and followers of other paths, while these three are common to non-practitioners. The three continuities (*tri-samtati*) are also referred to as the three poisons. In either case, these continuities constitute the obstruction of passion and are the cause of karmic death.

[100](#) The five destinies include rebirth among gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and the denizens of the various hells. Asuras (gods who make war on other gods) are sometimes added to these five, making six destinies.

[101](#) As in Section LXVI, this refers to the powers and domains of sensation and the forms of consciousness that arise upon their conjunction.

[102](#) The three liberations refer to the emptiness of the eighth form of consciousness, the formlessness of the sixth, and the intentionlessness of the seventh.

[103](#) Gunabhadra renders this verse in six lines, which I have

condensed into four following the translation of Shikshananda.

[104](#) Section LXIX. Previously, the Buddha said things have no self-existence. But if nothing has self-existence, is this not the same as nihilism? At the same time, the Buddha’s teaching of personal realization would seem to be advocating self-existence. Is this not a contradiction? Thus, Mahamati wonders if the Buddha’s teaching does not involve attachment to views of existence and nonexistence. The Buddha reminds him that all teachings are expedient means, nothing more, and points him back to personal realization. This section is also noteworthy for the great variation among texts, as Suzuki himself noted. As elsewhere, I’ve followed Gunabhadra.

[105](#) Buddhists identify five kinds of vision, each associated with a different “eye”: the physical eye sees objects in the realm of desire, the divine eye sees objects in the realm of form, the wisdom eye sees objects in the realm of formlessness (and thus their emptiness), the dharma eye sees the means of liberation, and the buddha eye sees everything.

[106](#) The Sanskrit is *arya-bhava-vastu*. This is another term peculiar to the *Lankavatara*. As it is used by Mahamati, not by the Buddha, it refers to self-existence as perceived by the wise, what elsewhere is called “perfected reality” (*parinishpanna-svabhava*) .

[107](#) Although Mahamati realizes attachment to the existence or nonexistence of something is a delusion, he wonders if “higher reality” is not another delusion and if those not aware of it are thus not deluded. He repeats this view in the lines that follow.

[108](#) Unaware of the existence of something, they are not deluded. Unaware of what transcends existence and nonexistence, they are not not deluded.

[109](#) That is, if projections are inherently false, how do we discriminate what is real?

[110](#) The Sanskrit is *vivikta* (separation/detachment), which is used here, and in Section LXXVII, as equivalent to nirvana. By the “nonexistence of detachment,” Mahamati wonders whether detachment is equivalent to nothingness.

[111](#) Section LXX. The Buddha continues to develop the point with which he closed the previous section. Talking about what is real burns the mouth. To say anything at all is to ask for trouble. Fortunately, the Buddha has a mouth made of asbestos. In this case, he uses one of his own teachings as an example: “whatever exists does not arise.” Like any teaching of the Buddha, it was not meant as a proposition but as an expedient means to help those attached to existence or nonexistence. Also, it only works if it is applied to everything, including the proposition itself.

[112](#) Without a sufficient reason a proposition cannot be established. Hence, every proposition depends on a reason. Thus to establish the proposition, the reason would have to “arise.”

[113](#) In this case, that “something” is the statement of the proposition.

[114](#) The use of the five-part syllogism, consisting of proposition, reason, example, application, and conclusion, was common to a number of schools of logic in ancient India. Buddhist texts list thirty-three errors inherent in the use of such syllogisms.

[115](#) The standard example is water, which fish see as we do air, which hungry ghosts see as fire, and which devas see as aquamarine.

[116](#) Left unsaid here is what to teach to those fearful of the teaching of the illusory nature of imagined reality. The teaching

used for the fearful is “the personal realization of buddha knowledge,” which was dealt with in the previous section.

[117](#) Although the translations of Gunabhadra and Shikshananda are in agreement, Bodhiruchi and the Sanskrit have “no repository consciousness” in the second line. This series represents the denials of other paths. But if such claims were true, those making them would have to be nonexistent themselves.

[118](#) The three liberations are emptiness, formlessness, and intentionlessness.

[119](#) All three Chinese translations render this verse in six lines, as does the Sanskrit.

[120](#) Section LXXI. If opening one’s mouth only leads to trouble, what about one’s eyes and ears? How do we obtain knowledge? And what are the obstacles? Mahamati still thinks of knowledge as something we obtain from an external world and still does not grasp that whatever we might know is a perception of our own mind. It turns out no knowledge is knowledge. Who would have guessed?

[121](#) The Sanskrit for “knowable” is *jneya*, which Gunabhadra transcribes: *er-yen*.

[122](#) Namely, views that equate the absence of knowledge with no knowledge.

[123](#) Section LXXII. The reason Mahamati is still attached to external existence is because he has not yet experienced the personal realization of the knowledge of a buddha. Hence, the Buddha repeats his earlier mention of the way of attainment (which Suzuki translates “self-realization”) and the way of instruction, which he dealt with earlier in Section LXIII. The way of instruction is for external knowledge, and the way of

attainment is for knowledge that is neither external nor internal.

[124](#) The Sanskrit is *nrtyat*. Normally, the term means “to dance.” But it also means “to turn around,” which is how Gunabhadra translated it (*hui-chuan*). However, Shikshananda chose *huan-huo* (to be mystified), which I think comes closer to what is meant here.

[125](#) Again, the fourfold tetralemma: it exists, it does not exist, it exists and does not exist, it neither exists nor does not exist.

[126](#) The past, the present, and the future.

[127](#) Section LXXIII. Mahamati wonders if the way of instruction does not include other philosophies, such as materialism. But not only do materialists confuse ordinary people, they also use their “way of instruction” to confuse the gods. The Buddha redirects Mahamati to the “way of attainment,” which he also calls the “way of personal understanding,” which, ironically, is too empirical for materialists, as it alone is based on one’s own experience.

[128](#) The Sanskrit for “materialist” is *lokayata*. This term included all those whose approach to knowledge was based on knowledge gained from the five senses.

[129](#) The Sanskrit is *amisha* (flesh, object of enjoyment). Gunabhadra has simply *t’u* (desire/lust). In this case, I’ve turned to the Sanskrit.

[130](#) The Sanskrit for this expression is *sva-naya*, or literally, “one’s own way,” which refers to the “way of attainment” of the previous section.

[131](#) Shakra, also known as Indra, was chief of the gods and himself an expositor of Buddhist doctrine.

[132](#) The Chinese translations all have *lung* (dragon), but the Sanskrit text has *naga* (serpent). A multiheaded, multihooded

cobra was a standard conception in ancient Indian mythology with the snake, of course, representing the guardian of knowledge.

[133](#) Different sutras outline different time spans for the age in which the Dharma flourishes and in which it can be understood. The most common conception outlines four such periods of five hundred years, after which people will no longer understand the Dharma, or if they do, it will only be with the greatest difficulty and in the most superficial manner.

[134](#) This is a catchall phrase for the underlying duality in the teachings of materialists concerning change.

[135](#) The threefold gate of liberation is marked by emptiness, formlessness, and effortlessness (or intentionlessness). In his commentary, T'ung-jun notes, "The stance of those who understand the way of truth of self-existence is firm. They teach materialism all day, yet it is not materialism. Meanwhile, the stance of those who don't understand is unstable. They teach what is not materialism all day, yet it turns out to be materialism."

[136](#) Brahmins are the priests and chief functionaries of the various Hindu traditions. The name comes from Brahma, the creator of the universe. The text here presents this Brahmin as arrogant and disdainful, with no respect for the Buddha's teaching. Although a "materialist Brahmin" sounds like a contradiction, there were materialist sects among Hindus.

[137](#) These three were considered *asamskrita* (uncreated) dharmas in the abhidharma of some sects, though not all included nirvana. If uncreated dharmas are like this, how much more so those that are created.

[138](#) This refers to an existence between one life and the next.

[139](#) These represent the views of the world as functioning either

according to causes or not according to causes—in short, according to a deity.

[140](#) This is a comment on the three uncreated dharmas, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. At the end of this paragraph, Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit add: “How much more so teachings about whether they are created or uncreated.”

[141](#) At this point, the Sanskrit text inserts a paragraph about a conversation with the serpent king of Chapter One.

[142](#) These ten vows are listed in a note to Section LXVIII.

[143](#) Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit begin this series with another verse that clearly does not belong and must have come from somewhere else: “Beings are attracted by training (meditation) / morality ends their evil deeds / wisdom their mistaken views / which lead to liberation.”

[144](#) Section LXXIV The previous section talked about the cause of the world according to materialists. This section talks about liberation from the world, or nirvana. Nirvana was seen by Hinayana Buddhists as the final and complete annihilation of both body and mind, while Mahayana Buddhists see it as the final and complete transformation of the bifurcating/bifurcated mind. In addition to Buddhists, other paths had their own views of this form of ultimate liberation, and in this section the Buddha lists more than twenty of them.

[145](#) This paragraph lists different versions of the view of nirvana held by most Hinayana Buddhists; namely, it is the end of something.

[146](#) Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda add *pu* (not) here (“For some, *not* seeing permanence and impermanence is nirvana”), and this is supported by the Sanskrit. However, in support of

Gunabhadra's version, T'ung-jen notes that this was, in fact, the view of followers of the Rudra-Shiva sect.

[147](#) Again, Gunabhadra omits *pu* (non-destruction), but it is present in Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda, who simply repeat their rendering of the previous view.

[148](#) Purusha is viewed by many early Hindu sects as creating the world out of his body.

[149](#) According to this view, which is interpreted differently by the different commentators, the tendencies (*gunas*) are permanent and combine to form objects of sensation, which are impermanent.

[150](#) The last part of this sentence is also handled differently by Bodhiruchi: "the end of affliction is due to wisdom" and Shikshananda: "the end of affliction is not due to wisdom."

[151](#) Brahma and Shiva are the standard examples of such a power.

[152](#) As noted earlier, the three tendencies (*gunas*) of creation, stasis, and destruction were considered the forces or building blocks of reality by the Samkhyas.

[153](#) According to the Samkhyas, the primordial darkness gives rise to awareness, which gives rise to the sense of self, which gives rise to the five subtle elements, which give rise to the five gross elements, which give rise to the eleven bases of sensation, which altogether is twenty-five realities.

[154](#) According to the Vaisheshikas, the six included substance (*dravya*), tendency (*guna*), action (*karma*), sameness (*samanya*), difference (*vishesa*), and combination (*samavaya*).

[155](#) For the last few lines, Bodhiruchi has: "There are followers of still other paths who say distinguishing something that exists,

or something that doesn't exist, or something that exists and does not exist is nirvana." Shikshananda has: "Some imagine something that exists or does not exist is nirvana, while others imagine nirvana as no difference between nirvana or anything else." The Sanskrit agrees with Shikshananda.

[156](#) These pairs include no self among beings or things, the afflictions of the senses and what arises from them, the obstructions of passion and knowledge, and karmic and transformation death.

[157](#) Pain resulting from direct causes, from deprivation and from impermanence. Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit all have "words give rise to the three realms."

[158](#) In this metaphor, the world is likened to the image and the mind to the mirror. To know which is which is to know the mind and the world. For the first line, Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit have variations of "who doesn't know what they perceive is only mind." Likewise, for the third line, they all have "who knows it is only mind." The readings of lines two and four are the same in all versions.

[159](#) Section LXXV. In the previous section, the Buddha moves away from the traditional view of nirvana as the end of something to the later view that it is marked by the presence of something, namely enlightenment. Hence, Mahamati asks about enlightenment. But in defining enlightenment, the Buddha avoids any of the major dualities: it is neither different nor not different from the skandhas, from liberation, or from wisdom.

[160](#) In place of *yu* (want), Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda have variations of "accept." The reason for such a reaction by buddhas is that if any result were tantamount to buddhahood, this would sever the relationship between practice and

attainment.

[161](#) In the *Samyuktagama*, the Buddha asks the ascetic Shrenika Vatsagotra if the Tathagata is the same as the skandhas, and Shrenika says, “No, Bhagavan.” Again the Buddha asks if the Tathagata is separate from the skandhas, and again Shrenika answers, “No, Bhagavan.” The Buddha then asks if the Tathagata is inside the skandhas. Again Shrenika answers, “No, Bhagavan.” The Buddha then asks if the skandhas are inside the Tathagata. Once more Shrenika says, “No, Bhagavan.” Finally the Buddha asks if the Tathagata is not the skandhas, to which Shrenika answers, “No, Bhagavan.”

(105) Likewise, in the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, the Buddha says that enlightenment is neither inside the skandhas nor outside them, nor both inside and outside them, nor other than the skandhas. (1/9) Two horns one bull.

[162](#) This repetition of the initial pair is only present in Gunabhadra.

[163](#) In this and the following sentence, Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit all have “like space” instead of “essentially nirvana.”

[164](#) In this series of verses, as in the foregoing text, the third person singular refers to enlightenment, the subject about which Mahamati asked.

[165](#) This refers to the twelve nidanas, or links, that make up the chain of dependent origination that begins with ignorance and memory and ends with old age and death.

[166](#) For this line, Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit have variations of “it isn’t the skandhas and not not the skandhas.”

[167](#) Section LXXVI. Mahamati inquires further into the nature of a tathagata. Previously he was told to let go of appearances. Now it is names. Here, he focuses on one particular name used to describe and refer to a tathagata but misunderstands it, thinking “what neither arises nor ceases” must necessarily refer to nothing (meaning) or something (words). The Buddha reminds him not to focus on words but on meaning and that meaning is neither a nothing nor a something.

[168](#) The Sanskrit is *anirodha-anutpada*.

[169](#) Implicit in Mahamati’s question is the suspicion that the Buddha’s statements are contradictory. If “what neither arises nor ceases” refers to nothing, this is tantamount to nihilism; if it refers to something, such as a name, it is tantamount to eternalism.

[170](#) Gunabhadra’s is the only translation that includes this statement. It is because nothing arises that there is no “something,” and it is because nothing ceases, there is no “nothing.”

[171](#) The projection bodies of a buddha are also mentioned in sections XXX, LII, and LVII. Of the three types of projection bodies mentioned, this is the third type, which is able to teach the Dharma.

[172](#) Indra is chief of the gods and is also known as Shakra and Purandara.

[173](#) The water represents the minds of all beings, and the moon is the body of the Tathagata.

[174](#) This is a difficult sentence and is variously interpreted by Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and Suzuki. I’ve followed Gunabhadra who understands this as confronting the problem of a meaning that transcends words.

[175](#) The reasoning here is that such beings are still dependent on the way of instruction and not yet ready for the way of attainment. Language is for those in need of instruction, no language is for those ready to see for themselves.

[176](#) There are different lists of these powers, but the most typical is the one that includes a knowledge or mastery of right and wrong, karma, meditation, the senses, desires, natures, directions, past lives, divine sight, and passionlessness.

[177](#) Gunabhadra has “foolish person,” but in this case I’ve followed Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit.

[178](#) Gunabhadra and Shikshananda have the infant going mad. Certainly feeding a child uncooked rice would not make it happy, but mad, as in crazy? I’ve turned to Bodhiruchi in this case.

[179](#) Only Gunabhadra has this sentence.

[180](#) Section LXXVII. Mahamati continues his inquiry and wonders if the Buddha’s teaching of what neither arises nor ceases differs from that of other schools. The Buddha tells him that despite their usage of similar expressions, there is always something behind the words of other schools, while he uses this term because everything is illusory and neither arises nor ceases. What seems to arise or cease are nothing but the perceptions of one’s own mind.

[181](#) At the beginning of Chapter One and Chapter Two, Mahamati also rises by the Buddha’s power to ask his questions. It’s been awhile, but the sutra reminds us that it is really a dialogue engineered by the Buddha to question himself. Then, too, Mahamati asks questions he might not normally ask and represents the views of others who might have such doubts in the future.

[182](#) The causes are listed at the end of the next paragraph.

[183](#) The Sanskrit is *apratismkhyā-nirodha*. This is one of the two types of cessation recognized by the Sarvastivadins and one of the six uncreated dharmas of the Yogacarins. This refers to the cessation of whatever gives rise to suffering not as the result of analysis and understanding, but simply as the result of fortuitous circumstances. Hence, it is temporary.

[184](#) Not mentioned here are: time, direction, space and Brahma.

[185](#) This probably refers to a creator god, such as Brahma, who does not arise or change. Or it could refer to death. All three Chinese translations have *bien* (changing) here, instead of the usual *mieh* (ceasing).

