Unveiling the Hidden Meaning of the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment

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Unveiling the Hidden Meaning of the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment

Thus have I heard: At one time, the Bhagavān entered the samādhi of proper reception in the great light treasury of spiritual powers, upheld by the radiance and adornment of all Tathāgatas.

This is the ground of pure enlightenment of all sentient beings: body and mind are quiescent, the original nature is equal, and it perfectly pervades the ten directions. In accord with nonduality, within the realm of nonduality, he manifested Pure Lands. He was together with one hundred thousand great bodhisattva mahāsattvas. Foremost among them were Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, Universal-Eye Bodhisattva, Vajragarbha Bodhisattva, Maitreya Bodhisattva, Pure-Wisdom Bodhisattva, Sovereign-Might-and-Virtue Bodhisattva, Eloquent-Sound Bodhisattva, Purifying-All-Karmic-Obstacles Bodhisattva, Universal-Enlightenment Bodhisattva, Perfect-Enlightenment Bodhisattva, Worthy-Good-Head Bodhisattva, and others. All, together with their retinues, entered samādhi and dwelt in the Tathāgata's assembly of equal Dharma.

The Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-nine years and spoke only of the two Chinese characters yuanjue ( ), translated as "perfect enlightenment." Yet it can never be fully conveyed in words, for perfect enlightenment is without characteristics; it is the virtue of mind equally possessed by Buddhas and sentient beings and cannot be expressed in words.

Enlightenment is intrinsic nature, while "perfect" conveys virtue. Without enlightenment, nature does not manifest; without cultivation, enlightenment is not perfected. Whether it is perfect or not lies with you yourself, not with the Buddha, not with the Dharma, and much less with words. We can only rely on words to explain meaning and use them as aids to verification, as one uses a mirror for reflection, examining the condition of one's own ground of enlightenment. Thus it is provisionally called perfect enlightenment.

Perfect enlightenment is a dhāraṇī Dharma gate. Through it, all dharmas are gathered together and immeasurable meanings are retained; its wondrous functions are as countless as the sands of the Ganges, and nothing fails to flow from it. Thus, upon realizing the essence, one activates its function. It is therefore called the great dhāraṇī gate, named perfect enlightenment. The characteristic of enlightenment is no characteristic; this "characteristic" refers to the essence of enlightenment—that is, knowing the essential characteristics of one's own mind as they truly are. Only when one becomes continuous and undivided is it called perfect. Yet one must use illuminating awareness as its function. When the obstructions of phenomena are cut off, afflictions are exhausted; when the obstructions of principle are cut off, what is knowable is exhausted. When self and dharmas are both empty, one realizes perfect enlightenment.

From "Thus have I heard," we may know that the sūtra's words merely assist the knowledge of my ear faculty. I then contemplate in accordance with the words, and contemplation itself enters into cultivation; these cannot be divided into three

separate stages. Here faith is primary. Among the eleven wholesome dharmas and the fifty-five stages of cultivation and realization, none is without faith as its mother.

When contemplation accords with hearing, that is cultivation. When cultivation reaches mutual confirmation, it is called accord; accord is called sūtra. In Sanskrit, it means agreement or conformity. Above, it accords with the Buddha's mind; below, it accords with one's own mind. All of this is the natural outflow of perfect enlightenment, an accord that arises without being sought.

Feeling gives rise to language, and language accords with meaning; inwardly it confirms the minds of all beings. Therefore, through the prajñā of words, one opens the prajñā of true reality, using the sūtra as a means of confirmation and illumination. Yet hearing alone is of no benefit. In former times, Ānanda heard the Buddha-Dharma together with the Buddha innumerable kalpas ago. The Buddha attained realization, while Ānanda remained an attendant; after the Buddha had entered nirvāṇa, Ānanda had still not realized the mind. This shows the harm of extensive learning without cultivation.

Whenever you read this sūtra, contemplate with a comprehensive mind. What is comprehensive contemplation? It is that when one is understood, all are understood; when one is penetrated, all are penetrated; the three vehicles are precisely the one vehicle; and so forth. It demolishes all appearances of distinction and enters nonduality—this is called comprehensive contemplation. Tiantai provisionally establishes emptiness, provisional existence, and the middle; yet in truth the three contemplations are one contemplation. If there is stopping and contemplation, then it is not stopping and contemplation; if one posits perfect enlightenment, then it is not perfect enlightenment. Ultimately, not even the slightest dharma can be obtained.

Before realizing samādhi, one cannot be spoken to about perfect enlightenment. Before seeing true reality, one cannot be said to realize perfect enlightenment. Only upon entering the gate of nonduality, penetrating both worldly and supramundane matters, and remaining neither startled nor afraid, may one perhaps comprehend the meaning of this sūtra. It is not that the Dharma itself has distinctions of high and low; people differ in sharpness and dullness of faculties, and their understanding accordingly differs.

Whenever one reads a sūtra, one must first understand its standpoint and central principle. This sūtra takes as its principle true cultivation after awakening, direct pointing to the essential mind, and sudden transcendence to the ground of enlightenment. It is the simplest, clearest, and most essential Dharma gate for contemplating the mind. It realizes phenomena through principle, knowing that complete practice is perfect; it is a sūtra of the complete and sudden Mahāyāna, of

definitive meaning. The Tathāgata taught it for those of the highest vehicle, and only those of superior faculties are neither startled nor afraid.

Throughout, this sūtra takes care of those sentient beings in the latter age who cultivate the complete and sudden Mahāyāna. From this we know that future sentient beings will not lack persons of great capacity; this is not something that ordinary beings can fathom. Take care not to disparage later students or abandon yourselves in despair.

This sūtra is divided into three major sections: first, it clarifies the Dharma practices at the causal stage of awakening; second, it explains methods of cultivation; third, it removes the various illnesses of Chan. In regard to principle, it explains repeatedly, resolving doubts for fear that its treatment may be incomplete. In regard to Dharma, it instructs each gate in turn, describing illnesses for fear that its account may lack detail. Its compassion is vast and inconceivable. Those without roots of goodness, merit, virtue, and conditions do not have the good fortune to hear this sūtra.

The term “Worthy-Good-Head” precisely represents the supreme virtue of this sūtra. When reading it, one should first read the final fascicle. It says that this sūtra is named the sudden-teaching Mahāyāna, through which sentient beings of sudden capacity awaken; it is also called the Great Vaipulya Perfect-Enlightenment Dhāraṇī, the Sūtra of Definitive Meaning, the King of Secret Samādhi, the Tathāgata’s decisive realm, and so forth. Thus only the Tathāgata can proclaim it fully. It is the refuge of bodhisattvas in the ten directions and the pure eye of the twelve divisions of scripture. In these statements, the standpoint and central principle of this sūtra have already been fully proclaimed.

The nature of enlightenment originally has neither square nor round characteristics. Its being called “perfect” does not mean roundness in the ordinary sense. Because its essence pervades without exception, it is called great; because its dharmas encompass without exception, it is called extensive; because its functions are complete without exception, it is called broad. Moreover, no dharma precedes it; it alone precedes all dharmas. Like boundless space, it is therefore great. Dharma means a norm; a name is established according to this meaning, and so it is extensive. Function arises from essence, and it receives its name from function; its meaning is broad erudition, and so it is broad. The total virtue of great, extensive, and broad is called perfect enlightenment.