[186](#) That is, they seem not to be false.

[187](#) The Sanskrit is *avivikta-darshana*, which is similar to *avivikta-drishti*, both of which mean “to not see clearly/distinctly.”

[188](#) Section LXXVIII. This section denies doctrines of arising, establishes the truth of non-arising, and treats doctrines of other paths claiming non-arising and non-cessation as projections and as just more versions of arising. There is considerable variation among the translations for this section. As elsewhere, I’ve followed Gunabhadra, unless otherwise noted.

[189](#) For this line, Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit have “I teach the truth of ‘no cause’ (*abetu-vada*).”

[190](#) I’ve followed Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit for this line, which is not clear in Gunabhadra.

[191](#) This verse is rendered in six lines by all versions.

[192](#) Another verse rendered by all versions in six lines. Only Gunabhadra has *chih-jan* (bright light).

[193](#) Bodhiruchi omits most of this. Shikshananda has this verse

in four lines. Gunabhadra renders it in six lines, which I've summarized in four.

[194](#) Non-arising (the forbearance of non-arising) is associated with the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path. Hence, bodhisattvas of the first seven stages do not understand this teaching.

[195](#) Gunabhadra omits the last line. I've followed Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit in including it.

[196](#) Three of this verse's four lines and the first two lines of the next verse are missing in Gunabhadra. I've followed Shikshananda.

[197](#) Imagined (*parikalpita*) and dependent (*paratantra*) reality.

[198](#) The Sanskrit is *paravrtti-ashraya*, overturning the basis, transforming the foundation.

[199](#) For the last two lines, Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit all have variations of "except when things combine / something is seen arising or ceasing."

[200](#) The lamp, for example.

[201](#) For the last line, Bodhiruchi has "which isn't known to fools," while Shikshananda and the Sanskrit have "which is what fools perceive."

[202](#) The forbearance of the non-arising of all things is attained at the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path. The Sanskrit is *anutpattika-dharma-kshanti*.

[203](#) For the third line, Gunabhadra has "everything free from chains." But no other edition agrees.

[204](#) From a bow drill comes fire, from clay comes a pot, from a wheel comes a cart, from seeds come plants.

[205](#) For the last line, Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda have, "and

thus negate the teaching.”

[206](#) These refer to the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind.

[207](#) For this last line, Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit have: “the auspicious Eightfold Noble Path.” The Buddha’s meaning here is that while afflictions and understandings might differ, what appear as different teachings are not different teachings. If they were different, they would not be Mahayana teachings.

[208](#) Section LXXIX. The recognition of impermanence underlies the Buddha’s teaching. But the Buddha was not alone in such recognition. Other schools also taught impermanence. This section presents an admittedly convoluted review of their views and notes their inherent flaws and concludes with the Buddha’s teaching. Some of the views criticized involve differences as to how the material world and the elements of which it is composed are understood, others differ as to whether impermanence is some kind of independent entity. All of these views, however, fail to realize that whatever they perceive is nothing but the mind. Permanence and impermanence are irrelevant.

[209](#) Bodhiruchi says “eight kinds.” Suzuki points out what he thinks must be Bodhiruchi’s eighth kind, but I think it is simply an explanation, which is something Bodhiruchi frequently adds to his translation.

[210](#) That is, things are abandoned by the causes that gave rise to them.

[211](#) Buddhists differentiate shape (*samsthana*) and form (*rupa*). Shape is the external appearance of material form, while form is anything external, material or not, and includes sound,

smell, taste, and touch.

[212](#) In the paragraphs that follow, the Buddha explains these seven kinds of impermanence, but in an order different from his initial list: 6, 7, 5, 1, 2, 3, 4. Note that in his explanations of these seven, the Buddha presents them from the points of view of their adherents followed by comments of his own.

[213](#) Roof tiles were sufficiently heavy to keep from being blown off.

[214](#) Samkhyas believed that the world was a combination of matter and spirit, with the former being made of varying amounts of *gunas* (tendencies or qualities) of creation, stasis, and destruction that were permanent and indestructible.

[215](#) This refers to materialists who held that the world (*loka*) alone exists, that it is made up of the four elements, and that only knowledge gained through the five senses is valid. Thus, worldly conventions are, as a rule, invalid.

[216](#) This is the fourth kind of impermanence mentioned at the beginning of this section.

[217](#) The world-destroying conflagration at the end of a series of kalpas.

[218](#) In summarizing some of the kinds of impermanence mentioned in this verse, the Buddha sees such conceptions as irrelevant. Arguments about impermanence are themselves nothing but mind.

[219](#) For this last verse, Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda have: “Everything including Brahma’s heavens / I say are nothing but mind / apart from the mind / there is nothing to be found.” Some sects held that Brahma alone was permanent but everything created by him was not. His heaven is located beyond the realm of desire at the base of the realm of form.

CHAPTER FOUR:

FINAL QUESTIONS¹



LXXX²

Mahamati Bodhisattva again asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, would you please explain for bodhisattvas, shravakas, and pratyeka-buddhas the sequence of stages involving the Samadhi of Cessation,³ so that once I and the other bodhisattvas better understand this sequence, we will not wrongly forsake⁴ the bliss of the Samadhi of Cessation or fall prey to the foolishness of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, or followers of other paths.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen carefully and ponder it well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati answered the Buddha, “Would the Bhagavan please instruct us.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “It is at the sixth stage that bodhisattvas, shravakas, and pratyeka-buddhas enter the Samadhi of Cessation.⁵ At the seventh stage, bodhisattvas think thoughts during this samadhi, but thoughts that are free from any characteristic of self-existence.⁶ This is not true of shravakas or pratyeka-buddhas. Shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas fall prey to their own accomplishments and are aware of a practitioner and a practice during this samadhi. Therefore, at the seventh stage they do not think thoughts. Instead of the undifferentiated nature of things, they still perceive their different characteristics during this samadhi, such as which are good or bad.⁷ Hence, at

the seventh stage they are unable to think during this samadhi.

“Mahamati, from the first to the seventh stage,⁸ bodhisattvas see the three realms as nothing but mind, will, and conceptual consciousness and without a self or what belongs to a self. But for bodhisattvas, shravakas, and pratyeka-buddhas at the eighth stage, projections of mind, will, and conceptual consciousness cease. Meanwhile, those fools who cultivate their own projections remain trapped by the myriad characteristics of external entities and see things in terms of the dialectic of subject and object unaware that these are the result of habit-energy from the beginningless past.

“Mahamati, at the eighth stage, bodhisattvas, shravakas, and pratyeka-buddhas experience nirvana. But because bodhisattvas are supported by buddhas during samadhi,⁹ despite the bliss of samadhi, they do not enter nirvana. Without such support, they would not complete the tathagata stage and would give up all that they do for other beings and would sever their membership in the lineage of buddhas. Therefore, the buddhas tell them of the inconceivable and infinite virtues of a tathagata. Meanwhile, shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas are seduced by the bliss of samadhi and create the thought of nirvana.

“Mahamati, I have distinguished these seven stages that involve examining characteristics of the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness, and that involve examining the self and what belongs to a self and the absence of a self among both persons and things, and that involve examining the individual and shared characteristics of what arises and ceases, and that also involve mastery of the four unhindered powers of argument and judgment,¹⁰ samadhi, the sequence of stages, and the elements of awareness in order to prevent bodhisattvas unaware of

individual or shared characteristics and unfamiliar with the seven stages from falling prey to the mistaken doctrines of other paths. This is why I teach a sequence of stages.

“Mahamati, there is nothing that actually arises or ceases. The sequence of stages and all the phenomena in the three realms are nothing but perceptions of one’s own mind. But fools are unaware of this. And because they are unaware, I and other buddhas talk about a sequence of stages and talk about the phenomena of the three realms.

“Moreover, Mahamati, shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas at the eighth bodhisattva stage become so intoxicated by the bliss of the Samadhi of Cessation, they fail to realize it is nothing but the perception of their own mind. Obstructed by the habit-energy of individual and shared characteristics, they fall prey to views of attachment to no self among persons and things and give rise to conceptions of nirvana, not to an understanding of detachment from dharmas,¹¹

“Mahamati, when bodhisattvas experience the bliss of the Samadhi of Cessation, because of their earlier vows of compassion to complete the ten inexhaustible deeds,¹² they do not give rise to conceptions of nirvana. And because conceptions of nirvana do not arise, they transcend projections of grasping and what is grasped and realize that these are nothing but perceptions of their own mind. And because they do not give rise to projections of any kind, they do not fall prey to projections of the mind, will, or conceptual consciousness or characteristics of external existence. They do not give rise to what is not conducive to the Dharma. And as their wisdom grows, they reach the tathagata stage of self-realization.

“It is like someone crossing a river in a dream who wakes up

before they are across.¹³ Once they are awake, they wonder if it was real or not. But it was neither real nor not real. It was only because of the different habit-energy of the traces that remained from the sights, sounds, feelings, and thoughts from the beginningless past that different shapes appeared and disappeared in the dream that is the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness.

“Mahamati, this is how bodhisattvas at the eighth stage view the arising of projections. As they progress from the first stage through the seventh stage, they see everything as an illusion. But once they transcend projections of subject and object, they undertake the work of the Dharma so that those who have not yet understood understand. Mahamati, this is the nirvana of bodhisattvas. It does not involve annihilation. And because they transcend the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness, they achieve the forbearance of non-arising. Mahamati, the ultimate truth includes no sequence of stages. The absence of all projections, this is what is meant by detachment from dharmas.”¹⁴

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Nothing but mind and no projections¹⁵ / this abode and the buddha stage¹⁶ / these are what tathagatas teach / past, present, and those to come
2. Nothing but mind is the seventh stage / no projections is the eighth / of the two stages where I dwell¹⁷ / the buddha stage is supreme
3. Self-realization and purity / these make up my world / in the highest heaven of heavens¹⁸ / adorned with the purest forms

4. With the blazing fire of knowledge / filling all directions with light / with a radiance that doesn't blind / I appear throughout the three realms

5. I appear in the present world / I appear in worlds gone by / the paths I teach in each / all lead to the buddha stage

6. The tenth stage thus becomes the first / the first becomes the eighth / the ninth becomes the seventh / and the seventh becomes the eighth

7. The second becomes the third / the fourth becomes the fifth / the third becomes the sixth / but which is free from projections?"¹⁹

LXXXI²⁰

Mahamati again asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, are the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones permanent or impermanent?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “The tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones are neither permanent nor impermanent. Either assertion would be mistaken.²¹ If they were permanent, the problem would be that of a first cause²² because what is permanent, according to followers of other paths, is a first cause that is not itself caused. Hence, the permanence of tathagatas would not be permanent because the problem would be that of not possessing the permanence of a first cause. And if tathagatas were impermanent, the problem would be that of the impermanence of a first cause. Also, since the characteristics characterized by the skandhas do not exist by themselves, when the skandhas disappear, the tathagatas should cease to exist. But they do not cease to exist.

“Mahamati, everything that is caused is impermanent, like a pot or a robe. But if everything suffered from impermanence, all knowledge, attainments, and skills would be meaningless because they would be caused. And everything caused would be a tathagata because its causal basis would be the same. Therefore, Mahamati, tathagatas are neither permanent nor

impermanent.

“Moreover, Mahamati, tathagatas are not permanent like space.²³ If they were permanent like space, their attainment of the self-realization of buddha knowledge would be meaningless. Mahamati, if anything were like space, it would be neither permanent nor impermanent. It would transcend permanence and impermanence. Because of the problems of permanence and impermanence, it could not be said to be one or the other or both or neither. Therefore, tathagatas are not permanent.

“Again, Mahamati, if tathagatas possessed the permanence of what does not arise,²⁴ such as that of rabbit horns or horse horns, because of the permanence of what does not arise, their practice would be meaningless. Thus, because of the problems with a permanence that does not arise, tathagatas are not permanent.

“Moreover, Mahamati, there is another aspect in which we know tathagatas are permanent. And what aspect is that? The knowledge attained by realization is permanent. Therefore, tathagatas are permanent. Mahamati, whether tathagatas appear in the world or do not appear in the world, the Dharma is fixed and abiding.²⁵ Shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, and tathagatas all dwell in realization, not in space. But this is not something fools would know.

“Mahamati, the knowledge attained by tathagatas is the result of prajna²⁶ and not the result of the skandhas, dhatus, or ayatanas or the mind, the will, or conceptual consciousness. Mahamati, everything in the three realms arises from false projections. But tathagatas do not arise from false or empty projections.

“Mahamati, it is because of duality that there is permanence

and impermanence, not because of non-duality. Non-duality means detachment, where nothing is characterized by the appearance of dualistic characteristics. Therefore, the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones are neither permanent nor impermanent. Mahamati, whenever distinctions of language occur, there are problems regarding permanence and impermanence. Only when distinctions cease are they transcended. But foolish people are not detached from views of permanence and impermanence. It is the wise who once and for all transcend permanence and impermanence and who are not affected by either.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Neither permanent nor impermanent / but perceived as permanent or impermanent / who sees the buddhas like this / doesn’t give rise to mistaken views²⁷
2. The meaninglessness of accomplishments / results from permanence or impermanence / whose knowledge is free from distinctions / leaves permanence and impermanence forever
3. Once a position is established / a multitude of truths appear²⁸ / who sees nothing but mind / cannot be touched by words.”

LXXXII²⁹

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, would you please explain again the arising and cessation of the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas? If they contain no self, who arises, and who ceases? Foolish people rely on arising and cessation and fail to experience an end of suffering and fail to know nirvana.”

The Buddha said, “Excellent. Listen carefully, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati replied, “May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha said, “The tathagata-garbha is the cause of whatever is good or bad and is responsible for every form of existence everywhere. It is like an actor who changes appearances in different settings but who lacks a self or what belongs to a self. Because this is not understood, followers of other paths unwittingly imagine an agent responsible for the effects that arise from the threefold combination.³⁰

“When it is impregnated by the habit-energy of beginningless fabrications, it is known as the repository consciousness and gives birth to fundamental ignorance³¹ along with seven kinds of consciousness. It is like the ocean whose waves rise without cease. But it transcends the misconception of impermanence or the conceit of a self and is essentially pure and clear.

“The seven kinds of thoughts of the remaining forms of consciousness—the will, conceptual consciousness, and the others—rise and cease as the result of mistakenly projecting and grasping external appearances. Because people are attached to the names and appearances of all kinds of shapes, they are unaware that such forms and characteristics are the perceptions of their own minds and that bliss or suffering do not lead to liberation. As they become enveloped by names and appearances, their desires arise and create more desires, each becoming the cause or condition of the next. Only if their senses stopped functioning, and the remaining projections of their minds no longer arose, and they did not distinguish bliss or suffering, would they enter the Samadhi of Cessation of Sensation and Perception in the fourth dhyana heaven.³² However, in their cultivation of the truths of liberation,³³ they give rise to the concept of liberation and fail to transcend or transform what is called the repository consciousness of the tathagata-garbha. And the seven kinds of consciousness never stop flowing. And how so? Because the different kinds of consciousness arise as a result of causes and conditions. This is not the understanding of shravaka or pratyeka-buddha practitioners, as they do not realize there is no self that arises from grasping the individual or shared characteristics of the skandhas, dhatus, or ayatanas.³⁴

For those who see the tathagata-garbha, the five dharmas, the modes of existence, and the two kinds of no-self cease to exist.³⁵ And once they progress through the sequence of stages and are not swayed by the views of other paths, they are said to dwell in the unshakeable stage³⁶ of bodhisattvas, where they enjoy the bliss of the ten samadhis.³⁷ Supported by the buddhas during such samadhis, they reflect on the inconceivable Dharma.

But because of their vows, they do not grasp the bliss of samadhi or ultimate reality.³⁸ And by means of the personal realization of buddha knowledge, which is not among the practices of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, or followers of other paths, they complete the ten-stage path of the lineage of sages,³⁹ and they acquire bodies of knowledge and projection that transcend samadhi.

“Therefore, Mahamati, bodhisattvas who seek the highest goal should purify what are called the tathagata-garbha and the repository consciousness.⁴⁰ Mahamati, if there were nothing called the repository consciousness, the tathagatagarbha would neither arise nor cease.⁴¹ But sages and fools alike experience arising and cessation, Mahamati. Therefore, practitioners who cultivate the personal realization of buddha knowledge dwell in the bliss of whatever is present and do not abandon their practice.

“Mahamati, although this repository consciousness of the tathagata-garbha seen by the minds of shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas is essentially pure, because it is obscured by the dust of sensation, it appears impure—but not to tathagatas. To tathagatas, Mahamati, the realm that appears before them is like an amala⁴² fruit in the palm of their hand.

“Mahamati, I have used my spiritual power to support Queen Shrimala⁴³ and other bodhisattvas of deep wisdom to explain the meaning of what are called the repository consciousness and the tathagata-garbha, which appear together with the seven other kinds of consciousness, so that those shravakas still attached to them might see that persons and dharmas are without a self. Thus supported by the power of the Buddha, Queen Shrimala explained the realm of understanding of

tathagatas and not the realm of understanding of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, or other paths. The repository consciousness of the tathagata-garbha is something only buddhas and those wisest of bodhisattvas who rely on meaning understand.⁴⁴ Therefore you and the other bodhisattvas should diligently reflect on the repository consciousness of the tathagata-garbha. Don't simply think hearing about this is enough."

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. "Deep is the tathagata-garbha / with seven kinds of consciousness / the two kinds of grasping that arise⁴⁵ / are avoided by the wise

2. The mind is like a reflected image / the result of habit-energy without beginning / for those who see what is real / whatever is seen isn't seen

3. Like fools who see me point to the moon / look at my finger and not at the moon / those who cling to names / don't see this truth of mine

4. The mind is the hero in a play / the will is the hero's confidant / the five forms of consciousness are the cast / projections are the audience."

LXXXIII⁴⁶

Mahamati then asked the Buddha, “May the Bhagavan please explain the essential distinguishing characteristics of the five dharmas, the modes of existence, the forms of consciousness, and the two kinds of no-self. For as I and the other bodhisattvas distinguish these during the sequence of stages, we will penetrate the teaching of every buddha. And by penetrating the teaching of every buddha, we will eventually reach the realm of a tathagata’s own realization.”

The Buddha said, “Listen carefully, Mahamati, most carefully, and think about what you hear.”

Mahamati replied, “May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “The distinguishing characteristics of the five dharmas, the modes of existence, the forms of consciousness, and the two kinds of no-self include name and appearance, projection, correct knowledge, and suchness.⁴⁷ As practitioners cultivate these and reach the realm of personal realization of buddha knowledge, they transcend views of eternity and annihilation and existence and nonexistence and dwell in the bliss of meditating on what is present and what appears before them.⁴⁸ Mahamati, because they are unaware that the five dharmas, the modes of existence, the forms of consciousness, and the two kinds of no-self are perceptions of

their own minds, fools imagine their external existence, but not the wise.”

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, why do fools give rise to projections and not the wise?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Fools let their thoughts wander among the names and appearances of convention to which they are attached. And as they wander among the multitude of shapes that appear, they fall prey to views and longings concerning a self and what belongs to a self, and they become attached to excelling. And once they are attached, they are blinded by ignorance and give rise to passion. And once they are inflamed, the karma produced by desire, anger, and delusion accumulates. And as it accumulates, they become enveloped in their own projections, like silkworms in cocoons, or submerged in boundless states of existence in the sea of birth and death, as if they were on a waterwheel. But because of their ignorance, they do not realize that their own existence is an illusion, a mirage, a reflection of the moon in water, and without a self or what belongs to a self, that it is devoid of the origination, duration, or cessation of what characterizes or what is characterized, and that it arises from the projections of their own mind and not from a creator, time, motes of dust, or a supreme being. Thus do fools wander among names and appearances.

“Mahamati, as for appearance, what appears to visual consciousness, we name ‘form.’ What appears to auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, or conceptual consciousness, we name ‘sound,’ ‘smell,’ ‘taste,’ ‘feeling,’ or ‘thought.’ These are the names for appearances.⁴⁹

“Mahamati, projection fabricates names and points to appearances as being ‘like this and not something else.’ What

we name an elephant or a horse, a charioteer or a foot soldier, a man or a woman, this is what is meant by projection.

“Mahamati, according to correct knowledge, names and appearances are indistinguishable—like passersby. When the different forms of consciousness do not arise, and they are neither annihilated nor eternal, and one does not end up in the realms of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, or other paths, this is what is meant by correct knowledge.⁵⁰

“Moreover, Mahamati, as a result of correct knowledge, bodhisattvas neither assert names or appearances, nor do they not assert names or appearances. They avoid dualistic views of assertion or denial because they know that names and appearances do not arise. This is what is meant by ‘suchness.’

“Mahamati, because bodhisattvas who dwell in suchness reach the realm that is free from projections, they reach the bodhisattva’s stage of joy. And once they reach the bodhisattva’s stage of joy, they leave the false realms of other paths forever and dwell in transcendent realms, where they become proficient in distinguishing the characteristics of all dharmas as illusory, including the characteristics of the realm of personal realization, and where they see their nature as different from their characteristics while remaining free from projections, and where they eventually reach the dharma cloud stage⁵¹ and therein the full unfolding of samadhis, higher powers, masteries, and spiritual faculties. And upon reaching the tathagata stage, the light of their various transformations radiates like the moon on the water and brings beings to maturity by teaching them in accordance with their desires and understanding, as they thereby fulfill the ten inexhaustible vows.⁵² A dharma body that transcends the products of thought, this is what bodhisattvas

who dwell in suchness obtain.”

Mahamati then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, are the three modes of reality part of the five dharmas, or do they each have their own independent characteristics?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “The three modes of reality as well as the eight forms of consciousness and the two kinds of no-self are all included in the five dharmas. Mahamati, name and appearance are the imagined mode of reality. Mahamati, because the mind and what belongs to the mind⁵³ are dependent on projection for their existence and arise together with name, just as do the sun and its rays, and because they are supported by the differentiation of their various appearances, they constitute the dependent mode. And, Mahamati, because correct knowledge and suchness are indestructible, they make up the perfected mode.

“Moreover, Mahamati, the projections that are the perceptions of one’s own mind are of eight kinds, namely, those of the repository consciousness, the will, conceptual consciousness, and the five forms of sensory consciousness.⁵⁴ But their appearances are not real because they are projections. And when the twofold grasping of a self and what belongs to a self ceases, the two kinds of no-self arise.⁵⁵” Thus, Mahamati, the sequence of stages that lead shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, bodhisattvas, and tathagatas to the self-realization of buddha knowledge and all the teachings of buddhas are included in the five dharmas.

LXXXIV⁵⁶

“Moreover, Mahamati, the five dharmas include appearance, name, projection, suchness, and correct knowledge.⁵⁷ Mahamati, appearance is what is perceived as having physical shape and features. This is what is meant by appearance. If a certain appearance is referred to as a pot and not something else, this is what is meant by name. Designating names and pointing to appearances, as in the case of a pot, involve the mind and what belongs to the mind. This is what is meant by projection. But names and appearances are essentially ungraspable and ultimately unknowable. What is not affected by anything and what transcends mistaken projections, this is what is meant by suchness. What is real, true, certain, ultimate, self-existent, and ungraspable,⁵⁸ these are the characteristics of suchness. The characteristics I and all buddhas accordingly attain and truly explain and designate and indicate to others so that they are able to reach a true understanding of what is neither annihilated nor eternal and so that they do not give rise to projections but reach the realm of the personal realization of buddha knowledge beyond the reach of shravakas, pratyekabuddhas and followers of other paths, this is what is meant by correct knowledge.

“And this, Mahamati, is what is meant by how the five

dharmas include the three modes of reality, the eight forms of consciousness, the two kinds of no-self, and all the teachings of buddhas. Therefore, Mahamati, you should cultivate these in your own practice and teach others not to follow anything else.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “The five dharmas include the three modes of existence / the eight forms of consciousness / the two kinds of no-self / the entire Mahayana

2. Name, appearance, and projection / these form the first two modes / correct knowledge and suchness / these form the perfected mode.”

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “According to a statement made by the Bhagavan, ‘the buddhas of the past are like the sand of the Ganges, as are those of the future and the present.’ Bhagavan, are we to accept this as stated, or does it have another meaning? May the Tathagata be so compassionate as to explain this.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “You should not accept this as stated. The number of buddhas in the three periods is not like the sand of the Ganges. And why not? Because they surpass worldly expectations and are not comparable to any comparison. But because foolish people are attached to permanence, and because followers of other paths foster their own pernicious views and projections,⁶⁰ and their births and deaths are endless, in order to encourage their aversion to the wheel of birth and death and their effort to advance, I tell them buddhas are easy to encounter, not like udumbara flowers,⁶¹ which are hard to encounter, and they are worth looking for. But other times, when I see those who are receptive to instruction, I tell them buddhas are as hard to encounter as an udumbara flower.⁶² An udumbara flower has never been seen, is not seen, and never will be seen.⁶³ Tathagatas, however, are seen in every world. But the reason I liken a tathagata’s appearance in the

world to an udumbara flower is not in order to establish personal understanding.⁶⁴ Mahamati, those who establish their own understanding are beyond worldly expectations, and ordinary people find it hard to believe them, for there is nothing to which the realm of personal realization of buddha knowledge can be compared. Tathagatas are truly beyond the characteristics perceived by the mind, the will, or conceptual consciousness. They are beyond comparison.

“Nevertheless, Mahamati, my comparison of tathagatas to the sand of the Ganges is not mistaken.⁶⁵ Mahamati, they are compared to the sand of the Ganges because when turtles or otters or lions or elephants or horses or people or animals tread on it, the sand doesn’t give rise to projections and think ‘they are disturbing me,’ for its nature is pure and free from such defilements. The self-realization of buddha knowledge of the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones is the Ganges, while their higher powers, spiritual faculties, and masteries are the sand. No matter how animals and people and followers of other paths try to disturb them, tathagatas do not give rise to projections or concerns. Tathagatas remain at peace and free from thoughts of discrimination. And the freedom of tathagatas from disturbance is no different than that of the sand of the Ganges because they have vowed to comfort beings with the bliss of samadhi, and because they have eliminated anger and desire.

“For example, the essential nature of the sand of the Ganges is earth. But when the kalpa-ending fire⁶⁶ burns up everything made of earth, the essential nature of the element of earth is not lost because it arises together with the element of fire. Fools in other worlds⁶⁷ imagine that earth is burned up. But earth is not

burned up because fire is its cause.⁶⁸ In the same manner, Mahamati, a tathagata's dharma body is indestructible, like the sand of the Ganges.⁶⁹

“Mahamati, just as the sand of the Ganges is beyond measure, a tathagata's light is likewise beyond measure. It shines on all buddha assemblies everywhere in order to bring beings to maturity.

“Mahamati, just as the sand of the Ganges could never seek to be other than sand, likewise, Mahamati, the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones are free from birth and death, origination and cessation, because they have put an end to the cause of existence.⁷⁰

“Mahamati, just as it is impossible to know if the sand of the Ganges increases or decreases, the same is true, Mahamati, of the wisdom of tathagatas that brings beings to maturity, for it neither increases nor decreases because it is not a physical dharma.⁷¹ Physical dharmas can be destroyed, but the dharma body of a tathagata is not a physical dharma.

“And just as pressing the sand of the Ganges does not produce cooking oil, even if tathagatas are pressed by beings in the most intense kinds of pain because of their great compassion, as long as any being has not yet attained nirvana, they do not abandon the Dharma Realm⁷² for the wished-for joys of samadhi.

“Mahamati, just as the sand of the Ganges flows together with the river's water and not where there is no water, likewise, Mahamati, all the teachings spoken by the tathagatas flow together with nirvana and thus are said to be like the sand of the Ganges. However, tathagatas do not flow or go⁷³ anywhere because to go means to disappear. Mahamati, the ultimate

beginning of samsara cannot be known. And because it cannot be known, how can anyone speak of going? Mahamati, foolish people do not understand that to go means to cease to exist.”

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, if beings cannot know the ultimate beginning of samsara, how can they know liberation?”⁷⁴

The Buddha told Mahamati, “When one understands that the external world is a perception of one’s own mind, the cause of the habit-energy of beginningless projections ceases, and there is a transformation of one’s imaginary body. This is liberation not cessation. Therefore, what has no boundary⁷⁵ does not mean nothing at all because such an expression as ‘what has no boundary’ is a product of projection. Whether you look inside or outside, apart from projection, there are no other beings. Whether it is what knows or what is known, everything is still. As long as you don’t recognize that your projections are perceptions of your own mind, projections arise. Once you do, they cease.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Who views the tathagatas / like the sand of the Ganges / not destroyed or disappearing / they can see the buddhas⁷⁶
2. What is a buddha’s body like / like the sand of the Ganges / flowing unpolluted / flowing on forever.”⁷⁷

LXXXVI⁷⁸

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Could the Bhagavan please explain how dharmas are momentary and subject to destruction?⁷⁹ Why are they momentary?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen closely and think about what I tell you.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “All dharmas are either good, bad or neutral, created or uncreated, mundane or transcendent, karmic or non-karmic, defiled or undefiled, perceptible or imperceptible. Briefly, Mahamati, the five grasping skandhas⁸⁰ are based on the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness along with their habit-energy. It is the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness and their habit-energy that nourishes the differentiation of good and bad by fools. Mahamati, cultivating the bliss and absorption of samadhi and the bliss of whatever is present, this is what is called good and undefiled by the wise.

“Mahamati, what is good or bad refers to the eight forms of consciousness. And what are the eight? They include the tathagata-garbha—known as the repository consciousness—the will, conceptual consciousness, and the five forms of sensory consciousness. These are not taught by followers of other paths. Mahamati, the five forms of sensory consciousness together with

the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness give rise to the development and destruction of good and bad characteristics and a body that continues without being destroyed. But while these arise and cease, people are unaware that they are perceptions of their own minds. And as one form of consciousness ceases, others arise, differentiate, and grasp shapes and forms. And as conceptual consciousness and the five forms of sensory consciousness arise in correspondence with one another, they last but a moment. Hence, they are called momentary.

“Mahamati, what is momentary is the repository consciousness of the tathagata-garbha. But while the habit-energy of consciousness that arises together with the will is momentary, its undefiled habit-energy is not momentary. This is not something of which foolish people are aware because they are attached to the doctrine of momentariness. Unaware that the momentariness of everything is not momentary, they apply their views of annihilation to the destruction of uncreated dharmas as well.⁸¹

“Mahamati, the seven forms of consciousness⁸² do not transmigrate. Nor do they experience pleasure or pain. Nor are they the cause of nirvana. Mahamati, it is the tathagata-garbha that experiences pleasure and pain and that arises and ceases in conjunction with causes. Intoxicated with the four states of affliction and that of fundamental ignorance,⁸³ foolish people remain unaware that their view of momentariness is the mind under the influence of differentiation.

“Moreover, Mahamati, just as gold and diamonds and the relics of buddhas possess a unique nature, which is indestructible, if realization were momentary, Mahamati, the wise

would not be wise. But the wise are, indeed, wise. Even in the course of kalpas, the amount of gold or diamonds does not diminish. Why then do foolish people not understand the deeper meaning of my words and think that everything, whether internal or external, is momentary?”

LXXXVII⁸⁴

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. ‘Fools imagine created things⁸⁵ / as empty,
impermanent, and momentary / momentariness they
imagine / as a river, a lamp, or a seed

2. Afflictions end in a moment / they are still and
uncreated / nothing arises at all / this is what momentary
means

3. Things arising then ceasing / this isn’t what I teach
fools / an unbroken continuous existence / this is the result
of distinctions

4. Ignorance is the cause / this is where thoughts
begin / but before any forms appear / where are they in
between⁸⁶

5. Cessation is unceasing / one thought follows
another / before they focus on form / on what do they
depend to arise

6. Because this arises from that / arising from what
isn’t real / how could something be momentary / if it was
never complete

7. The samadhis of practitioners / the relics
of buddhas and diamonds / celestial palaces of light and
music⁸⁷ / the world cannot destroy

8. The abiding truths that are attained / the perfect knowledge of a tathagata / the equalities realized by a monk⁸⁸ / how can these be momentary

9. Illusions such as gandharvan cities / these too are not momentary / but regarding unreal forms / real is how they are seen.⁸⁹

LXXXVIII⁹⁰

Mahamati, once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, according to what the Bhagavan has said, by carrying out the six paramitas one attains enlightenment, but which six?”⁹¹

The Buddha told Mahamati, “There are three different kinds of paramitas:⁹² mundane, metaphysical, and transcendent. Mahamati, as for the mundane paramitas, because those who are attached to a self and what belongs to a self cling to dualities, they carry out the paramita of charity in order to enjoy the form, sound, smell, taste, and touch of other states of existence. And they do the same in regard to morality, forbearance, vigor, meditation, and wisdom for the sake of worldly powers or rebirth in the heavens of Brahma⁹³

“Mahamati, as for the metaphysical paramitas, because shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas become attached to nirvana, they practice the six paramitas in order to enjoy the bliss of nirvana for themselves.