The nature of enlightenment originally has neither square nor round form. When enlightenment occurs, it has never arisen; when there is non-enlightenment, it has never ceased. Its essence has no boundary and transcends all measures. It has no beginning in the past and no end in the future; there is only the distinction between concealment and manifestation. Provisionally, concealment is called non-

enlightenment and manifestation is called enlightenment. When function arises from essence, the perfect enlightenment of great, extensive, and broad is revealed.

The first manifestation of perfect enlightenment is called the initial awakening, the Buddha's light. When one realizes this Tathāgata dhāraṇī mind-Dharma of the great light treasury, it is like the faint appearance of white light at dawn: it is no longer the dark of night. It naturally increases and never regresses; when it becomes like the sun at midday, one attains great enlightenment. Yet this cannot be understood from words. One must turn the contemplation back upon one's own nature, use the meaning of the sūtra to verify the various states of mind, accord above with the middle way, and accord below with the capacities of beings. This is called sūtra.

"Definitive meaning" is a decisive expression. The Buddha teaches according to persons; teachings spoken as expedient means are not definitive. When the Buddha teaches the Dharma as it truly is and speaks in accordance with intrinsic nature, this is the foremost definitive meaning. At this ultimate point, there is no room for equivocation; no expedient means are assumed, nor are there gradual stages. Therefore it is called definitive meaning. Yet "definitive" itself is still a matter of meaning, and meaning is not definitive. To speak of definitive meaning is merely to apply a name.

Sūtra means the constant path. In terms of the prajñā of words, a sūtra has the meanings of threading together, according, and Dharma. In terms of the prajñā of true reality, a sūtra is the Buddha-nature complete in sentient beings, the Vairocana in whom sages and ordinary beings are nondual. Sūtras are indeed spoken by the Buddha, yet the sūtra existed before the Buddha; the Buddha indeed emerges from the sūtra, yet the sūtra is made clear through the Buddha. Though Buddha and sūtra may seem two, in truth they are one.

What especially distinguishes this sūtra from other sūtras is that, from its opening, it reveals nonduality. The Buddha and sentient beings together enter the samādhi of proper reception in the treasury of luminous spiritual powers, upheld by radiance and adornment, on the ground of pure enlightenment. Originally, the fundamental nature of body and mind in Buddhas and sentient beings is equally quiescent and extinguished. Speaking in terms of appearances, there seems to be distinction, but appearances are not appearances; the essence of enlightenment is no different. According to its essence, it pervades completely and fulfills the ten directions—this is its essence. In accordance with nonduality, it manifests all Pure Lands within the realm of nonduality—this is its function. It speaks in the strongest terms of the equality of sentient beings and Buddhas, directly entering the gate of nonduality. How could one who has not realized true reality be fit to speak of this?

To enter means to realize. “Treasury” means treasure store: the original source equally possessed by all Buddhas and sentient beings. It is called the land of dharmatā and also the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light. Sentient beings alone are deluded and obscured; though they have light, they cannot illuminate, and though they have spiritual powers, these cannot function. Thus it cannot be called entering. Entering does not mean coming in or going out. It means that wisdom and principle become indistinguishable. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra speaks of being able to enter the perfect source; this means realization and entry. Yet without the proper reception of samādhi, there is no means of realization and entry.

Samādhi is translated into Chinese as proper concentration and proper reception. Proper reception means non-reception: not receiving any reception is called proper reception. If, on seeing an object, one becomes deluded; if one shifts with conditions, receives the object of one’s conditions, and enters inversion, that is not proper reception. This is because one lacks concentration. If one attains the proper concentration of samādhi, one naturally is not shaken or deluded, receives nothing at all, and does not even receive non-reception. This is called the proper reception of samādhi. It is precisely the function and virtue as numerous as dust and sand, issuing from the great light treasury of spiritual powers. The root is never lost or destroyed and is upheld forever; therefore it is called being upheld by radiance and adornment.

Spiritual powers are sometimes translated as miraculous transformations, but they are not the worldly conjuring transformations used to delude the multitude. They are the wondrous function of the great light treasury. Though they are directly realized by all Buddhas, they are also equally possessed by all sentient beings; hence this is an assembly of equal Dharma. Moreover, when not a single thought arises, there is ultimate purity and stillness, with neither Buddha nor sentient beings; therefore it is called the equal fundamental nature. Yet when it arises in accordance with conditions, defilement and purity are nondual; therefore it is called accordance.

The wonder of this sūtra lies in its directness and sudden transcendence, beyond comparison with gradual teachings that divide ignorance into stages of severance. In such phrases as “if one knows these are flowers in empty space, there is immediately no cyclic turning,” knowing is itself immediate absence. What power this has! In an instant one lets go of the myriad conditions and can immediately transcend the ten bhūmis. It is truly a subtle and wondrous Dharma, difficult to encounter even in hundreds of thousands of millions of kalpas.

Those of superior faculties investigate and realize perfect enlightenment through sudden awakening by contemplation of principle. Those of middling and lesser faculties enter through antidotal practice. Yet in either case cultivation cannot be dispensed with. When contemplating principle, contemplation itself is phenomena;

when cultivating phenomena, how could one depart from principle? Thus we know that principle and phenomena are nondual, though, in their sequence, expedient means are necessary.

When the Buddha teaches the Dharma, he must first demolish existence, declaring that all is not; then he reverses this existence, declaring that all is. This prevents people from clinging to not-being or to being. Turning themselves around and passing through this barrier, they relinquish both existence and nonexistence and attain great freedom.

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment is the most effective sūtra for entering Buddhahood. For example, in the Maitreya chapter, the Buddha gives instruction layer upon layer: first cutting off the root of cyclic existence, then knowing the two obstructions, discerning the five natures, arousing vows, and cultivating reverently until Buddhahood is attained. Nothing necessary for practical cultivation is lacking. Therefore, compared with reading the Diamond Sūtra, reading this sūtra makes thorough understanding easier. May people everywhere read the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment more often.

Before teaching the Dharma, the Buddha first entered samādhi, strongly indicating that everything must be understood before one opens one's mouth. If one understands, there is no need to speak; if one does not understand, lecturing on sūtras and listening to sūtras are also useless. What is being done now is only out of necessity.

When this sūtra speaks of cultivation, it sets forth three gates: sudden cultivation, gradual cultivation, and perfect cultivation. These also vary according to each person's capacity.

This sūtra is the wondrous principle of the perfect teaching. Because the causal stage is perfect, the stage of fruition is also perfect; there is no division into before and after. Flower and fruit occur simultaneously, and the Dharma is likened to the lotus flower, as in the Lotus Sūtra of the Wonderful Dharma.

Mahāsattva means "great being." The additional word "great" before it signifies the greatest among the great. Only great beings such as Mañjuśrī, whose Dharma bodies are perfectly luminous, have virtue sufficient to bear this designation.

When the Buddha teaches the Dharma, it is not that he speaks the perfect sound only at the assembly of perfect enlightenment. Indeed, there is no assembly in which the sound is not perfect, nor is there any assembly in which the Dharma is not taught in samādhi. It is like burning exquisite incense: everyone is pervaded by its fragrance, though some may smell it without knowing what incense it is. Yet there is

no difference in receiving its fragrance; only those with diseased noses leave the assembly.