“Mahamati, as for the transcendent paramitas, because those who realize that the projections to which they are attached are nothing but perceptions of their own mind and that their own mind is thereby divided, they do not give rise to projections or become attached to other states of existence.

“Not letting their mind become attached to material

appearances, they engage in the transcendent practice of the paramita of charity for the happiness of all beings. Not giving rise to restrictions regarding the projection of objective conditions, this is the paramita of morality. Not giving rise to the projection of patience while knowing what grasps and what is grasped, this is the paramita of forbearance. Not giving rise to the projection of practice while practicing with zeal during the three periods of the night, this is the paramita of vigor. Not becoming attached to the nirvana of shravakas when projections cease, this is the paramita of meditation. And examining the nonexistence of the projections of one's mind with insight without falling into dualities, and transforming one's karmic body into an indestructible one,⁹⁴ and reaching the realm of the personal realization of buddha knowledge, this is the paramita of wisdom.”

LXXXIX⁹⁵

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “The Bhagavan assures arhats they will attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment no different from bodhisattvas. But why then say that those beings who attain buddhahood are those who do not experience the dharma of nirvana?⁹⁶ And why do you say that from the time buddhas first attain enlightenment until the time they enter nirvana, they do not speak or respond with a single word, or that because tathagatas are always in samadhi, they don’t reason or reflect, while the work of buddhas is performed by apparition buddhas, or that their consciousness is momentary and subject to destruction or that they are always accompanied and protected by Vajrapani?⁹⁷ And why do you not point out the ultimate beginning?⁹⁸ And how is it that the Tathagata attains the knowledge of all things yet does not escape such afflictions as karmic retribution in the form of demons and demonic deeds⁹⁹ or karmic obstructions in the guise of Cinca Manavika, or Sundari,¹⁰⁰ or an empty begging bowl?”¹⁰¹

The Buddha told Mahamati, “Listen carefully and ponder it well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati replied, “Wonderful, Bhagavan. May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “I speak of complete nirvana to

attract those who would engage in bodhisattva practices. And to those in this and other worlds who cultivate bodhisattva practices but who delight in the nirvana of the shravaka path, in order to encourage them to abandon the shravaka path and turn toward the Mahayana, apparition buddhas give these shravakas assurances, not dharmata buddhas.¹⁰² Therefore, Mahamati, the assurances given to shravakas and bodhisattvas do not differ.

“Mahamati, what doesn’t differ is the taste of liberation when shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas or buddhas and tathagatas get rid of the obstruction of passion, not when they get rid of the obstruction of knowledge. Mahamati, the obstruction of knowledge is purified when they see that dharmas have no self. The obstruction of passion is removed prior to this when they become accustomed to seeing that persons have no self. It is when the seventh consciousness ceases¹⁰³ that they are liberated from the obstruction of dharmas. And it is when the habit-energy of the repository consciousness ceases¹⁰⁴ that their purification is complete.

“Because I rely on an underlying reality,¹⁰⁵ past and future do not exist. And because my original vow has no limit, the Tathagata speaks the Dharma without reasoning or reflecting. And because my thoughts have been transformed by correct knowledge and are not delusions, I do not reason or reflect. And because I have cut off the habit-energy from the four states and fundamental ignorance,¹⁰⁶ I have eliminated the two afflictions,¹⁰⁷ transcended the two types of death, realized the two kinds of no-self, and removed the two obstructions.

“Mahamati, because the mind, the will, conceptual consciousness, visual consciousness, and the rest are all based on momentary habit-energy, they are devoid of good, non-

karmic qualities that do not result in samsara. Mahamati, the tathagata-garbha is the cause of samsara and nirvana, of joy and suffering. But because their minds are confused by emptiness, this is something foolish people cannot fathom.

“Mahamati, those who are accompanied and protected by Vajrapani are apparition buddhas, not real tathagatas. Mahamati, real tathagatas are beyond the range of the senses. The range of the senses of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, and followers of other paths is limited. Also, because they dwell in the bliss of whatever is present and the knowledge and forbearance of realization, they are not the ones protected by Vajrapani.¹⁰⁸

“Apparition buddhas are not created by karma. Apparition buddhas are not buddhas. But neither are they different from buddhas. When they speak the Dharma, they rely on such man-made objects as pottery wheels, but they do not speak about their own understanding of the realm of personal realization.¹⁰⁹

“Moreover, Mahamati, fools give rise to views of annihilation based on the cessation of the seven forms of consciousness.¹¹⁰ And they give rise to views of permanence because they do not understand the repository consciousness. It is because of their own projections that they do not understand the ultimate beginning. It is when their projections cease that liberation occurs. And it is when the habit-energy of fundamental ignorance and the four states of affliction stop that all faults stop.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “The three paths are not paths / the tathagatas are not destroyed / the assurances given by buddhas / are for

getting free of faults and vices

2. With the knowledge of different realizations / and nirvana that leaves no trace / I attract those of lesser wisdom / and thus conceal my teaching¹¹¹

3. The knowledge taught by buddhas / the paths to which they point / none of these are paths / nor are they nirvana

4. Desire, form, existence, and views / on these four states of which I speak¹¹² / and to which conceptual consciousness gives birth / the will and repository consciousness dwell

5. The will and sensory consciousness / nihilists say are impermanent / others see them as nirvana / saying they last forever.”

XC¹¹³

Mahamati then asked in verse:

1. “Regarding bodhisattvas / whose minds are set on buddhahood / should they consume / wine or meat or onions¹¹⁴
2. Why do fools desire / the stench, the filth, the infamy / why would anyone eat / the favorite food of wolves and tigers
3. Does eating meat give rise to sin / does not eating meat mean blessing / please explain the sin and blessing / of eating meat or not.”

After Mahamati had asked in verse, he once more addressed the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please explain for us the vice and virtue of eating and not eating meat. For when I and other bodhisattvas, both now and in the future, explain the Dharma to beings who enjoy eating meat, we will be trying to arouse their compassion toward others. For once their compassion is aroused, whatever stage they are at will be purer and clearer, and they will attain supreme enlightenment sooner. Even those resting in the stages of shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas will quickly attain supreme enlightenment.

“Followers of other paths who maintain mistaken doctrines and who are attached to mistaken views of annihilation and

eternity have commandments that prohibit eating meat. Can those who would protect the true teaching of the tathagatas in the world do any better while eating meat?"

The Buddha told Mahamati, "Excellent, most excellent. Listen and ponder it well, and I will tell you."

Mahamati said, "May we be so instructed."

The Buddha told Mahamati, "There are countless reasons why you should not eat meat. But I will summarize them for you. Because all beings have at some time been reborn as family members, out of your feelings for them, you shouldn't eat meat. Because butchers indiscriminately sell the flesh of donkeys and camels, foxes and dogs, cattle and horses and humans¹¹⁵ along with that of other animals, ¹¹⁶ you shouldn't eat meat. And you shouldn't eat meat because animals are raised on impurities. And you shouldn't eat meat because beings become afraid when they smell its odor, like when a dog snarls in anger and fear at the sight of a chandala or domba.¹¹⁷

"Also, you shouldn't eat meat because it prevents practitioners from giving rise to compassionate thoughts. You shouldn't eat meat because those fools who are fond of its stench, its filth, and its impurity are maligned. You shouldn't eat meat because it makes spells and incantations ineffective. You shouldn't eat meat because those who kill living creatures become so attached to its taste, they think about it whenever they see them. You shouldn't eat meat because those who eat meat are abandoned by the gods. You shouldn't eat meat because it makes your breath stink. You shouldn't eat meat because it causes nightmares. You shouldn't eat meat because the tigers and wolves in the the forest and the wilderness can smell it. You shouldn't eat meat because it results in a lack of

restraint regarding food and drink. You shouldn't eat meat because it keeps practitioners from giving rise to aversion. You shouldn't eat meat because I have often said that when you eat or drink, you should imagine you are consuming the flesh of your children or swallowing medicine.¹¹⁸ I would never approve the eating of meat.

“Further, Mahamati, in the past there was a king named Simhasaudasa who ate all kinds of meat.¹¹⁹ But when he started eating human flesh, his ministers and subjects would not accept it. They conspired to overthrow him, and they put an end to his reign. Such are the ills of eating meat. Hence, you should not eat meat.

“Further, Mahamati, those who kill do so for profit. They kill creatures and sell them in the marketplace, where ignorant meat-eating people use the net of money to catch their meat. Among those who take the lives of others, some use money, and some use hooks and nets to catch creatures that move through the air or in the water or across the land. They kill all sorts of creatures and sell them in the marketplace for profit. Mahamati, when it comes to fish or meat, there is no such thing as ‘not requesting, seeking, or thinking about it.’¹²⁰ For this reason, you should not eat meat.

“Mahamati, on some occasions I have proscribed eating five kinds of meat and at other times ten kinds. Today, in this sutra, I am getting rid of practices that allow certain kinds at certain times in favor of none whatsoever. Mahamati, the Tathagata, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One has never eaten anything much less taught others to eat fish or meat. Because of my past acts of great compassion, I look on all beings as I would a child. And why would I approve eating the flesh of children?”

The Buddha then repeated this in verse:

1. “Because it was a family member / or because it is covered with filth / or it was raised on impurities / or its smell gives rise to fear

2. From meat and from onions / from leeks and from garlic / from indulging in alcohol / practitioners keep their distance

3. They also avoid sesame oil¹²² / as well as beds of thorns¹²³ / because there are tiny insects / cowering in fear inside

4. As food and drink promote indulgence / and indulgence stimulates feelings / and from feelings come desires / you should therefore eat no meat

5. As eating meat produces desires / and desires stupefy the mind / forever drunk on love and desire / from birth and death you won’t escape

6. Killing creatures for profit / or catching your meat with money / both of these are evil paths / leading to the hell of lamentation¹²⁴

7. As for ‘not requesting, seeking, or thinking about it’¹²⁵ / there is no thrice-pure meat / this isn’t free of karma / therefore you should eat no meat

8. Those who are practitioners / therefore keep their distance / buddhas of the ten directions / all voice their disapproval

9. Taking turns eating each other / reborn among wolves or tigers / amid detestable stench and filth / wherever they are born they are fools

10. Usually they’re born as chandalas¹²⁶ / as dombas

or as hunters / or they're born among meat-eating demons
/ rakshasas or wild cats¹²⁷

11. In the *Hastikakshya* and the *Mahamegha* / in
the *Angulimaliya* as well¹²⁸ / and here in the
Lankavatara / I proscribe all eating of meat

12. Buddhas and bodhisattvas / even shravakas
denounce it / eating meat without shame / living life after life
in ignorance

13. And those who admit their offense¹²⁹ / who have
already stopped eating meat / blinded by their projections /
they are reborn in carnivorous worlds

14. Just as excessive desire / keeps you from getting
free / alcohol, meat, onions, and garlic / block the path to
buddhahood

15. Beings in some future age / might stupidly say
about meat / 'it' pure and isn't wrong / the buddhas said
we could eat it'

16. Imagine you're swallowing medicine / or eating
the flesh of a child / be content and practice aversion / beg
for your food instead

17. Even those with compassionate hearts / I tell to
practice aversion / such beasts as tigers or wolves / might
yet become their companions

18. Those who eat blood-covered flesh / terrify other
beings / therefore those who practice / out of compassion
should not eat meat

19. It doesn't foster compassion or wisdom / it
prevents your true liberation / it conflicts with the ways of
the wise / therefore you should not eat meat

20. Rebirth as a Brahman / in a place of practice / in

a wise or noble family / this comes from not eating meat.”

1 Chapter Four. Just a few final questions as Mahamati and the Buddha move on to the nature of buddhahood and the end of the bodhisattva path. I have combined Suzuki’s chapters Four through Nine into this one chapter but have retained his section numbering.

2 Section LXXX. This section focuses on the differences between how bodhisattvas and followers of other paths handle samadhi and the bliss of samadhi during the final stages of the path. While followers of other paths see the cessation of sensation and perception as their final goal, bodhisattvas see it as just another illusion and continue in their practice of liberating all beings. Then, too, bodhisattvas see all stages as illusions.

3 The Sanskrit is *nirodha-samapatti*. This samadhi in which sensation and perception cease is characteristic of the sixth stage of the bodhisattva path. It is also part of the Hinayana path, whose practitioners interpret this as nirvana. However, Mahayana practitioners see it as transitional and neither allow themselves to be seduced by its bliss, nor do they forsake its bliss for the nothingness of nirvana, nor do they cease giving rise to thoughts. For them, thoughts are not thoughts.

4 Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit all have variations of “not fall prey to” or “not be confused by” the bliss of this samadhi. I’ve followed Gunabhadra. Based on what follows in this section, Gunabhadra’s translation is clearly the correct interpretation here.

5 At this stage they eliminate all views of the three realms.

6 Formless meditations are practiced during the first five stages but only begin to exceed those based on form at the sixth stage. By the seventh stage all meditations are said to be formless.

7 What is good is nirvana or what leads to nirvana, what is bad is samsara or what leads to samsara.

8 Gunabhadra alone has “seventh,” all other versions have “sixth.” I have inverted the order of this sentence and the next.

9 Both here and in Section LXXXII, Gunabhadra has *chueh* (to be aware/to know), instead of *chueh-che* (aware ones; buddhas). Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit all have “aware ones/buddhas.” Since elsewhere in the sutra, even Gunabhadra has the buddhas supporting bodhisattvas during samadhi, Gunabhadra’s translation needs amending here.

10 The four *pratisamvid* include powers regarding teaching, meaning, expression, and eloquence.

11 The Sanskrit is *vivikta-dharma*. Suzuki reads this quite differently as “absolute solitude.”

12 These ten vows, made at the beginning of the path, include speaking the Dharma in being realms without limit, world realms without limit, space realms without limit, dharma realms without limit, nirvana realms without limit, etc.

13 In this metaphor, this shore is samsara, the other shore is nirvana, and the river is that of the ever-flowing habit-energy that arises from projections.

14 Again, the Sanskrit is *vivikta-dharma*. Bodhiruchi adds a paragraph here in which Mahamati asks about the seeming contradiction of shravakas and pratye-kas reaching the eighth stage but not yet possessing insights characteristic of the first stage, let alone the seventh. The Buddha tells him there are two kinds of such practitioners, the ordinary shravakas and those who have previously practiced the bodhisattva path but who have fallen back into the Hinayana path.

15 As the Buddha himself states in the next verse, these refer to

the seventh and eighth stages, respectively.

16 The referent of “this abode” is the ninth stage. See also the next verse.

17 The “two stages” are the ninth and tenth stages, the tenth of which is “supreme.” Thus, the conception of the bodhisattva path in the *Lanka* is one of ten stages, in which the tathagata stage is the tenth. There is no eleventh stage.

18 Buddhas experience enlightenment in the highest heaven in the realm of form.

19 The stage free from projections is the eighth stage. Then again, as the sequence of stages is itself a projection, no stage would be the only stage free from projections.

20 Section LXXXI. Previously in Section LXXIX, the Buddha dismissed the seven kinds of impermanence advanced by other paths and said the teaching of the tathagatas is neither permanent nor impermanent. Here, Mahamati wonders if this also applies to a tathagata’s body—in or out of nirvana. The question concerns a buddha’s dharma body, not a buddha’s apparition or reward bodies. The Buddha reminds Mahamati that such assertions are inherently flawed, as they are based on a duality that is imaginary and that does not apply to tathagatas or to the knowledge of tathagatas.

21 If permanent, tathagatas would be equivalent to a creator (or first cause). If impermanent, then they would cease to exist when their bodies ceased to exist. Also, if they are not the creator but the created, they would be like anything else created, as would their knowledge and teaching. Finally, they would be like everything else, and everything else would be like them.

22 The Sanskrit is *karana*.

23 Followers of other paths also held that what was permanent

or impermanent was caused or created. But if tathagatas were uncaused, would they not be the same as space, which was also held to be uncaused? Also, if the tathagatas were uncaused, they would not require a short, much less a long, course of practice to reach such attainment.

[24](#) Previously, the Buddha said “non-arising is another name for the Tathagata.” Followers of other paths held that what does not arise is permanent because by not arising it would not be subject to ceasing. But this would be equivalent to an imaginary fabrication.

[25](#) This permanence is true permanence and not false permanence. The Dharma doesn’t change whether it is realized or not, whether it is manifest or not, whether it is taught or not. What is realized is permanent, and what realizes is permanent.

[26](#) This is the Sanskrit term for “wisdom.” Its use in this sutra is rather rare, as the *Lankavatara* focuses on *jnana*, or “knowledge.” *Prajna* literally means “before-knowledge.”

[27](#) I’ve followed Shikshananda for this verse, which Gunabhadra omits.

[28](#) As when the seven kinds of impermanence are applied to nirvana.

[29](#) Section LXXXII. The Buddha explains the relationship, if it can be called that, between the tathagata-garbha and the alaya-vijnana, whereby the former is the cause of the latter but whereby the latter is an illusion. Readers should also refer to the Buddha’s earlier description of the tathagata-garbha as an intrinsically pure jewel wrapped in the rags of the skandhas and without a self (Section XXVIII).

[30](#) This term refers to a sensory power, a sensory domain, and the form of sensory consciousness that arises when these two

meet.

[31](#) This refers to the fundamental condition of ignorance from which all forms of ignorance arises. The Sanskrit is *avidya-vasa-bhumi*.

[32](#) The four dhyana (meditative) heavens are regions in the realm of form, where enlightenment occurs. The fourth dhyana heaven is where thought ceases.

[33](#) This refers to the Four Noble Truths, the fourth of which is the Eightfold Path of Liberation.

[34](#) They have seen through the self in persons but not the self in dharmas.

[35](#) They cease to exist because they are products of the repository consciousness, which has been replaced by or transformed into the tathagata-garbha.

[36](#) This name (*acala*: unshakeable) refers to the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path.

[37](#) These are enumerated in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, where they constitute the subject of Chapter 27 (of the forty-chapter version): universal light, subtle light, travel to all buddhalands, purification of the mind, knowledge of the past, light of wisdom, knowledge of adornments, differentiation of beings, the Dharma Realm, and unimpeded teaching.

[38](#) The Sanskrit term *bhuta-koti* means “limit/boundary of reality,” and here all three Chinese translations render it *shih-chi* (reality-boundary). Its range of reference is similar to that of “nirvana,” but without the sense of annihilation. For more on this term, and its counterpart *purva-koti* (ultimate beginning), see Robert Sharf’s *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, pages 230-233.

[39](#) This is a conception of spiritual lineages found in

Prajnaparamita literature. It begins with the “dry-wisdom” stage and ends with the pratyeka-buddha, bodhisattva, and buddha stages.

[40](#) When consciousness is transformed into knowledge, its name is no longer repository consciousness but womb of buddhas (*tathagata-garbha*).

[41](#) If there were no repository consciousness, there would be no tathagata-garbha and, thus, no liberation or path leading to liberation.

[42](#) The Indian gooseberry, or *Phyllanthus emblica*, the fruit of which is about one inch in diameter.

[43](#) She was the daughter of King Prasenajit and Queen Mallika of Kosala. In a sutra named after her, she explains that the tathagata-garbha has two states: empty and not empty. This short text was translated by Gunabhadra in 436. (cf. Taisho Tripitaka, volume 12)

[44](#) Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda add: “It is not for shravakas and the followers of other paths who are attached to words.”

[45](#) As for the two kinds of grasping, earlier in this section, the Buddha lists the grasping of individual and shared characteristics. However, near the end of the next section, he lists the grasping of the self and what belongs to the self, of subject and object.

[46](#) Section LXXXIII. The Buddha explains the all-inclusive nature of the five dharmas, which was a category of analysis and understanding used by the Yogacara, whereby name and appearance are the objects of projection or imagination (and thus false knowledge) and suchness is the object of correct knowledge.

[47](#) The distinguishing characteristics of this series of categories

consist in the characteristics of the first member of the series, namely, the five dharmas.

[48](#) The Sanskrit is *drshta-dharma-sukha-vihara*. This meditation is associated with the realm of form and not the realm of desire.

[49](#) Appearance and name are so inextricably linked that to talk about one is to talk about the other.

[50](#) Gunabhadra omits the last clause, which is present in Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda and seems called for here.

[51](#) This is the tenth and final stage of the bodhisattva path. In the *Lankavatara*, it is also called the tathagata stage.

[52](#) Vows to liberate beings regardless of the extent of the realms of beings, worlds, space, emptiness, reality, nirvana, etc. See my note in Section LXVIII.

[53](#) The Sanskrit is *citta-caitta-kalapa*. The same phrase also occurs in the next section, as well as in numerous other places in the sutra. It refers to the mind in general as well as to any and all varieties of its states and functions.

[54](#) Only Gunabhadra lists all eight.

[55](#) As elsewhere in the *Lankavatara*, negating something does not necessarily result in nothing.

[56](#) Section LXXXIV. This is a continuation of the previous section and a restatement of the five dharmas as containing all the teachings of the buddhas. At heart, it also comes down to transforming projection, which is responsible for names and appearances, into non-projection, on which correct knowledge and suchness are based. And by correct knowledge is meant the knowledge known to buddhas that is realized for oneself and that cannot be taught.

[57](#) The different order for the last two items is supported by all

editions. Commentators say that correct knowledge followed by suchness, as in the previous section, reflects a systematic approach to the five dharmas, while suchness followed by correct knowledge, as in this section, reflects an experiential approach.

[58](#) The Sanskrit for this series is: *tattva, bhuta, nishcaya, nishtha, prakrti, svabhava, anupalabधि*. Gunabhadra's translation, which I have followed, does not include *prakrti* (fundamental).

[59](#) Section LXXXV. The last section ended with suchness, which is the realm of a buddha's dharma body. In this section, the Buddha uses the sands of the Ganges as a multipurpose metaphor to demonstrate such a body's virtues.

[60](#) Namely, impermanence.

[61](#) This is meant to encourage people to believe that becoming a buddha is something anyone can do. The udumbara is a flower (some say it is a blue lotus) that blooms once every three thousand years.

[62](#) This is meant to encourage people to try to do what is difficult.

[63](#) The purpose of such a statement seems to be twofold. First, people should not become attached to the idea of a buddha because buddhas do not exist. Second, they are, in fact, now seeing an udumbara flower and should take advantage of this rarest of opportunities.

[64](#) The Sanskrit for "to establish personal understanding" is *sva-naya pratyav-asthana*. See also Section LXIII, where *siddhanta-naya* is used with basically the same meaning, referring to "the personal realization" of buddha knowledge. Such understanding cannot be established for others, it can only

be realized for oneself

[65](#) Even though the buddhas are beyond comparison, the sand of the Ganges still serves to exemplify certain qualities of the buddhas, namely the seven that follow.

[66](#) Every universe goes through four stages: creation, stasis, destruction (by fire), and emptiness. Then it begins again.

[67](#) In this hypothetical situation, these fools would have to be “in other worlds” because this world would have been burned up.

[68](#) This statement could be based on witnessing volcanoes spewing lava. But it also follows from the conception of a material world as a cycle of elements, whereby one gives rise to the other.

[69](#) The intent is to counter those who think the end of the fires of ignorance also means an end of the dharma body.

[70](#) Because buddhas are no longer subject to birth and death, they cannot become anything other than what they are.

[71](#) The Buddha’s dharma body is not a physical body but a wisdom body. It does not decrease or increase in size when others become enlightened.

[72](#) The Sanskrit, *dharma-dhatu* (dharma realm), is a term with multiple meanings, but here it refers simply to the world of beings in which the Dharma is taught.

[73](#) Nirvana is often mistaken as leaving this world, the end of the cycle of birth and death. But as interpreted by the Mahayana, it is not a departure but a transformation. Nothing comes, nothing goes. The Sanskrit for “go” is *gata*. Hence, *tatha-gata* (thus-go) and *that-agata* (thus-not go) are common puns.

[74](#) The question implies that liberation somehow exists outside of birth and death. In this and the above paragraph, “the ultimate beginning (*purva-koti*) of samsara” is also another name and

another view of nirvana.

[75](#) Gunabhadra translates *purva-koti* in Mahamati's question as *pen-chi* (boundary /limit of the beginning), but in his answer, he translates it as *wu-pien* (without limit/boundary). Both are standard readings of this term, which refers to what came before samsara, before life and death, while *bhuta-koti* (ultimate reality) refers to what comes after nirvana. Essentially, they refer to the same thing. See Section LXXXII and my note thereto.

[76](#) Gunabhadra expands this into six lines. I've followed Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit.

[77](#) Gunabhadra has "this is a buddha's enlightenment" for the last line, which I've transposed to the first line. Otherwise, I've followed Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit for this verse. The Buddha is referring to the tathagata-garbha here, which is the alaya-vijnana transformed and thus "unpolluted." The Buddha has more to say about this relationship between the tathagata-garbha and the alaya-vijnana in the next section.

[78](#) Section LXXXVI. Mahamati continues his inquiry into the nature of buddhas. If all dharmas are transient, would this not also include those dharmas upon which buddhahood is based? And if so, are buddhas themselves not also momentary? The Buddha's teaching in this and other Mahayana sutras is that dharmas are not momentary because they do not exist in the first place. But this is only understood by someone at the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path, someone who has attained the forbearance of non-arising.

[79](#) The Sanskrit is *kshana-bhanga* (momentary-breakable). Impermanence is among the earliest teachings of the Buddha.

[80](#) The five skandhas (form, sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness) are sometimes called "grasping" because they

represent the domains in which a self is established, or at least conjured.

[81](#) Uncreated, or unconditioned, dharmas include space, cessation, and nirvana.

[82](#) Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit all have “five forms of sensory consciousness.” Either version would be correct here, as it is only the eighth form of consciousness that “transmigrates,” which it does in the form of fundamental ignorance.

[83](#) These refer to the five states of affliction, four of which are lumped together here: views, attachments to desire, attachments to form, attachments to formlessness, and fundamental ignorance, which is separated from the rest here, as it is said to be responsible for “transmigration.”

[84](#) Section LXXXVII. This section does not so much explain the previous section as it does its last sentence. The deeper meaning of the Buddha’s teaching of momentariness is no momentariness. The order of this and the next section was apparently confused at an early date, as Gunabhadra, Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit all have the next section before this one. However, such an arrangement is clearly mistaken, and I have reverted to what I assume was the original order. There are also quite a few lines in this section that are handled differently by Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit. I have only indicated the more significant differences.

[85](#) “Created things” refer to *samskrita* dharmas, as opposed to the *asamskrita* (uncreated) dharmas of space, cessation, and nirvana.

[86](#) This verse, and also the last two lines of the previous verse, outline the view of “transmigration” as the rebirth of ignorance.

[87](#) Characteristic of the third (*Abhasvara*) heaven in the second meditation in the realm of form.

[88](#) Referring to the view that affliction is enlightenment, samsara is nirvana.

[89](#) For the last two lines, Bodhiruchi has: “the forms that are seen are devoid of the four elements / how can the four elements create them?” Shikshananda has: “the elements have no real existence / why say they can create them?” Suzuki translates the Sanskrit: “realities are characterized with unreality / how can they be causal agencies?”

[90](#) Section LXXXVIII. As this sutra approaches its conclusion, the practices known as the six paramitas are also reviewed in the light of its unique teaching. The six paramitas include charity, morality, forbearance, vigor, meditation, and wisdom. The word *paramita* is often interpreted as “the means for reaching the other shore,” with this shore being that of samsara and the other shore being nirvana.

[91](#) Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda add: “And how are they carried out?”

[92](#) One kind for ordinary people, one kind for shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas, and one kind for bodhisattvas.

[93](#) Brahma was regarded as the supreme being and creator of the universe by Brahmans, and his heavens (as many as eighteen according to some accounts) make up what Buddhists call the realm of form.

[94](#) Every translation handles this clause differently. As elsewhere, I’ve followed Gunabhadra, who has a buddha’s dharma body in mind.

[95](#) Section LXXXIX. Mahamati poses a final series of questions concerning the nature of buddhas and buddhahood. Much like

those concerning the metaphor of the sand of the Ganges, the Buddha's answers are meant to reveal the deeper meaning concerning what on the surface appear to be contradictions.

[96](#) This sentence follows from the previous one and asks how is it that those who seek nirvana (arhats) are assured of buddhahood. I have followed Shikshananda in this case, as the wording is unclear in Gunabhadra, while Bodhiruchi has buddhas not entering nirvana rather than arhats not entering nirvana. Suzuki has something quite different: "How can all beings attain Tathagatahood without realizing the truths of Parinirvana?"

[97](#) Vajrapani is the name of one of the three protective deities of every buddha. As his name indicates, he is usually depicted wielding a vajra, or thunderbolt.

[98](#) Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit all have variations of "why say the ultimate beginning is not knowable yet speak of entering nirvana." In what follows, the Buddha says the ultimate beginning cannot be known because the past and future are illusions and because it is merely another fabrication.

[99](#) This refers to the attempt by Mara and his demonic host to distract Shakyamuni prior to his attainment of Enlightenment.

[100](#) Cinca Manavika accused the Buddha of being the father of her unborn child, which turned out to be nothing but rags tied around her stomach. Sundari also made false accusations against the Buddha. Some texts say for sexual impropriety, others say that she killed her own daughter, buried the body where the Buddha was staying, and accused the Buddha of the murder.

[101](#) This refers to an occasion when the residents of a village where the Buddha was begging refused to give him any food.

[102](#) The term "dharmata buddha," as the Buddha says later in

this section, refers to a “real buddha,” or what would eventually be called a buddha’s “dharma body.”

[103](#) The seventh consciousness is self-consciousness.

[104](#) It is only the habit-energy of repository consciousness that ceases, not the eighth consciousness itself, which, once purified, is referred to as the tathagatagarbha, the womb of buddhas, and thus the source of buddha knowledge.

[105](#) The Sanskrit for this expression is *purva-dharma-sthitita*.

[106](#) As it did earlier in this chapter, these refer to the five states of affliction: wrong views, attachments to desire, attachments to form, attachments to formlessness, and fundamental ignorance.

[107](#) There are different lists for the two afflictions (*kleshas*). Most likely meant are afflictions arising from projection and those inherent in the eight forms of consciousness.

[108](#) Demons cannot disturb, nor Vajrapani protect, those who understand what is real.

[109](#) They necessarily limit their explanations of the Dharma to things people can see, using them as metaphors for what they cannot see. But they do not speak of their own understanding because they are apparitions and have no experience or realization of their own.

[110](#) Bodhiruchi, Shikshananda, and the Sanskrit have “six forms of consciousness.” Obviously, there developed a difference of opinion as to whether or not the will, or self-consciousness, ceases along with conceptual and sensory consciousness at death. In the *Lankavatara*, the Buddha says only the repository consciousness continues into the next life. Hence, Gunabhadra’s version alone is consistent with the text.

[111](#) The Sanskrit has *samdhya-bhashya* (twilight teaching), which is a mistake for *samdha-bhasya* (esoteric teaching).

Gunabhadra and Bodhiruchi have *yin-fu* (covered), while Shikshananda has *mi-yi* (secret). The meaning of this is a subject of much debate. Which is the real teaching? Judging from what the Buddha says in the following verses as well as elsewhere in this sutra, he is concerned that if he presented his “real” teaching to such people, it would either be misunderstood or it would terrify them. Hence, he keeps it covered up and presents something more attractive. Then again, at the end of Section LXXXVI, he asks why people don’t understand the “deeper meaning” of his words.

[112](#) The four states of affliction include views and attachments in the realms of desire, form, and formlessness. They are referred to as the five states when they include fundamental ignorance.

[113](#) Section XC. This section on cultivating a vegetarian diet follows from the foregoing and is not a haphazard addition. It is important to know how to live in this world of illusions. And the practice of avoiding the eating of meat became part of the bodhisattva path advocated by Mahayana Buddhism. Thus, some commentators also view this section as a critique of the practices of Hinayana Buddhists, namely, the shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas, who excused their eating of meat by claiming it was not proscribed by the precepts. Bodhiruchi’s translation of the prose part of this section is seven times as long, while Shikshananda’s is three times as long, suggesting that this issue was of more than passing concern.