What is called fundamental ignorance is not that there is some ignorance that truly exists as a root. Rather, because all deluded actions and inverted views arise dependently upon ignorance, which lies latent within the faculties, it seems to have a root. Ignorance has no real substance; it illusorily arises and illusorily ceases, and upon awakening it is suddenly empty. Ordinary beings are deluded by it; those of the two vehicles fear it; bodhisattvas know it; sages penetrate it. At the point of beginning practice, one should investigate and reflect upon it. If one mistakenly takes ignorance to have a real substance, then bring it forth.

That all speak the same indicates the equality of sentient beings and Buddhas. As for illusory samādhi, it means thoroughly understanding illusion, not being affected by any circumstance, and attaining the great functioning of samādhi; this is called proper receptivity. In short, whoever hears the Buddha teach perfect enlightenment must first realize it personally before being able to awaken to and enter it. If one hundred thousand people are all included, then it is not limited to the twelve great bodhisattvas.

When the World-Honored One taught perfect enlightenment, the twelve great bodhisattvas all entered the proper concentration of samādhi. People often mistakenly suppose that the Dharma was taught while in concentration. They see only that the World-Honored One and the bodhisattvas were all in samādhi, silent and motionless, and say that, apart from these thirteen persons, no one else heard or knew. Is such an argument not laughable?

The sūtra clearly states that he and all his retinue entered samādhi and dwelt together in the Tathāgata's equal Dharma assembly. Thus, it was not only the Buddha and bodhisattvas who knew. Those said to enter concentration are not like insentient wood or stone, seeing and hearing nothing. Only after realizing samādhi, cutting off the delusions of ignorance, and entering the assembly of nondual equality can one avoid being bound by emotional views.

One then comprehends what the Buddha taught, and they mutually confirm one another. One neither clings to speech nor discards speech; this does not reveal any sort of mystery. Moreover, when the assembly had entered the equal proper receptivity of samādhi, why would the Buddha need to make a further announcement? Yet realizations differ in depth; a definitive confirmation must be given before the teaching may be disseminated.

For those of that time, this sūtra was a definitive teaching, in the hope that they would thereby penetrate more deeply. For the future, it was to be disseminated, in the hope that later people might have something in which to take refuge. Those who

listen must first have a foundation: those who understand, understand for themselves; those who do not understand remain bewildered even if detailed instruction is given. At the Lotus Dharma assembly, five thousand withdrew. Surely withdrawal from one's seat alone does not necessarily constitute withdrawing from the assembly?

All who are frightened upon hearing the Dharma, forcibly distinguish high from low, and measure the Buddha's intent by emotional views have withdrawn from the assembly. All who study Buddhism without understanding the root, without investigating the mind-ground, who merely cling to words and seek through textual criticism, have withdrawn from the assembly. To withdraw from the assembly is to be blind and mute; in brief, it is to turn away from awakening and join with dust. Such people have no relation at all to the Buddha or to awakening. Concentration has signs of concentration, which even the eyes of ghosts can see; this is the concentration of the Lesser Vehicle. But Mahāyāna concentration cannot be seen even by heavenly eyes; only those who have equally realized samādhi can see it. Those who cannot see it have withdrawn from the assembly.

Of the twelve bodhisattvas, Mañjuśrī is first. The root cannot be separated from prajñā: one must first awaken to fundamental wisdom, which is the proper cause. Only after awakening does one enter the Section on Right Cultivation. Therefore Samantabhadra comes next, representing practice. The former is knowing; this is practice. Together, they are the unity of knowledge and practice. Yet if the dharma eye is unopened and the root of delusion unsevered, one should illuminate all universally and see through clearly; therefore Universal Eye comes next.

As function arises from essence and expands greatly, the essence of the vajra treasury is then revealed; therefore Vajragarbha comes next. Yet only by breaking through appearances and returning to intrinsic nature, with form and emptiness nondual, can fundamental wisdom, which still turns along with consciousness, be transformed. To break through consciousness is precisely to transform consciousness into wisdom; when appearances are understood, intrinsic nature can be seen. Therefore Maitreya comes next. When intrinsic nature and appearances interpenetrate and one enters nonduality, delusion is naturally cut off and truth realized, while the eye of wisdom becomes pure; therefore Pure Wisdom comes next.

From this, the Dharma wheel is inexhaustible; one enters the subtle and wondrous, attains great freedom, and possesses unsurpassed majesty and virtue. Therefore Majestic Virtue and Freedom comes next. Yet what is most subtle is sound, and what is difficult to distinguish is the subtle. Among the three subtle and wondrous Dharma gates—whether calming and contemplation or dhyāna—one should choose according to what is appropriate, whether to cultivate one alone or cultivate them

together. Faculties differ from person to person; if a practice does not suit one's capacity, diligent progress can hardly be expected. Therefore Discerning Sounds comes next.

Through Mañjuśrī, the essence of prajñā is clarified; from Samantabhadra through Discerning Sounds, the function of prajñā is brought forth. Once the root is clear and the great matter has been discerned, karmic obstacles nevertheless remain unremoved. If one wishes for the obstacles to be exhausted and luminosity to appear, one should thoroughly understand the root of the dependent arising of deluded appearances. The view of self is the ancestor of karmic obstacles: when one is broken, all are broken; when one is purified, all are purified. Therefore Purifying All Karmic Obstacles comes next.

Although the view of self is empty, emptiness itself has not yet been emptied. The subtle self is connected to dharmas; when the view of dharmas is not yet purified, it cannot be called universal awakening. Therefore Universal Awakening comes next. When both self and dharmas are forgotten, one then enters the great light treasury of samādhi. One body is pure, and many bodies, extending to countless worlds, are each and every one pure; penetrating hundreds of thousands of worlds and pervading the ten directions, this is called perfect enlightenment. Therefore Perfect Enlightenment comes next.

In this way, through proper cause and proper cultivation, one enters proper awakening. With lofty and magnificent virtue, one approaches the Buddha's rank and is first among the ranks of the worthy; therefore Worthy Good Leader comes next. The names of bodhisattvas originally express the Dharma. Here, they accord with the process of cultivation. The twelve bodhisattvas unite their virtues as one, thereby simply expressing their consummate virtues.

This sūtra is complete in both realization of principle and practical cultivation. Broadly speaking, it has two gates: first, sudden awakening to principle, with Mañjuśrī as chief; second, practical cultivation and realization, with Samantabhadra as chief. A chief is the leader of the assembly. The first division is for those of the highest capacities, who cultivate by contemplating principle; awakening to principle immediately brings practical realization. The latter ten divisions are for those of middling capacities, whose dharmakāya has not yet manifested; they cultivate through counteracting afflictions and are opened to immeasurable gates of skillful means. In truth, the whole of principle is practice, and the whole of practice is principle; there is no distinction.

Sūtra It means "in accord": because it accords with capacities and with principle, it is called a sūtra.

Kashmir The name of a country in northern India.

Buddhamitra One proficient in the three baskets is called a Tripiṭaka Master. He came to China in the second year of Changshou in the Tang dynasty.

Translation This sūtra was translated at White Horse Monastery in the Divine Capital. In two fascicles, it was orally dictated by the master and recorded in writing by others.

Bhagavān The Buddha. It means the supremely pure awakened one, awakened oneself and awakening others. “Awakening” carries the meaning of fulfillment.

Radiant Adornment Light interpenetrates layer upon layer, shining brilliantly and manifestly.

Abiding To abide securely, forever free from grasping after conditions.

Upholding To sustain and maintain without loss.

Following Nonduality To accord with nonduality.

Entering To enter through realization: when all discriminations cease and wisdom merges indistinguishably with principle, this is called entering.

Samādhi Proper concentration and proper receptivity. Not being affected by any external condition is called proper receptivity; when one is free of delusion, there is concentration.

Mahāsattva Great. Such as arousing the great resolve, cultivating great conduct, and realizing the great Way. Here it refers to bodhisattvas on the bhūmis.

Chief The leader.

Retinue The assembly in which principal and companions come together—those who share the same view and practice.

Equal Dharma Assembly This refers to an assembly of dharmatā, where there is neither self nor person; therefore it is called equal.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva

Then Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, in the midst of the assembly, rose from his seat, bowed with his head at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: “Greatly Compassionate World-Honored One, may you explain to the Dharma assembly gathered here the Tathāgata’s originally arisen purity, the practices at the causal ground, and how bodhisattvas may give rise to a pure mind within the Mahāyāna and remain free

from all hindrances, so that sentient beings in the degenerate age to come who seek the Mahāyāna will not fall into wrong views."

Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself fully on the ground. In this way he made the request three times, repeating it from beginning to end. Then the World-Honored One said to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good man. You are able to inquire on behalf of the bodhisattvas into the Tathāgata's practices at the causal ground, and on behalf of all sentient beings in the degenerate age to come who seek the Mahāyāna, so that they may attain right abiding and uphold it without falling into wrong views. Listen carefully now, and I shall explain it to you." Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva joyfully received the instruction, and the entire assembly listened silently.

"Good man, the unsurpassed Dharma King has a great dhāraṇī gateway called Perfect Enlightenment. From it flow all pure suchness, bodhi, nirvāṇa, and pāramitās. It instructs bodhisattvas. All Tathāgatas, in their originally arisen causal ground, rely on the perfect illumination of the pure aspect of awakening, forever cut off ignorance, and only then accomplish the Buddha Way."

"What is ignorance? Good man, from beginningless time all sentient beings have been subject to various inverted views. They are like a lost person who mistakes the four directions, taking the four great elements mistakenly as the characteristics of their own body, and the conditioned shadows of the six sense objects as the characteristics of their own mind. It is like a person with diseased eyes who sees flowers in empty space and a second moon. Good man, there are in fact no flowers in empty space, but the diseased person falsely clings to them. Because of this false clinging, such a person is not only deluded about the nature of empty space, but also confused about where real flowers grow. Thus there falsely arises the cycle of birth and death; this is called ignorance."

"Good man, this ignorance has no real substance. It is like a person in a dream: while dreaming, the dream is not absent; but upon awakening, nothing at all can be found. It is like flowers in empty space: when they vanish into empty space, one cannot say that they have a fixed place of extinction. Why? Because they have no place of arising. All sentient beings, amid what is unborn, falsely perceive arising and ceasing. Therefore it is called the cycle of birth and death."

"Good man, when Tathāgatas cultivate Perfect Enlightenment at the causal ground, they know these to be flowers in empty space. Then there is no cycle of birth and death, nor is there any body or mind that undergoes that birth and death. It is not that birth and death are absent because they have been made absent; they are absent because they are absent in their own nature. That which knows and awakens is like empty space. To know empty space is itself the appearance of flowers in

empty space. Yet one also cannot say that there is no nature of knowing and awakening. When both being and nonbeing are relinquished, this is called accordance with pure awakening."

"Why? Because it has the nature of empty space and is ever unmoving; because within the Tathāgata-garbha there is no arising or ceasing, and no knower or known; because, like the nature of the dharma realm, it is ultimately complete and pervades the ten directions. This is called practice at the causal ground. Because of this, bodhisattvas may give rise to a pure mind within the Mahāyāna, and sentient beings in the degenerate age to come who cultivate accordingly will not fall into wrong views."

Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke in verse:

"Mañjuśrī, you should know: all Tathāgatas,

At their original causal ground, all use wisdom-awareness

To comprehend ignorance and know it as flowers in empty space.

Thus they can escape cyclic wandering. It is also like a person in a dream:

Upon awakening, the dream cannot be found. The awakened one is like empty space,

Equal and unmoving; awakening pervades the realms of the ten directions.

Thus one accomplishes the Buddha Way. The many illusions vanish without a place of vanishing;

Even accomplishment of the Way entails no attainment, because intrinsic nature is complete.

Bodhisattvas, within this, are able to give rise to bodhicitta;

Sentient beings in the degenerate age to come who cultivate this are free from wrong views."

The import of Mañjuśrī's question forms the outline of the entire sūtra and may be divided into three parts. First, he asks how to awaken to and understand the practices at the causal ground: hence, "May you explain the Tathāgata's originally arisen practices at the causal ground." Second, he asks how one gives rise to the resolve and cultivates it: hence, "give rise to a pure mind within the Mahāyāna." Third, he asks how to remove the various diseases of Chan: hence, "remain free from all hindrances," so that sentient beings in the degenerate age to come do not fall into wrong views. These few phrases already present the main outline of the

meaning of the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment; they are the pure eye of the entire sūtra.

Human birth is difficult to obtain. In this life, one can hear the true Dharma, thereby awaken wisdom, and comprehend one's intrinsic nature. This great causal condition enables one to leave the three realms forever. Its importance in a single lifetime is so immense that no urgent or important worldly matter can compare with it. Such an opportunity is as difficult to obtain as searching in the ocean for a fine needle that has fallen into it—could one be certain of finding it? Yet now one obtains it without having expected it; the joy is self-evident. Perhaps this may approximate even a ten-thousandth part of it.

Therefore one must treat the matter with utmost solemnity, prostrate oneself fully, and make the request three times, repeating it from beginning to end. Later people take the Dharma lightly; this means that they are not deeply earnest about themselves. How then can their practice gain entry? "Listen carefully" means to examine constantly and attend single-mindedly: set aside all myriad conditions, enter deeply through one gateway, and listen.

The Buddha said, "The unsurpassed Dharma King has a great dhāraṇī gateway called Perfect Enlightenment." This Dharma King cannot refer exclusively to the Buddha. The sentence runs continuously until "only then accomplish the Buddha Way." Since it says, "forever cut off ignorance, and only then accomplish the Buddha Way," it is clearly not addressed to Buddhas. Buddhas need not be taught the Dharma, nor need they become Buddhas again.

What is spoken of is directed only to sentient beings. The opening sentence speaks of this unsurpassed Dharma King. Although the Buddha fully employs it and is therefore called the unsurpassed Dharma King, sentient beings have not lost its function either. The Dharma King remains present; the treasury has not been opened. This does not mean that the treasure is absent. Once one knows it, it opens, and one realizes and enters Perfect Enlightenment. Chan Master Heze said, "The single word 'knowing' is the gateway to all wonders."