[114](#) Wine and onions are not mentioned again in the prose section. I imagine this is because they were already listed among the things prohibited by the precepts that lay and monastic Buddhists agreed to abide by. Eating meat, however, was not prohibited—although killing was. The reason for the proscription

regarding onions and their kin was that they were considered aphrodisiacs. To this first verse, Gunabhadra adds two lines: “May the Peerless One / pity us with an explanation.” I’ve followed Bodhiruchi and Shikshananda, neither of whom includes this.

[115](#) Most likely referring to the unburied corpses of the poor.

[116](#) You never know when you’re eating a human.

[117](#) Chandalas were members of a despised caste associated with the disposal of corpses. Dombas were also outcastes and associated with the cremation of corpses.

[118](#) The Buddha encouraged such associations so that his followers would eat and drink as little as possible.

[119](#) This story appears in a number of variants in early Indian texts. Saudasa was the son of Sudasa and a lioness. Hence, he was called Simha, “the Lion.”

[120](#) It was the contention of some shravakas that as long as they didn’t request, seek, or think about meat, they could eat it.

[121](#) Shikshananda’s translation of the poems agrees with that of Gunabhadra, while that of Bodhiruchi sometimes does but often does not. The Sanskrit includes a number of verses that are not present in any of the Chinese versions.

[122](#) The proscription in this case concerns the use of sesame oil as an insecticide.

[123](#) Not only is self-mortification counterproductive to enlightenment, killing insects in the process cancels any merit gained from such a practice.

[124](#) This is one of the eight hot hells. The Sanskrit is *raurava*, meaning to “lament” or “scream.”

[125](#) This terminology, which also appears in the penultimate paragraph of the prose section, refers to the series of excuses

some shravakas used for eating meat.

[126](#) Chandalas were one of many despised castes in India. Among their professions was the disposal of corpses. Dombas were another despised caste whose professions included the cremation of corpses.

[127](#) The appearance of rakshasas here is ironic, considering they were the inhabitants of Lanka. Gunabhadra spreads this out over six lines.

[128](#) The *Angulimaliya Sutra* was translated into Chinese by Gunabhadra, the translator of this sutra, around A.D. 440. Not to be confused with the *Angulimala Sutta* of the Pali Canon, the focus of this Mahayana text is on the tathagatagarbha, or true self.

[129](#) The wording here refers to the practice of reporting violations of the precepts as to what one has seen, heard, or suspected regarding others and oneself. The Buddha's point is that such people are attached to their projection of their newfound purity.

LANKAVATARA MANTRA ¹³⁰



The Buddha then told Mahamati, “Mahamati, in order to protect this sutra, buddhas of the past, the future, and the present proclaim the *Lankavatara Mantra*. You should memorize what I, too, proclaim. The mantra goes:

*Tutte tutte vutte vutte patte patte katte katte amale
amale vimale vimale nime nime hime hime vame vame
kale kale kale kale atte matte vatte tutte jnette sputte
katte katte latte patte dime dime cale cale pace pace
bandhe bandhe ance mance dutare dutare patare
patare arkke arkke sarkke sarkke cakre cakre dime
dime hime hime tu tu tu tu du du du du ru ru ru ru phu
phu phu svaha.*

“Mahamati, if a good son or daughter memorizes and recites and explains this dharani to others, no human or non-human or evil spirit will trouble them. And should misfortune occur, if someone recites this mantra for them 108 times, the offending spirit will leave at once.

“Mahamati, I will teach you another mantra:

*Padme padmadeve hine hini hine cu cule culu cule
phale phula phule yule ghule yula yule ghule ghula
ghule pale pala pale munce munce munce cchinde
bhinde bhanje marde pramarde dinakare svaha.*

“Mahamati, if a good son or daughter memorizes and recites and explains this dharani to others, no deva or naga or yaksha or human or non-human or evil spirit will trouble them. I also teach this mantra to keep rakshasas away.

“Whoever memorizes these mantras, memorizes every word of the *Lankavatara Sutra*.”

This marks the end of the *Lankavatara Sutra*.

[130](#) This mantra, or dharani, is not present in Gunabhadra’s text. I’ve based my rendering on Shikshananda’s Chinese transcription and the Sanskrit.

GLOSSARY



The following is a list of titles, names, and terms that appear in the preface, in the sutra, or in the notes. All Sanskrit terms are romanized, but without their usual diacritical marks. For the romanization of Chinese, I have used the traditional Wade-Giles system and added the modern Pinyin spelling after the slash. For the most part, the Chinese characters reflect the usages that appear in Gunabhadra’s translation.

abhidharma 阿毘達磨. Sanskrit for “higher dharmas” or “study of dharmas,” this refers to the matrices of dharmas used by various sects of Buddhism for the study of the mind. It is like a periodic table of the mind.

adhishthana 神力. This refers to powers used by tathagatas to support the spiritual practice of others.

aids to enlightenment 覺支. The Sanskrit is *bodhi-angani*. There are seven: perception of what is true, perception of what is false, zeal, joy, transcendence, remembrance and renunciation.

Akanishtha Heaven 色究竟天. The highest heaven in the realm of form and where enlightenment takes place.

alaya-vijnana 阿梨耶識. See repository consciousness.

anagamin 阿那含. The third of the four fruits of the Hinayana path. This refers to shravaka practitioners who are not reborn in the realm of desire (as humans, for example) but among the gods in the highest heaven of the realm of form.

Ananda (b. 432 B.C.) 阿難. Shakyamuni Buddha's cousin and the monk whose unfailing memory formed the basis of the sutras that comprise the Buddhist Canon.

Angulimaliya Sutra 央掘利魔羅經. A Mahayana text that focuses on the tathagata-garbha. It was translated into Chinese by Gunabhadra.

apsaras 樂天. Celestial females known for their beauty and grace and also for their skill as dancers.

arhat 阿羅漢. The fourth of the four fruits of the Hinayana path. This refers to those shravakas who are free from rebirth and who attain nirvana at the end of this life.

Aryadeva (fl. A.D. 200-250) 聖天. Born on the island of Lanka, he became the most prominent disciple of Nagarjuna

and an expositor of Madhyamaka teachings.

Ashoka (304–232 B.C.) 阿育王. The ruler who united most of India during his reign. Following his conversion to Buddhism, he was responsible for sending missionaries to such places as the island of Lanka and for otherwise spreading the religion throughout the sub-continent.

ashraya-paravrtti 轉依. The overturning or transformation of one's foundation, which occurs as a result of the freedom from projections that accompanies the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path.

assurances 記. These are given to bodhisattvas who have reached that stage from which they will no longer retreat and who are destined to become buddhas.

asuras 阿修羅. Gods who have been expelled from the heavens atop Mount Sumeru who now make war on the other gods. They constitute one of the six possible realms into which one can be reborn.

Avici 阿毘(無擇). Sanskrit for “uninterrupted” or “unrelenting.” This is the name of the hell in which there is no respite from suffering. It is also the hottest of all hells.

ayatanas 入. These include the five powers of sensation and the five domains of sensation along with the sixth power of the mind and its corresponding domain of thought.

bhagavan 世尊. This is one of every buddha's ten titles. It means "one who bestows prosperity."

bhumi 地. Sanskrit for "stage," as in the stages of a path.

bhutakoti 本際. This Sanskrit term means "limit of reality" or "boundary of reality." In the *Lanka*, it refers to transcending the dialectic of samsara and nirvana. I have usually translated it as 'ultimate reality.'

Bodhiruchi 菩提留支. Indian monk who translated the *Lankavatara* in 513.

bodhisattva 菩薩. Those who follow the path to enlightenment and who vow to liberate all beings. The paragon of Mahayana Buddhism, as opposed to the shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas of Hinayana Buddhism, with their focus on their own nirvana.

bodhisattva path 菩薩地. Initially conceived as a seven-stage path that indicated the sequence of attainments realized by those who followed Buddhist teachings. As the Mahayana developed, three additional stages were added, and it is these that are the focus of the *Lankavatara*.

Brahma 梵天. The creator of the universe whose heavens make up the lower part of the realm of form.

Brahman 梵. Member of the priestly class in ancient India.

buddha knowledge 聖智. The Sanskrit is *arya-jnana*, where *arya* refers to “the noble ones” and *jnana* means “knowledge.” What buddhas know.

Buddhist Canon 三藏. The Sanskrit is *tripitaka*. The Mahayana version is usually described as having twelve divisions. The nine-division classification mentioned in the *Lanka* includes sermons of the Buddha (sutras), metrical pieces (geyas), prophecies (vyakaranas), poems (gathas), impromptu statements (udanas), narratives (ityuktas), stories of the Buddha’s previous lives (jatakas), expanded sutras (vaipulyas), and miracles (adbhuta-dharmas). It excludes causal conditions (nidanas), parables (avadanas), and treatises (upadeshas) of the twelve-division version.

cakravartin 轉輪王. Sanskrit for “wheel-turning-king.” This refers to those whose accumulated merit results in a birth in which they have the option of becoming a buddha or ruling the world.

cessation of sensation and perception 受想滅正受. The Sanskrit is *samjna-vedita-nirodha-samapatti*. This meditation is carried out in the realm of form as well as in the formless realm and is considered the highest or most sublime of the nine levels of meditative states cultivated in these two realms.

Chienkang/Jiankang 健康. Old name for the city of Nanching/Nanjing.

Chihuan/Qihuan Monastery 祇洹寺. Monastery near Nanching where Gunabhadra translated the *Lankavatara* in 443.

Ching-chueh/jingjue (683–750) 淨覺. Author of *Leng-ch'ieh-shih-tzu-chi*, which lists the early patriarchs of Zen beginning with Gunabhadra up to and including his own teacher, Shen-hsiu.

Chos-grub (fl 840) 法成. Tibetan monk who lived in Tunhuang and other oases in the Kansu Corridor and who translated Gunabhadra's Chinese translation of the *Lankavatara* into Tibetan.

Chuang-tzu/Zhuangzi (369–286 B.C.) 莊子. Author of the Taoist allegorical text that bears his name.

citta 心. This term refers to the mind in general, but in the *Lanka* it often refers to the eighth, or repository, consciousness.

Cold Mountain (fl. 780) 寒山. Anonymous hermit-poet who lived near the Tientai Mountains of Chekiang province.

delight in whatever is present 現法樂. The Sanskrit is *drishta-dharma-sukha*.

delusion 妄. The Sanskrit is *bhranti*. This refers to the misperception of reality. It is one of the three poisons, the other two being desire and anger.

dependent origination 緣起. The Sanskrit is *pratitya-samutpada*. The understanding that one thing is dependent upon another and therefore does not exist by itself forms the basis of the teaching that all dharmas are therefore empty of self-existence. It was the understanding of the chain of dependent origination (ignorance, memory, consciousness and so on up to grasping, existence, birth, old age and death) that led to Shakyamuni's Enlightenment.

dependent reality 緣起自性. The Sanskrit is *paratantra-svabhava*. Reality as a matrix of interdependence, where nothing exists by itself and where there are therefore no things in themselves. Dependent reality is also referred to as *pratitya-samutpada*, or dependent origination. In the snake-rope analogy, dependent reality is the rope. While it forms the basis for misperception, it is also a misperception, as it is an arbitrary designation without self-existence.

devas 天. A Sanskrit term used to refer to gods or deities in general and thus one of the five or six categories of beings.

dharani 陀羅尼. An incantation with spiritual potency with or without meaning. Used interchangeably with *mantra*.

dharmā/Dharma 法. Sanskrit term for whatever is thought to be real, whether a thing or an idea or a teaching or reality itself. The term is usually capitalized when referring to the wordless doctrine on which Buddhism and thus the teaching of all buddhas is based, as when it comprises one of the three treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

dharmā body 法身. The Sanskrit is *dharmā-kaya*. The real body of every buddha. It has no attributes but also does not have no attributes. Because it has no attributes, it is sometimes likened to the ocean. And because it does not have no attributes, it is likened to the ocean's waves.

dharmā cloud stage 法雲地. The Sanskrit is *dharmā-megha-bhūmi*. This is the name of the tenth and final stage of the bodhisattva path. In this sutra, it is also referred to as the “tathagata stage.”

Dharmakṣema (d. 433) 曇無讖. Indian monk who made the first translation of the Lankavatara into Chinese. His translation, however, was subsequently lost.

dharmatā buddha 法性佛. A conception unique to the *Lanka*, this buddha establishes the dependent reality of personal realization, while the nishyanda buddha reveals the imaginary reality conjured by the mind, and the nirmaṇa-nirmita buddha teaches the perfected reality of spiritual practice.

dhatus 界. The six sensory powers, the six sensory domains,

and the six forms of consciousness that arise from their conjunction.

Diamond Summit 金剛山. The top of Mount Sumeru. However, according to one legend, a great wind once blew off the summit, which fell into the sea and formed the island of Lanka.

Diamond Sutra 金剛經. Most popular of the Prajnaparamita sutras. The Sanskrit title is *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra*.

Edgerton, Franklin (1885–1963). His *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, originally published by Yale University in 1953, remains an essential tool for Sanskrit usages in early Mahayana texts.

eight forms of consciousness 八識. The Sanskrit is *ashtavijnana*. This conception of the mind includes the five forms of sensory consciousness, a sixth form that reifies sensory consciousness into concepts, a seventh form for self-identity and reasoning, and an eighth form for storing and distributing the seeds left behind by the habit-energy from the operations of the sixth and seventh forms.

Eightfold Noble Path 八正道. This was one of the earliest formulations of the Buddha's teaching: right views, right intent, right action, right livelihood, right devotion, right thought and right meditation.

elements of awareness 菩提分. The Sanskrit is *bodhi-paksha*. There are thirty-seven, seven of which are the “aids to enlightenment.”

emptiness 空. The Sanskrit is *shunyata*. In Buddhism, this is used in reference to “the emptiness of self-existence” and not in reference to “nothingness.”

Empty Cloud (1840–1959) 虛雲 Hsu-yun/Xuyun. China’s most famous Zen master of the twentieth century.

Fa-tsang/Facang (643–712) 法藏. Sogdian monk who participated in a number of translation projects and who is also known for his expositions of Huayen Buddhism, of which he was a founding patriarch.

five destinies 五趣. The Sanskrit is *panca-gati*. These include rebirth among gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and the denizens of the various hells. Rebirth among asuras (gods who make war on other gods) is sometimes added to these five, making six destinies.

five dharmas 五法. The Sanskrit is *panca-dharma*. This is one of the principal concepts used in this sutra to explain how we misperceive reality and how we correct such misperception. They include appearance, name, projection (discrimination in Suzuki), correct knowledge and suchness.

five higher powers 五神通. The Sanskrit is *panca-abhijna*. These include distant vision, distant hearing, telepathy, knowledge of past lives, and bodily transport or projection. To these are sometimes added a sixth power: knowledge that puts an end to affliction.

five-part syllogism 五分論. The Sanskrit is *panca-avaya*. This was a form of argument aimed at discovering the truth by means of proposition, reason, example, application and conclusion.

five skandhas 五陰/蘊. This was one of the first abhidharma matrices developed for the purpose of meditation and includes form, sensation, perception, memory and consciousness.

forbearance of non-arising 無生法忍. The Sanskrit is *anutpattika-dharma-kshanti*. The attainment of this realization—that nothing has arisen, now arises, or will arise—marks the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path.

form 色. The Sanskrit is *rupa*. This is one of the five skandhas and comprises the projection of an external world.

formless realm 無色界. The Sanskrit is *arupya-dhatu*. One of the three realms.

four boundless meditations 四無量心. The Sanskrit is *catvari-apramanani* or *catvari-brahma-vihara*. These are

meditations in the formless realm in which practitioners give rise to feelings of infinite friendship, compassion, joy and equanimity.

four (material) elements 四大. The Sanskrit is *catu(maha)-bhuta*. These include earth, water, fire, and wind. To these are sometimes added *bhautika* for the elemental forms compounded of the elements.

four equalities 四種平等. These are made up of four pairs: characteristics and no characteristics, causes and results, self and no self, practice and practitioner.