Although it is called a gateway, there is in truth neither inside nor outside. Yet since all defiled and pure dharmas issue forth from it, it is called a gateway. At the initial causal ground, all rely on the perfect illumination of the pure aspect of awakening. This is the general method of the gateway of practice. Without it, one cannot forever cut off ignorance. Once ignorance is cut off, all pure suchness, bodhi, nirvāṇa, and pāramitās naturally flow forth.

Perfect illumination is illumination without contrivance. Illumination is the illuminator, while the aspect of awakening is what is illuminated. Only when both subject and object are forgotten is it called perfect, pure illumination. If subject and

object remain, ignorance has not been cut off, and this cannot be called Buddhahood. This Dharma is the common path of all Buddhas; no Buddha is otherwise. Therefore the text says that all rely upon it. Since one awakens oneself and awakens others, it says that it instructs bodhisattvas. This means that there are no practitioners of the two vehicles in this assembly who can hear this essential Dharma; only bodhisattvas can be instructed and receive it. It is not shared with the two vehicles, and is therefore also called an unshared Dharma. Practitioners must not divide themselves and the Buddha into two. They should know that all is thus. The sūtra says, “Those who comprehend the dharma of no-self are called bodhisattvas.”

The section on ignorance is especially concise, clear, and fluent. It may be divided into five parts: first, it describes the appearance of ignorance; second, it explains that ignorance has no substantial entity, because it has no place of arising; third, it explains the most direct method of breaking through ignorance; fourth, it explains that there has originally been no ignorance; fifth, it explains that ignorance need not be defined as sheer nonexistence. Although ignorance and purity have two names, awakening is not dual. It is ever unmoving and ultimately complete throughout the ten directions. In this way, layer by layer, attachments are shed, and ignorance is broken through without one even noticing it. Truly, its wonder is inconceivable.

First, in describing the appearance of ignorance, it uses a lost person as an analogy. Though such a person is so confused as to mistake the four directions, the person has not thereby become different. It is like a drunkard: while drunk, one cannot say that he is not a human being. When he sobers up, there is no change and no addition whatever. Thus the fundamental substance does not change, though inverted views are not absent. Their causal ground lies in clinging to a self: taking the provisional composite of the four great elements as the body, and the shadows produced by the conjunction of faculties and objects as the mind. Both are illusory, arising and ceasing, and impermanent.

It is like a jewel that reflects in all four directions, appearing blue or yellow according to its surroundings. Blue and yellow suddenly appear and vanish, and cannot be grasped as real. The foolish forget the jewel and take the illusory colors of blue and yellow to be the jewel itself. Again, it is like a person with diseased eyes who sees flowers in empty space because a film obscures the eyes. Such a person not only takes the flowers in empty space to be real, but also forgets the diseased film over the eyes. Thus, in successive turns, one falsely grasps at the cycle of birth and death. Ignorance is therefore taken as the father, and the birth and death arising thought after thought as the child.

Second, that ignorance has no substantial entity is emphatically shown as follows: if something exists, it must have a form and substance. Since ignorance cannot be

grasped, seized, or discarded, it is clear that it has no substantial entity. It is like a person having a dream: the dream is not absent while one is dreaming, but upon awakening nothing at all is obtained. Clearly, amid what is unborn, one falsely sees arising and ceasing. This view of illusory transformation within empty space is itself a case of producing something from nothing. Speaking in terms of false perception, one says that it exists; speaking in terms of reality, one says that it does not. Now it is called false, yet in reality it does not exist, because it has no place of arising.

Third, the direct method for breaking through ignorance lies in the single word "knowing." To know is to understand everything completely, to emerge suddenly from birth and death, with no other Dharma required. The first aim of practitioners is to transcend birth and death, yet they do not know that the mother of birth and death is ignorance, the mother of ignorance is clinging to illusion, the mother of clinging to illusion is lack of wisdom, and lack of wisdom is the loss of illumination. Loss of illumination is not knowing.

This word "knowing" is the wisdom-knowing that comes after understanding, practice, and realization; it is not the limited knowing of worldly cleverness. Therefore Esoteric Buddhism calls prajñā the mother of Buddhas, and the Heart Sūtra says that no Buddha or bodhisattva fails to rely upon prajñā in crossing to the other shore. Whoever claims that one can become a Buddha apart from this is speaking the words of Māra. This is the right cause.

Fourth, to say that there has originally been no ignorance refers to after one has realized knowing. First, once one knows that all phenomena are like flowers in empty space, where can ignorance be? Second, once one knows that flowers in empty space are false, one no longer grasps at them in vain, and there is no cyclic wandering. Third, once one knows that body and mind are both empty, and that birth and death are also illusory, there is neither action nor undergoing; therefore there is no ignorance. Fourth, once one knows that ignorance is nonexistent in its own nature, there is no need to insist upon deliberately undertaking contemplative illumination before body and mind can become empty. Even without arousing illumination to realize emptiness, or even while one is in the midst of inverted views, its intrinsic nature has always been empty and quiescent: form is itself emptiness. The wise see this and thoroughly comprehend it for themselves.

Fifth, to say that ignorance is not nonexistent and that it is nondual with purity means that the illusory appearance called ignorance, as well as the provisional name of awakening spoken of in dependence upon illusion, are not simply absent as illusions. Yet ignorance and purity, though named as two things, are in fact one substance.

For example, when a bell rings, its sound can be heard a hundred li away; it is this bell. If one presses it with one's hand and strikes it again, its sound is muffled; it is still this same bell. Though the sounds differ, the bell is not two. Remove the hand, and again it rings resonantly into the distance, its sound heard a hundred li away. Thus ignorance is only a temporarily muffled sound; it does the bell no ultimate harm.

Ignorance and purity both issue from the same Tathāgata-garbha. Since its nature is like empty space and unmoving, without arising or ceasing, without knower or known, who then arises and who ceases? Where could there be one who sees or knows? Ultimately, these cannot be found; ignorance is likewise so. Further, when mind and objects are both empty, and sentient beings and their environment interpenetrate thoroughly, encompassing all and pervading the ten directions, the nature of the Tathāgata-garbha is originally thus. There is no need to diminish what is old or add what is new, extinguish delusion and generate wisdom, before it may be called ultimate.

What is meant by "like the nature of the dharma realm" is that it extends through everything; this is the meaning of investigating things in order to extend knowledge. Knowing this, one realizes that not a single place among mountains, rivers, and the great earth can be separate from the nature of my Tathāgata-garbha; that is, this treasury-nature of mine pervades the dharma realm.

This section is of the greatest importance. Those of the highest capacities may hear it and immediately awaken thoroughly. The single word "knowing" already fully encompasses faith, vows, practice, and realization; there is truly no need to devise any separate contrivance. Yet it universally embraces practitioners of all three capacities, and those of dull faculties must also be considered. Therefore the requests of the great bodhisattvas could not but be opened forth, for the benefit of later students. In fact, the meaning of Perfect Enlightenment, the aspect of Perfect Enlightenment, and the progression from cause to fruition have all been completely expounded by the Buddha in this section, leaving not the slightest remainder. Therefore one should contemplate it perfectly and completely; do not allow oneself to be turned about by the sūtra.

The Buddha speaks of people in dreams, who cannot be found when awake; he also says that the awakened are like empty space, clearly indicating equality and nonduality. Foolish people insist on dividing dreaming and waking into two. If one teaches them the Dharma of nonduality, they instead take dreaming and waking to be truly one. They do not know that they are neither one nor different; how then can they be grasped as real? Therefore, one who truly sees the real characteristics sees that everything is illusory, sees that all dharmas are illusory, and sees that awakening, too, is an illusion. There is no one who can awaken, nothing awakened

to, no speaker, and no hearer. Thus it is said that the Tathāgata has nothing to teach. This very having nothing to teach is precisely awakening to the real characteristics.

The phrase “all rely on the perfectly illuminating, pure characteristic of awakening” is the fundamental dharma gate of cultivation and realization. There is no dharma that is not so, and no Buddha that is not so. Without this, ignorance cannot be forever cut off. This is the original causal ground, and it has the same meaning as the two occurrences of yi ( ), “rely on,” in the Heart Sūtra.

The explanation of the cause of ignorance is most concise: it is nothing other than taking the deluded for real. The cause of taking the deluded for real lies only in the single word “delusion.” The sole dharma gate is to open wisdom. Throughout the sūtra, the emphasis is on the single word “know”: when one knows, illusion vanishes; when illusion vanishes, one realizes the true. All wondrous functioning is fully contained herein.

From “When the Tathāgata cultivated perfect enlightenment at the causal ground” through the six clauses ending with “because intrinsic nature is without [inherent existence],” these passages are most powerful. They are the unsurpassed dharma gate for practitioners of sharp faculties to cut off birth and death. Each day, turn them over in the mind at least several dozen times. Once they become thoroughly familiar, wherever one is, bring forth the passage and contemplate it; as one contemplates, one becomes quiescent. Even practitioners of dull faculties may suddenly transcend an asaṃkhyeya kalpa if they are not alarmed or afraid and constantly embody and recollect these teachings.

The phrase “nor can one speak of a nature that is unaware yet aware” must also be understood. This nature of awakening is not an awareness that counteracts illusory awareness, for the awareness that counteracts it is itself illusory. This awakening is the eternal nature that neither arises nor ceases. Therefore, the text below says, “because there are no views of arising and ceasing.” This sentence has saved many people who have fallen into biased emptiness and annihilationism.

Within the phrase “like the nature of the dharma realm, ultimately perfect and complete, pervading the ten directions,” the words “like” and “ultimately” precisely indicate the definitive meaning. This is the pure eye of the twelve divisions of the Buddhist canon.

The phrase “not falling into heterodox views” indicates that abandoning this is itself a heterodox view. It is not the correct cause, and one will ultimately be unable to arouse the pure mind of the Mahāyāna.

In this section, the Buddha has already finished expounding perfect enlightenment. Practitioners of sharp faculties have thereby fully understood and completed their course; there is no need to ask further. The teaching continues only as an expedient for those in future times and for those of middling or lesser faculties. Below, it further demonstrates methods of practice. Consider how, in the preceding passage, the Buddha addresses Mañjuśrī as “good man,” followed by “and so forth”: the words “and so forth” include many among the assembly who likewise realized awakening. Surely there were far more than merely twelve.

[Circumambulate to the right] Turn and circumambulate to the right, for the right is considered the proper direction.

[Three circumambulations] This means three circuits, signifying such meanings as the Three Jewels and the three virtues.

[Latter age] The age of the decline of the Dharma—that is, the present age.

[Fall] This means to drop or fall.

[Five parts of the body] The four limbs and the head.

[Inquire] This means to ask.

[Carefully] Settle the mind and examine closely.

[Dhāraṇī] This means total retention: encompassing all dharmas and retaining their immeasurable meanings.

[Nirvāṇa] This means quiescent cessation: once the nature of awakening is perfected, there is no dharma that is not quiescent.

[Bodhi] This means the great awakening of emptiness and purity. It has five stages: first, arousing the resolve; second, subduing the mind; third, illuminating the mind; fourth, going forth and arriving; fifth, unsurpassed awakening.

[Both relinquished] This means that neither is taken up.

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva

Then Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, in the midst of the assembly, rose from his seat, prostrated himself at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One of Great Compassion, we pray that for the bodhisattvas in this assembly, and for all sentient beings in the degenerate age who cultivate the Mahāyāna, having

heard of this pure realm of perfect enlightenment, you will explain how they should practice."

"World-Honored One, if those sentient beings know that things are like illusions, and body and mind are likewise illusory, how can they use illusion to cultivate illusion? If the nature of all illusions is entirely extinguished, then there is no mind. Who, then, practices? And how can one still speak of practicing like an illusion? If sentient beings do not practice from the outset, they constantly abide amid the illusions of birth and death. Having never understood the realm that is like illusion, how can their deluded minds be liberated?"

"We pray that for all sentient beings in the degenerate age you will explain what expedient means and gradual stages of practice they should adopt, so that they may forever leave all illusions behind." Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself with all five limbs on the ground. He made this threefold request, repeating it from beginning to end. Then the World-Honored One said to Samantabhadra Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good son. You are able to ask on behalf of the bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the degenerate age about the expedient means and gradual stages for cultivating the bodhisattvas' samādhi of like-illusion, so that sentient beings may leave all illusions behind. Listen carefully now, and I shall explain it for you." Samantabhadra Bodhisattva joyfully received the teaching, and the entire assembly listened silently.

"Good son, all the various illusory transformations of sentient beings arise from the Tathāgata's wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment. They are like flowers in empty space, which appear because of space. Though the illusory flowers vanish, the nature of space is not destroyed. The illusory minds of sentient beings likewise cease in dependence upon illusion. When all illusions are utterly extinguished, the awakened mind does not move. To speak of awakening in dependence upon illusion is also called illusion. If one says that there is awakening, one has not yet left illusion; if one says that there is no awakening, it is likewise so. Therefore, the extinction of illusion is called immovability."

"Good son, all bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the degenerate age should leave far behind all illusory and delusive states. Because they firmly maintain the mind of leaving them behind, the mind that is like illusion must likewise be left behind. The leaving behind that is itself an illusion must likewise be left behind. The leaving behind of that illusory leaving behind must likewise be left behind. When there is nothing left to leave behind, all illusions are thereby removed."

"It is like making fire by drilling wood: the two pieces of wood depend on each other; when fire arises, the wood is consumed, and ashes fly away as smoke vanishes. To use illusion to cultivate illusion is likewise so. Though all illusions are exhausted, one

does not fall into annihilation. Good son, knowing illusion is itself liberation from it; no expedient means are required. Liberation from illusion is itself awakening; there are no gradual stages. All bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the degenerate age should practice accordingly. Only thus can they forever leave all illusions behind."

Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:

Samantabhadra, you should know: all sentient beings,

with their beginningless illusory ignorance, all arise from the Tathāgatas',

mind of perfect enlightenment, like flowers in empty space,

which take form in dependence upon space. When the flowers in empty space vanish,

space itself has never moved. Illusion arises from awakening;

when illusion is extinguished, awakening is complete, for the awakened mind does not move.

Therefore, all those bodhisattvas and sentient beings

in the degenerate age should always leave illusion behind; all illusions must be relinquished,

as fire arises from wood, and when the wood is consumed, the fire too is extinguished.