Four Guardians 四天王. The Sanskrit is *catu(lok)apalas*. Protectors of the Dharma, they include: Dhrtarashtra (east), Virudhaka (south), Virupaksha (west) and Vaishravana (north). Their statues line the entryway to most Buddhist monasteries in East Asia

four kinds of knowledge 四智. The Sanskrit is *catvari(jnanani)*. These are associated with the transformation of consciousness. Knowledge gained from the five forms of sensory consciousness is transformed into the knowledge of perfect accomplishment, knowledge gained from conceptual consciousness is transformed into the knowledge of perfect observation, knowledge gained from the will is transformed into the knowledge of perfect equanimity, and knowledge gained from the repository consciousness is transformed into the knowledge of perfect reflection.

Four Noble Truths 四聖諦. The Sanskrit is *catvari arya-satyani*. An early summary of the Buddha's teaching: suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering, namely, the Eightfold Noble Path.

four possibilities 四句. The sequence used by logicians to represent all possible outcomes of any event: it is either x, or it is y, or it is both x and y, or it is neither x nor y. The tetralemma.

four states of affliction 四住地. These include views, attachments to desire, attachments to form, and attachments to formlessness. The basis for these is the fifth state of affliction: fundamental ignorance, which is separated from the rest in the *Lanka*, as it is considered responsible for "transmigration."

four unhindered powers of argument and judgment 四無礙智. The four *pratisamvid* include powers regarding subject, meaning, expression and eloquence.

four uniformities 四等. These characterize all buddhas, who share the same syllables, voices, teachings and bodies.

fourth dhyana (heaven) 四禪(天). The fourth of the four dhyana heavens in the formless realm. It is characterized by no thought or sensation.

Fu-li/Fuli (fl. 700) 復禮. Chinese monk who, together with Fa-tsang, put the final polish on Shikshananda's draft translation of the *Lankavatara*.

fundamental ignorance 無明住地. The Sanskrit is *avidya-vasa*. The original ignorance from which all other forms of ignorance arise. It refers to ignorance of reality and is usually mentioned along with the four states of affliction to make five states of affliction.

gandharvas 健闥婆. The male counterparts of apsaras, they are guardians of soma, a hallucinogenic concoction used by priests. They are also skilled musicians who live in the sky. Hence, referring to their cloud abodes is tantamount to referring to an illusion.

Ganges 恆河. River in whose watershed Indian civilization and Buddhism developed.

good wisdom stage 善慧地. The Sanskrit is *sadhumati-bhumi*. This is the ninth stage of the bodhisattva path.

Gunabhadra (d. 468) 求那跋陀羅. Central Indian monk who translated the *Lankavatara* into Chinese in 443.

gunas 德. These were considered the forces or building blocks of reality by the Vaiseshikas and include *rajas* (creation), *sattva* (stasis), *tamas* (destruction). I have translated the term as

“tendencies,” but “qualities” is also common.

habit-energy 習氣. The Sanskrit is *vasana*. This is another name for karma, but karma conceived in terms of how it works in the realm of consciousness.

Haiming Monastery 海明寺. Buddhist monastery in the hills south of Taipei.

Hastikakshya Sutra 象腋(縛象)經. A Mahayana text first translated into Chinese around A.D. 300 by Dharmaraksha and again (under this title), around A.D. 430, by Dharmamitra.

Heart Sutra 心經. One of the shortest Buddhist texts, it contrasts the Prajnaparamita teaching of emptiness with the Sarvastivadin teaching of an inherent substance. There are several translations in Chinese and many more in English.

hell of lamentations 叫喚地獄. This is one of the eight hot hells. The Sanskrit is *raurava*, meaning to “lament” or “scream.”

Hinayana 小乘. A term invented by Mahayana Buddhists to criticize those whose spiritual practice they considered too self-centered. In the *Lanka*, these include shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

Hsuan-tsang/Xuancang (602–664) 玄奘. Chinese monk famous for his travels to India and his translations of the texts he

brought back. He is also one of the monks responsible for introducing Yogacara Buddhism to his countrymen.

Hsukaosengchuan/Xugaosengzhuan

續高僧傳

Compiled by Tao-hsuan, this text includes nearly five hundred biographies of Buddhist monks active in China between 502 and 645.

Hsutsangching/Xucangjing

續藏經

Supplement to the Tripitaka. This was published in Japan in 1915 and consists of 150 volumes containing thousands of Buddhist texts not included in the main body of the Tripitaka (Buddhist Canon).

Hui-k'o/Huikē (487–593)

慧可

Disciple of Bodhidharma and Second Zen Patriarch in China.

Hui-neng/Huineng (638–713)

慧能

Chinese Zen's Sixth Patriarch. His teachings are recorded in the *Platform Sutra*.

Hung-jen/Hongren (601–675)

弘忍

Fifth Patriarch of Zen in China. One of the first Zen masters to use the *Diamond Sutra* in his teaching.

icchantikas

一闍提

Beings who are so immersed in pleasure, they are incapable of understanding the Dharma. Thus, whether or not they have the ability to become buddhas has long been a point of contention among Buddhists.

imagined reality 妄想自性. The Sanskrit is *parikalpita-svabhava*. This is one of the three modes of reality according to Yogacara Buddhism and represents the net of delusions cast upon dependent reality and interpreted as real. In the snake-rope analogy, imagined reality is when the rope is seen as a snake.

imperceptible transformation deaths 不思議變易死. The Sanskrit is *acintya-parinati-cyuti*. Death and rebirth so subtle it is barely noticed.

individual and shared characteristics 自共相. The Sanskrit is *svasamanya-lakshana*. Terms used to identify elements of reality through contrast or combination as something possessed by one entity or something shared by a class of entities. Such terms were apparently in response to the Vaiseshika use of similar terms: *samana* (general), *vishesa* (specific).

Indra 天帝 (aka Shakra). The creator of the world whose palace includes a net of jewels, each of which reflects all the other jewels.

Iron Ring Mountains 鐵圍山. These mountains surround the seas that surround the world.

kalpa 劫. Period of time between the creation and the destruction of a world or universe. Thus, there are kalpas of varying lengths and kalpas within kalpas.

karmic deaths 分段死. these refer to death and subsequent rebirth in accordance with one's karma.

Kashyapa (fl. 400 B.C.) 迦葉. Also known as Uruvilva Kashyapa or Mahakashyapa, he was the eldest of the three Kashyapa brothers and among the Buddha's earliest disciples. He was also India's First Patriarch of Zen.

Khotan 于闐. Silk Road oasis between the southern edge of the Taklamakan Desert and the Kunlun Mountains. Along with Kucha and Turfan on the other side of the Taklamakan, this was the greatest center of Buddhism during the first millennium in what is now China's Hsinchiang/Xinjiang province.

Kokan, Shiren (1278–1346) 虎關師鍊. Japanese scholar-monk whose divisions of the *Lankavatara* into sections (in his *Butsugoshinron*) formed the basis for Suzuki's divisions.

kshana 剎那. This is the shortest imaginable period of time.

Kutsang/Gucang 姑臧. Ancient name for the capital of various kingdoms in the Kansu Corridor of Northwest China. The modern town of Wuwei.

Lanka 楞伽. The island in the Indian Ocean that serves as the backdrop of this sutra. Formerly Ceylon, it is now known as Sri Lanka, or Holy Lanka.

Lankavatara Sutra 楞伽阿跋多羅寶經. The sutra in which the Buddha points directly to the mind.

Leng-ch'ieh-shih-tz'i-chi/Lengchiehshiziji 楞伽師資記. An account of the early patriarchs of Zen written by Ching-chueh, in which he lists Gunabhadra as the First Patriarch and Shen-hsiu as the Sixth.

Light of Mahayana Samadhi 大乘照明三昧. A samadhi marked by emptiness, formlessness and intentionlessness.

Linchi/Linji (aka Rinzai) 臨濟. Name of a Zen lineage that recognized Linchi (d. 866) as its founder.

Liu Sung/Liu Song 劉宋. Name of the dynastic state that controlled all of South China between 420 and 479 from its capital in Chienkang.

Lokayatast 世間諸論. The name of a Hindu sect or movement whose members espoused the view that the world is comprised by nothing more than the four elements of solidity (earth), moisture (water), warmth (fire), and movement (wind). Hence, they are usually referred to as materialists.

Lotus Sutra 妙法蓮華經. Early Mahayana scripture that claims to be among the last sermons of the Buddha. While presenting the cosmic aspects of the Buddha, it also teaches the universality among beings of the ability to become buddhas.

Loyang/Luoyang 洛陽. Capital of numerous dynasties near the confluence of the Lo and Yellow rivers in China's Honan province.

Madhyamaka 中論. The Buddhist teaching first systematized by Nagarjuna and credited with inspiring the Mahayana revolution by pointing to a Middle Way between eternalism and nihilism through its teaching of the emptiness of self-existence.

Mahamati 大慧. The bodhisattva who is the interlocutor of this sutra.

Mahamegha Sutra 大雲經. This Mahayana text was translated in A.D. 417 by Dharmakshema, the same monk whose early translation of the *Lankavatara* was lost.

Mahayana 大乘. Buddhist teachings that focus on the transformation of the mind and that aim at the liberation of all beings. After developing near the end of the first millennium B.C. in India, this series of teachings spread through all of East Asia and includes the Zen, Pure Land, Tientai, Precept and Huayen schools, among others.

Mahinda (fl. 230 B.C.) 摩哂陀. Son of King Ashoka and monk who is credited with introducing Buddhism to the island of Lanka.

manas 意. Will or self-consciousness. In the scheme of eight

forms of consciousness, it is known as the seventh form.

mano-vijnana 意識. Conceptual consciousness. It is the sixth form of consciousness and reifies the five sensory-based forms of consciousness into conceptual constructs.

mantra 咒. An incantation with spiritual potency composed of strings of syllables that do not necessarily make sense from a linguistic perspective. Used interchangeably with *dharani*.

mara 魔. Demons who obstruct other beings from understanding the Dharma or who cause chaos, illness and death in the world. Mara was also the name of the demon that attempted to distract Shakyamuni the night of his Enlightenment.

masteries 自在. The Sanskrit is *bala*. Usually five of these are listed: faith, effort, mindfulness, meditation and wisdom.

materialist 世間諸論. The Sanskrit is *lokyata* or *lokyatika*. This term included all those whose approach to knowledge was based on the five senses.

Meghavarna (fl. A.D. 350) 眉伽槃那. Ruler of Lanka when this sutra was written.

Mi-t'uo-shan (fl. 700) 彌陀山. Tokharin monk who refined Shikshananda's draft translation of the *Lankavatara*. His Chinese name was Chi-yu (寂友)

mind and what belongs to mind 心心法. The Sanskrit is *citta-caitta-kalapa*. This refers to the mind in general and all its possible states, functions and attributes.

Mount Kailash 雞羅山. A sacred peak in the Himalayas and a center of pilgrimage.

Mount Malaya 摩羅耶山. Mountain on the island of Lanka that provides the setting for the *Lankavatara Sutra*.

Mount Sumeru 須彌山. Also known as Mount Meru, this peak occupies the center of the Buddhist universe.

Nagarjuna (fl. 175–200 A.D.) 龍樹. Indian philosopher-monk who laid the foundation for the Madhyamaka school of Mahayana Buddhism through his teaching of Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Wisdom) based on the emptiness of the self-existence of all things.

Nan Huai-chin/Nan Huaijin (1918–) 南懷瑾. Zen Buddhist teacher and lay practitioner whose books have been influential in renewing the interest in spiritual practice in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China.

Nanghai 南海. Ancient name for the seaport of Kuangchou (Canton).

Nanjio, Bunyiu (1849–1927) 南条文雄. Japanese Buddhist scholar responsible for the recension of the Sanskrit text of the *Lankavatara* used by D.T. Suzuki for his translation.

nirodha 滅. Extinction or cessation. It is used in the *Lanka* to describe one of the two kinds of cessation of thought.

nirmana-kaya 化身. The apparition body manifested by a buddha for use in teaching others.

nirmita-nirmana buddha 化佛. This term, apparently unique to the *Lankavatara*, refers to a buddha who teaches the Dharma. An apparition or incarnation buddha. Later Buddhists settled on the term *nirmana-kaya*.

nirvana 涅槃. The goal of early Buddhists, variously described but always in a way that includes the cessation of suffering and no further rebirth.

Nirvana Sutra 大般涅槃經. A major scripture of Mahayana Buddhism composed in stages between the second and third centuries, it includes one of the earliest presentations of such concepts as the tathagata-garbha and the buddha-nature.

nishyanda buddha 依佛. This term, also unique to the *Lankavatara*, refers to those buddhas created by the dharmata buddha who radiate light and perfect the worlds in which beings dwell and who lead practitioners to Akanishtha Heaven. Similar

to what was later called a buddha's *sambhoga-kaya*, or reward body.

nonanalytic cessation 非數緣滅. The Sanskrit is *apratīsamkhyā-nirodha*. This is one of the two types of cessation of thought recognized by the Sarvastivadins and one of the six uncreated dharmas of the Yogacarins.

non-dharma 非法. The Sanskrit is *adharmā*. This term is used in Chapter One to refer to imaginary things. Names with no corresponding reality.

Northern Liang 北涼. Dynastic state that controlled various parts of the Kansu Corridor 397–439.

Northern Wei 北魏. Dynastic state that controlled much of North China 386–534.

Nyaya 尼夜耶. This term refers to logicians in general but especially to those who belonged to the school of this name that developed on the basis of a set of texts written in the second century.

one path 一乘. This refers to the teaching of personal realization.

Paramartha (499–569) 真諦. An Indian monk who translated a number of Yogacara texts and whose interpretations of their meaning were opposed by those of Hsuan-tsang.

paramitas 波羅蜜多. Referring to six paramitas, or means to the other shore, which include charity, morality, forbearance, vigor, meditation and wisdom, to which skillful means, vows, strength, and knowledge were later added to make ten.

perceptions of one's own mind 自心所現. The Sanskrit is *sva-citta-drshya*. An expression that occurs repeatedly throughout the *Lanka* to point out that whatever we see is a product of our own mind and that the categories of such perception are self-generated.

perfected reality 圓成性. The Sanskrit is *parinishpanna-svabhava*. One of the three modes of reality, this refers to seeing what is truly so. It also corresponds to the last two of the five dharmas, namely, the correct knowledge of suchness. In the snake-rope analogy, it is seeing both snake and rope as (mis)perceptions of one's own mind.

personal realization of buddha knowledge 自覺聖智. The Sanskrit is *sva-pratyatma-arya-jnana*.

Pingcheng 平城. Ancient city of Tatung/Datong in North China.

Platform Sutra 壇經. The record of the Zen teaching of Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen.

prajna 般若. Sanskrit for “wisdom.”

Prajnaparamita 般若波羅蜜多. This is the name for the teaching of emptiness from which Mahayana Buddhism took its rise. The name means “transcendent wisdom” or “the wisdom that leads to the other shore.”

prajnapati-matra 唯假設. This is the concept around which the Yogacara turns, that whatever we might say exists only exists as a verbal convention or designation. What is real cannot be designated or indicated, because it would include the finger and the one doing the pointing.

pratyatma-gati 自證/自覺. Personal or self-realization.

pratyeka-buddhas 緣覺佛. One of the two categories of Hinayana Buddhists. They are devoted to self-liberation and the attainment of nirvana as opposed to the liberation of others and the attainment of enlightenment, which characterize Mahayana Buddhism.

pretas 餓鬼. Hungry ghosts. One of the five or six categories of rebirth.

projection 妄想. This is my translation of Gunabhadra’s *wang-hsiang* (false-conception), which is his translation of such Sanskrit terms as *vikalpa*, *parikalpa*, *kalpana* and so on, all of

which are derived from the root *klp* and have to do with imagining something that is not actually there.

projection body 意生身. The Sanskrit is *mano-maya-kaya*. This refers to any of the three bodies that are projected at will during samadhi.

projectionless 無相/無所有. The Sanskrit is *nirabhasa*, which means “no false appearance” but also “not within range.” Usually, the first meaning has been emphasized by translators, who have tended to render it as “imageless.” However, the image or false appearance as understood in the *Lanka* is a self-generated projection and not something external.

Purusha 士夫. According to early Indian epics, the god who created the world out of his body.

Queen Shrimala 勝鬘夫人. She was the daughter of King Prasenajit and Queen Mallika of Kosala. In a sutra named after her, she explains the tathagatagarbha as possessing two states: empty or not empty, pure or impure. This short but influential text was translated by Gunabhadra in 436.

rakshasas 羅刹. Among the ancient tribes of India. They are often linked with the yakshas, both of which are demonized in early Indian epics.

Ravana 羅婆那. The ten-headed king of Lanka. His name

means “He of the Terrifying Roar,” referring to his screams of agony while pinned under a mountain by Shiva. He is still reviled in India for his abduction of the wife of Rama.

realm of desire 欲界. One of the three realms.

realm of form 色界. One of the three realms.

repository consciousness 藏識. The Sanskrit is *alaya-vijnana*. This is conceived of as the receptacle that contains whatever remains from our projections, whether they consist of thoughts, words or deeds. As such, it is also conceived of as a seedbed from which our subsequent projections arise. In its undifferentiated state, it is known as the *tathagata-garbha*, or womb of buddhas.

rishis 仙. Recluses or ascetics.

Sagara 娑竭羅. One of eight serpent kings of ancient India.

Sagathakam 偈頌經. Collection of 884 short four-line verses of mixed origin (208 of which also appear in the *Lanka*) appended to the end of the *Lankavatara* as early as the sixth century.

sakrid-agamin 斯陀含. One of the four fruits of the Hinayana path, this refers to those who will be reborn once more as humans in the realm of desire, after which they attain

liberation in one of the heavens of the realm of form.

samadhi 三昧. Another name for meditation, especially when it involves the non-discrimination of subject and object.

Samadhi of Cessation 滅正受. The Sanskrit is *nirodha-samapatti*. This samadhi in which sensation and perception cease is characteristic of the sixth stage of the bodhisattva path. Hinayana practitioners interpret this as nirvana. However, Mahayana practitioners see it as transitional.

Samadhi of the Illusory 如幻三昧. The Sanskrit is *maya-upama-samadhi*. This is a samadhi in which one acquires an illusory body, hence the name. Then illusory body that accompanies this samadhi is one of the three projection bodies.

samapatti 正受. Another name for meditation, especially the four formless meditations.

sameness, difference, both, neither 異俱不俱. The tetralemma or list of all possible outcomes.

Samkhya 數論. The name of one of six prominent Hindu sects whose members believed in the constituent qualities or tendencies (*gunas*) of creation, stasis, and destruction that combined to form reality.

samsara 生死. Birth and death, the counterpart of nirvana.

Samudragupta (r. 335–375 B.C.) 沙姆陀羅笈多. Ruler of Central India when this sutra was written.

Samyuktagama 雜阿含經. Collection of sutras on topics of meditation belonging to the Sarvastivadins. It was translated into Chinese by Gunabhadra.

Sandhinirmonacana Sutra 深密經. Early Yogacara text discussing the nature of consciousness and the meditations whereby enlightenment is attained. There is an English translation with the title: *Wisdom of the Buddha*.

sangha 僧伽. The Buddhist spiritual community, both lay and monastic, which can be further characterized by the dominant form of practice: Zen, Pure Land, Tantric, Vipassana.

Sanmin Shuchu/Sanmin Shuju 三民書局. Bookstore in Taipei on Chungching South Road.

Sarvastivadins 一切有部. Major sect of Hinayana Buddhism during the first centuries of the first millennium in North and Northwest India. Its members believed in an underlying substance that survived change.

self and what belongs to a self 我我所. Other schools located the self in the skandha of consciousness and what

belongs to the self in the remaining four skandhas.

self-existence 自性. The Sanskrit is *sva-bhava*. The existence of something on its own and not dependent on anything else.

self-realization of buddha knowledge 自覺聖智. The Sanskrit is *sva-pratyatma-arya-jnana*. The personal experience of what buddhas know.

Seng-ts'an (519–606) 僧璨. Third Patriarch of Zen in China.

serpent king 龍王. The Sanskrit is *naga-rajā*. In ancient India, as in other early civilizations, serpents were viewed as guardians of knowledge. Several deities are identified with this title in India.

Shakra (aka Indra) 釋提桓. Chief among gods.

Shakyamuni 釋迦牟尼. Meaning “Sage of the Shakyas,” the Shakyas being the clan into which the Buddha was born.

Shaolin Monastery 少林寺. Buddhist monastery at the foot of the Lesser Peak of Mount Sungshan near Loyang.

Shen-hsiu/Shenxiu (606–706) 神秀. Disciple of Hung-jen, Zen's Fifth Patriarch, and considered by the Northern School of Zen as the rightful Sixth Patriarch.

Shikshananda (652–710) 實叉難陀. A Khotanese monk who translated the *Lankavatara Sutra* between 698 and 700 A.D. in Loyang.

shravakas 聲聞. One of two categories of Hinayana Buddhists devoted to self-liberation and the attainment of nirvana, as opposed to the liberation of all beings and the attainment of enlightenment that characterizes Mahayana Buddhism.

siddhanta 悉檀. This refers to “spiritual proofs,” and in such cases I have translated the word as “attainments.” Normally, *siddhanta* refers to a conclusion established as the result of inquiry or logic, but in this sutra it refers to a conclusion based on spiritual insight rather than logic.

six samadhis 六三昧. Meditations aimed at attaining the six higher powers.

skandhas 陰/蘊. These refer to the constituents that comprise what is thought of as the individual. They include form (external), sensation, perception, memory and consciousness (internal).

skillful means 方便. The Sanskrit is *upaya*. This is seen as the counterpart of compassion: to use whatever means are appropriate to help others. It is also listed as the seventh *paramita*, or perfection.

srota-apanna 須陀洹. The first of the four Hinayana categories of attainment. it means to “reach the river,” the river of impermanence.

Stonehouse (1272–1352) 清珙石屋. Reclusive Zen poet-monk of China.

suchness 真如/如如. The Sanskrit is *tathata*. Reality.

sugata 善逝. Another epithet of buddhas, it means “well gone.”

Sungshan/Songshan 嵩山. The central member among China’s five sacred mountains.

Supplement to the Tripitaka 續藏經. Compilation of Buddhist texts completed in 1915 in Japan that includes scriptures and commentaries not part of the earlier versions of the Tripitaka.

Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro 鈴木大拙貞太郎. Japanese scholar and translator of Buddhist texts, especially those concerned with Zen. His translation of the Sanskrit version of the *Lankavatara* into English was published in 1932.

sva-bhava 自性. What exists by itself. Hence, the essential building block of any conception of reality, be it imagined, dependent or perfected.

sva-citta-dryshya-matra 自心現量. Sanskrit for “nothing but the perceptions of one’s own mind.”

sva-pratyatma arya-jnana 自覺聖智. Sanskrit for “the self-realization of buddha knowledge.”

swastika 勝相剎. This ancient symbol of unknown origin is also referred to as a *shrivatsa*. It often appears as a white curl in the middle of the chest of a buddha or one of the Hindu gods, such as Vishnu.

T’ai-hsu/Taixu (1890–1947) 太虛. Scholar-monk who devoted himself to revitalizing and reforming Chinese Buddhism in the early twentieth century.

Taipei/Taibei 台北. Capital of Taiwan.

Taisho (Revised) Tripitaka 大正新脩大藏經. This edition of the Mahayana Buddhist Canon was published in Japan between 1924 and 1934 and remains the primary reference source for Chinese Buddhist sutras.

Tanyang/Danyang 丹陽. City near Nanching.

Tao-hsin/Daoxin (580–651) 道信. Fourth Patriarch of Zen in China and responsible for establishing the first Zen monastery.

T'an-lin (506–574) 曇林. Chinese disciple of Bodhidharma.

Tao-hsuan/Daoxuan (596–667) 道宣. Scholar monk and founder of the Precept School of Chinese Buddhism. Among the works he produced, the most famous is the *Hsukaosengchuan*, which was a collection of biographies of nearly five hundred monks who were active from 502 to 645.

tathagata 如來. One of several Sanskrit terms used to refer to a buddha. It means “to come/go in suchness.”

tathagata stage 如來地. The Sanskrit is *tathagata-bhumi*. This is another name for the tenth and final stage of the bodhisattva path.

tathagata-garbha 如來藏. This Sanskrit term means “womb of buddhas.” In the *Lankavatara*, it is treated as the same as the *alaya-vijnana* (repository consciousness), two sides of the same coin. But it is the *alaya-vijnana* transformed and free of projections. Elsewhere, it is linked with the dharma body: hidden, it's the *tathagata-garbha*, visible, it's the dharma body. Ultimately, though, it is a palliative for those terrified by the idea of no self.

Te-ch'ing/Deqing (1546–1623) 憨山德清. Chinese scholar-monk and major figure in the renaissance of Zen in China during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

ten inexhaustible vows 十無盡句. Aimed at liberating all beings, they begin with: “If beings are inexhaustible, my vow is inexhaustible.” The same vow is then applied to worlds, space, the realm of reality, nirvana, the appearances of buddhas, the knowledge of a tathagata, the objects of the mind, the realms entered by buddha knowledge, and the knowledge that turns the wheel of the dharma.

ten powers 十力. There are different lists of these powers, but typical is the one that includes a knowledge or mastery of right and wrong, karma, meditation, the senses, desires, natures, directions, past lives, divine sight and passionlessness.

ten samadhis 十三味. These include universal light, subtle light, travel to all buddhalands, purification of the mind, knowledge of the past, light of wisdom, knowledge of adornments, differentiation of beings, the Dharma Realm, and unimpeded teaching.

ten-stage path of the lineage of sages 十賢聖種性道. This is a conception of spiritual lineages found in Prajnaparamita literature. It begins with the “dry-wisdom” stage and ends with the “pratyeka-buddha,” “bodhisattva,” and “buddha” stages.

tendencies 德. The Sanskrit is *gunas*. These are viewed as permanent and as combining to form objects of sensation, which are impermanent.

tetralemma 四句. The four possibilities: x or y, both x and y, neither x nor y.

thirty-seven elements of enlightenment 三十七道品. The Sanskrit is *bodhi-pakshsa*. These are often linked together using the earth to represent the nature of reality, the seeds as the four subjects of mindfulness, the planting of the seeds as the four right exertions, the sprouting of the seeds as the four supernatural abilities, the sending down of roots as the five psychic faculties, the sending forth of stems and leaves as the five spiritual powers, the flowers as the seven constituents of enlightenment, and the fruit as the eightfold noble path.

thirty-two attributes 三十二相. This is the number of marks associated with every buddha, such as long earlobes and arms and a swastika on the chest.

three continuities 三相續. The Sanskrit is *tri-samtati*. These include greed, anger and delusion. Also known as the three poisons, they are responsible for the continuity of suffering and existence.

three means to knowledge 三(種)量. These three are used in Samkhya epistemology and include accepted authority, inference or reasoning, and direct experience.

three modes of non-reality 三無自性. The Sanskrit is *tri-asvabhava*. These include form, life and reality. This term does not appear in the *Lanka*.

three modes of reality 三自性. The Sanskrit is *tri-svabhava*. They include imagined, dependent and perfected reality.

three paths/vehicles 三乘. The Sanskrit is *tri-yana*. These normally include the two lesser paths of the Hinayana, namely those of the shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas, and the greater path of the Mahayana of bodhisattvas. However, in the *Lankavatara*, the Buddha says there is one path for gods and Bhrama, one for shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas and one for tathagatas.

three poisons 三毒. The Sanskrit is *tri-visha*. These include delusion, desire and anger. They are often depicted as a pig, a chicken and a snake, respectively.

three realms 三界. Meant to cover all forms of existence in any world, these include the realm of desire (of which there are five or six kinds of existence), the realm of form (of which there are four or more heavens), and the formless realm (of which there are also four heavens or levels).

three treasures 三寶. The different facets of Buddhism upon which practitioners rely. They include the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

threefold combination 三和合. This usually refers to a sensory power, a sensory domain and the form of sensory

consciousness that arises when these meet.

threefold gate of liberation 三解脫門. The gate of emptiness, formlessness, intentionlessness (or effortless) which leads to buddhahood.

Tokhara 靛貨邏. Ancient kingdom that included parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan, more or less equivalent to the previous kingdom of Bactria.

Tokiwa, Gishin 岡村圭真. Japanese scholar and translator of the *Lankavatara* from Gunabhadra's Chinese translation back into Sanskrit and also into English (the latter of which has yet to be made available to the public).

Tripitaka 三藏. The Buddhist Canon. Numbering a hundred or more volumes, there are different versions of this collection of scriptures in Chinese, Pali and Tibetan.

Tseng Feng-yi/Zeng Fengyi (c. 1570–1640) 曾鳳儀. Confucian scholar who was converted to Buddhism and who produced a number of commentaries on major sutras, including one of the *Lankavatara* on which many of my comments are based.

Tunhuang/Dunhuang 敦煌. Major oasis on the Silk Road located where the Taklamakan Desert meets the Kansu Corridor.

T'ung-jun/Tongrun (1565–1624) 通潤. Ming-dynasty scholar-monk who produced a number of commentaries on major sutras. Among the commentaries I have used for the *Lankavatara*, his is the best.

Tushita Heaven 兜率天. This heaven in the realm of desire above Mount Sumeru is where bodhisattvas are reborn prior to their final rebirth during which they attain buddhahood.

twelve nidanas 十二因緣. The links that make up the chain of dependent origination that begins with ignorance, memory, consciousness, name and form, sense organs and contact and ends with sensation, thirst, existence, birth, old age and death.

two kinds of affliction 二煩惱. These include the senses and what arises from them. It is on the basis of these that attachment to the two kinds of self exist.

two kinds of death 二種死. These include karmic death and transformation death, the latter of which is so subtle it is barely noticed.

two kinds of no-self 二無我. The absence of a self in persons or beings and the absence of self in dharmas or things.

two obstructions 二障. These include passion and knowledge. Passion is the cause of karmic death. Knowledge is

the cause of transformation death.

ultimate beginning 本際. The Sanskrit is *purvakoti*. In the *Lankavatara*, this refers to transcendence of the dialectic that samsara and nirvana represent. In Zen parlance, one's face before one was born.

ultimate reality 實際. The Sanskrit is *bhutakoti*. In the *Lankavatara*, this refers to transcendence of the dialectic that samsara and nirvana represent. In Zen parlance, have a cup of tea.

unexcelled, perfect enlightenment
阿耨多羅三藐三菩提. The Sanskrit is *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*. The qualifiers "unexcelled" and "perfect" were added to distinguish the enlightenment of a buddha from the enlightenment claimed by other sects or by shravakas or pratyeka-buddhas.

unshakeable stage 不動地. The Sanskrit is *acala-bhumi*. Referring to the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path, it is that stage from which one cannot be shaken.

Vajrapani 金剛力士. The name of one of the three protective deities of every buddha. As his name indicates, he is usually depicted wielding a *vajra*, or thunderbolt.

Vasubandhu (fl. 380 A.D.) 天親. Indian scholar-monk and

the author of numerous treatises that helped establish the teachings of Yogacara Buddhism.

Vedas 吠陀. The scriptures of the Brahmins.

Vimalakirti Sutra 維摩詰經. Major sutra of Mahayana Buddhism centered around Manjushri's visit to the sick layman, Vimalakirti, who represents the attainment of enlightenment outside the monastic order.

vinaya 律藏. That part of the Buddhist Canon that deals with moral discipline.

Wu Tse-t'ien/ Wu Zitian (624–705) 武則天. Empress of the T'ang dynasty.

Wu-ming/Wuming (1910–2011) 悟明. Former abbot of Taiwan's Haiming Monastery.

Yang Hsuan-chih/Yang Xuanzhi (fl. 530) 楊衒之. Writer and Buddhist translator who compiled a record of Buddhist temples of Loyang (*Lo-yang ch'ieh-lan-chi*).

yakshas 夜叉. Along with the rakshasas, with whom they are often confused, they were one of the ancient tribes of India.

Yin-shun/Yinshun (1905–2005) 印順. Prominent Chinese

scholar-monk and one of the few modern masters to specialize in Indian Buddhism, especially the Madhyamaka teaching of Nagarjuna.

Yogacara 瑜伽行. This is Sanskrit for “practice of yoga.” Its application, however, is in reference to the school of Buddhism that began in the third and fourth centuries that focuses its attention on consciousness.

Yungning/Yongning Monastery 永寧寺. Largest Buddhist monastery in Loyang during the Northern Wei dynasty and home of several thousand foreign monks.

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