Awakening has no gradual stages; expedient means are likewise so.

Samantabhadra's inquiry has two points: (1) What the Buddha taught Mañjuśrī was intended for those of the highest capacity, who awaken immediately upon hearing it. But those of middling capacity do not understand: one should not use emptiness to speak of emptiness, or illusion to cultivate illusion. Once the nature of illusion is entirely extinguished, there is no mind; who then practices, who knows that it is illusion, and who can cultivate and realize that it is illusion? (2) Since sentient beings do not practice and constantly dwell amid the illusions of birth and death, how can their deluded minds in this illusory realm be liberated? These questions are asked on behalf of sentient beings.

The samādhi of like-illusion means penetrating the true reality and clearly knowing that body and mind are all illusory, while original awakening and suchness are unchanging and unmoving. It is like a mirror receiving reflections: the reflections come and go, but the mirror itself does not move. Therefore it is called samādhi, right receptivity.

The Buddha begins with the statement, “All the various illusory transformations of sentient beings arise from the Tathāgata’s wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment.” This means that all illusions arise spontaneously from the wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment. The wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment is enduring nature. Without this enduring nature, whence could illusions arise? Without a great expanse of water, whence could waves arise? From knowing that water and waves are nondual, one knows that awakening and illusion are likewise nondual and must not be grasped as truly two. Thus this illusory mind also ceases in dependence upon illusion.

When all illusions are entirely extinguished, the awakened mind does not move. Going further, even the awakening of illusion is itself illusion and is also called illusion. Whatever is claimed to be awakening or non-awakening still remains within illusion. Therefore both awakening and non-awakening are illusions. Illusion can thus be extinguished, but the nature of perfect enlightenment remains unchanged and unmoving.

Illusory awakening is the awakening spoken of in dependence upon illusion; it is not the awakening of the true essence. It counteracts illusion, yet this awakening still belongs to the illusory mind and is therefore also called illusion. Since it remains within arising and ceasing, it is not the true awakening that neither arises nor ceases. Thus only when the discriminating mind is exhausted does enduring nature begin to reveal itself.

The two Chinese characters “should” are a solemn exhortation: this is the Tathāgata’s definitive realm, and there should not be the slightest hesitation.

There are four methods of leaving illusion: first, leave illusory objects; second, leave the illusory mind; third, leave the mind that leaves illusion; fourth, discard the leaving behind of that leaving behind. That is, first leave delusion; second, leave awakening; third, discard leaving behind; fourth, discard that discarding. When one reaches the point where there is nothing to leave behind and nothing to discard, this is called the pure extinction of illusion. It is like fire burning wood: when the wood is consumed, fire still remains; when the fire is gone, ashes still remain; when the ashes are gone, smoke still remains. Only when even the smoke has entirely vanished is it completely burned away. Yet the air in which this occurs remains unmoved. If one were to say that enduring nature and true awakening are also extinguished, one would fall into annihilationism.

Sentient beings’ emotional views commonly produce dualistic views through discrimination. When they enter practice, they again form the dualistic views of defilement and purity; these become deeply entrenched and instead turn into an illness. For example, if a wish-fulfilling jewel has dust upon it, the dust should

naturally be removed, for the dust and the jewel are two things, with forms and characteristics that can be separated or joined. But if the jewel reflects objects and displays various colors, these colors are precisely the defilements. How, then, should they be removed?

The ever-abiding precious nature is the jewel, while the defilements manifested by the illusory mind are the colors reflected within the jewel. These defilements differ from dust upon the jewel: they have no form or characteristics, cannot be separated or joined, and cannot be wiped away. Thus, to remove dust from a jewel depends on the single act of wiping; to remove defilement from the mind depends on the single word “knowing.” The key to the meaning of the entire sūtra lies in this one word.

In the section on Mañjuśrī, it says, “Know that they are flowers in empty space, and there will be no further round of rebirth.” In this section, it says, “Knowing illusion is itself liberation from it; no expedient means are required. Liberation from illusion is itself awakening; there are no gradual stages.” These two occurrences of zhi ( ), “knowing,” correspond to each other from afar; they are not two different dharmas. This knowing includes all the work of faith, vows, practice, and realization. Unless one attains realized knowing, one cannot truly know.

All sūtras are like lists describing objects: what kind of thing something is, and what its nature is, are set forth one by one. Yet only upon seeing the object and comparing it with the description can one determine that it is indeed so. Therefore, with regard to the definitive-meaning sūtras, practitioners should first understand the mind-ground and awaken prajñā. They should seal circumstances with the mind and seal the mind with the sūtras, clearly knowing that all is illusion. This is the unsurpassed, direct, and expedient dharma gate for removing defilement; hence the emphasis on the single word “knowing.” Sentient beings suffer precisely because they do not know for themselves. There are also three kinds of knowing: conceptual understanding, knowing through practice, and knowing through realization. The knowing meant here is awakened knowing through realization.

The dust on a jewel cannot be removed with a single wipe; it necessarily requires various expedient means, and there are gradual distinctions of slowness and speed, difficulty and ease. But as for the defilements of the mind, it is enough simply to know that they are illusory. Knowing is itself their extinction. Like reflections in a jewel, it is enough to know that they are empty and unreal; one need not insist that only the absence of reflections constitutes purity.

For reflections do no harm to the jewel, and their absence confers no benefit upon it. Though ignorance arises in awakened nature, it causes not the slightest harm to awakened nature. The only matter is knowing or not knowing: know what one knows, and acknowledge what one does not know. There is no knowing more,

knowing less, or knowing halfway. Since there is no distinction of more or less, it is evident that there are no expedient means or gradual stages. Hence it is said, “Knowing illusion is itself liberation from it; no expedient means are required. Liberation from illusion is itself awakening; there are no gradual stages.” This is such a subtle and wondrous dharma gate; with a single statement it strikes directly at the point. It is truly among the finest writings under heaven. That one may cultivate for many lifetimes and then hear the true Dharma—such merit and conditions of affinity are beyond conception.

Someone may ask: “I have respectfully heard the teaching that knowing illusion is itself liberation from it. Yet after I know that it is illusion, the illusion sometimes still appears before me, and I cannot sweep it away. Thus I have not actually been able to leave it. What then?” The answer is: “This is habitual tendency. Let me explain further.”

The dust on a jewel still has form and characteristics. The method of wiping it away is a provisional expedient involving gradual stages, because dust and jewel are two things. Its coming has a source, its going can be seen, and after it is removed, without a cause it is not easily stained again. But this case is different. When ignorance arises, its place of arising cannot be seen; because it has no place of arising, when ignorance ceases, its place of cessation cannot be seen. Since it was originally unborn, it has no cessation. It goes along with one’s removal of it and comes again along with it. This is unlike the dust on a jewel, where after some has been removed there may still be dust remaining.

Practitioners should first know the root. Once they know that all is illusion, they will no longer cling to it firmly, and their grasping will gradually relax. Yet habits formed over time cannot be removed in a day or a night, because one’s strength is not yet sufficient. It is like a sick person recovering from a stupor: although awake, they still lack the strength to rise and walk; yet though unable to rise and walk, they will certainly not fall back into the stupor. You now know illusion, but habitual tendencies still arise. When those habitual tendencies are arising, has your

awakened nature that knows illusion ever receded or been lost? If it has not receded or been lost, then you have already attained the root. Though habitual tendencies have not yet been eliminated, you need only remain constantly alert and continuously bring awareness to bear. Then the power of prajñā will grow strong, and habitual tendencies can be swept away.

This sūtra speaks only of the root: because it is the root, no expedient means are needed. But because of habitual tendencies, gradual stages are established. The sūtra says, “In principle, awakening is sudden; in phenomena, removal is gradual.” This is spoken as an expedient for beginners. For one who has already awakened

thoroughly, a single point breaks through it: principle and phenomena interpenetrate, and one realization resolves a hundred matters.

This one word, “knowing,” fully contains the marvel of the six perfections and myriad practices; it is not understood by those of inferior wisdom. You need only first ask whether you know the root; for now, do not concern yourself with whether habitual tendencies are pure or impure. So long as you know, there will be a way to remove habitual tendencies afterward. Through that method, day by day the noble embryo matures; one understands the nature of all dharmas; one’s strength grows greater each day, and habitual tendencies naturally lessen each day, until one enters the transformed realm of non-awareness.

The saying “liberation from illusion is itself awakening” emphatically declares that ignorance and awakening cannot coexist. If a room is completely dark, lighting a lamp immediately makes it bright; brightness and darkness cannot coexist. To say that brightness has gradual stages and that ignorance can be broken away bit by bit is the gradual teaching of partially severing ignorance; it is not a definitive-meaning sūtra.

Confucianism speaks of existence; Buddhism speaks of emptiness. In speaking of existence, Confucianism affirms benevolence and righteousness, not the coexistence of greed and desire. In speaking of emptiness, Buddhism empties illusory states, not morality along with them. Confucianism establishes good and does not establish evil, and thus remains within duality. Buddhism establishes nothing and abandons nothing; therefore it resolves all with the single word “illusion.”

The two Chinese characters “should” are a solemn exhortation, declaring that this is decisively so: apart from leaving illusion behind, there is no other method. Yet “should” still implies the opposition between what should and should not be. Practitioners should understand that this is medicine applied after knowing the illness. If one knows that there was originally no illness, that it was originally illusion, then there is no should or should not, no leaving or not leaving.

When Mañjuśrī speaks of awakening to principle, one must not fixedly maintain that there is no need for practice in phenomena. He is speaking only of the first stage of the work: the Great Matter must first be made clear. When Samantabhadra speaks of practical cultivation, how could he ever discard principle? After awakening, one must still apply oneself as though mourning one’s parents; this is how habitual tendencies are removed. Mañjuśrī is truly the first gateway to be opened. At the time of opening the gate, there is absolutely no room for expedient means; after it has been opened, all the arranging and clearing away necessarily depends on expedient means. The Buddha gave Samantabhadra a comprehensive Dharma gate,

saying: “Knowing illusion, one is thereby free of it; freed from illusion, one is thereby awakened.” The questions asked by the nine bodhisattvas below are all practiced on the basis of these two sentences.

Words such as “thus can” are also terms of certainty. Sentient beings’ ailment lies only in their doubting themselves and being unable to decide; hence it is called the Tathāgata’s realm of certainty.

The practice taught in this section consists simply in arousing wisdom-contemplation: that is, seeing that the five aggregates are all empty. Since the five aggregates encompass everything, including the sense faculties and objects, subject and object, this is a perfect and sudden practice.

[Drill] Using an object to bore into wood and make fire.

[Illusion] A false and unreal image.

[Annihilation] This is the biased emptiness of clinging to death: mistakenly taking the unobtainability of all things to mean that everything is sheer nothingness. Those today who are weary of the world and commit suicide are examples of this.

[Establishment] That which arises of itself.

Universal-Eye Bodhisattva

Then Universal-Eye Bodhisattva, in the midst of the assembly, rose from his seat, bowed with his head at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One of Great Compassion, may you expound for the bodhisattvas in this assembly, and for all sentient beings in the latter age, the gradual stages of bodhisattva practice: how they should contemplate, how they should abide and uphold, and what skillful means sentient beings who have not yet awakened should employ, so that all may be brought to awakening.”

“World-Honored One, if those sentient beings lack proper skillful means and proper contemplation, then, upon hearing the Tathāgata expound this samādhi, their minds will become confused and troubled. They will then be unable to awaken to and enter perfect enlightenment. We pray that, out of compassion for us and for sentient beings in the latter age, you will provisionally expound skillful means.” Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself fully on the ground. He made this request three times, repeating it from beginning to end.

At that time, the World-Honored One said to Universal-Eye Bodhisattva: “Excellent, excellent, good man! For the sake of the bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the

latter age, you are able to ask the Tathāgata about the gradual stages of practice, contemplation, abiding and upholding, and even the provisional exposition of various skillful means. Listen carefully now, and I shall explain them for you." Universal-Eye Bodhisattva joyfully received the teaching, and the entire assembly silently listened.

"Good man, novice bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the latter age who wish to seek the Tathāgata's pure mind of perfect enlightenment should maintain right mindfulness and abandon all illusions. First, they should rely on the Tathāgata's practice of śamatha and uphold the precepts firmly. They should settle among companions, sit peacefully in a quiet room, and constantly contemplate thus: 'This body of mine is a conjunction of the four great elements. Hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, brains, and impurities all return to earth.'

"Spittle, mucus, pus, blood, bodily fluids, saliva, phlegm, tears, semen, urine, and feces all return to water. Warmth returns to fire. Movement returns to wind."

"When the four great elements separate, where then can this illusory body be found? One then knows that this body ultimately has no substance. Its appearance is merely a conjunction, truly no different from an illusion. Through the provisional conjunction of four conditions, the six sense faculties falsely arise. The six sense faculties and four great elements, inward and outward, combine to produce a falsely arising conditioned energy. Within it, conditions and sense objects accumulate, seeming to form the appearance of conditions; this is provisionally called mind. Good man, without the six sense objects, this deluded mind cannot exist. When the four great elements disperse, no sense objects can be found. The conditions and objects to which it relates each disperse and perish; ultimately, no conditioning mind can be seen."

"Good man, when sentient beings' illusory bodies perish, their illusory minds also perish. When illusory minds perish, illusory sense objects also perish. When illusory sense objects perish, the cessation of illusion also perishes. When the cessation of illusion perishes, that which is not illusory does not perish. It is like polishing a mirror: when the grime is gone, brightness appears. Good man, know that body and mind are both illusory grime. When the appearance of grime is forever extinguished, the ten directions are pure."

"Good man, it is like a pure maṇi jewel reflecting the five colors, each appearing according to its direction. The foolish see that maṇi jewel as truly possessing five colors. Good man, the pure nature of perfect enlightenment manifests through body and mind and responds according to each kind. The foolish then say that pure perfect enlightenment truly possesses such inherent characteristics of body and mind. Thus they are unable to depart from illusion. Therefore, I say that body and

mind are illusory grime; in contrast to departing from illusory grime, one is called a bodhisattva. When grime is exhausted and its opposite removed, there is neither grime to oppose nor anyone who is so named."

"Good man, when these bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the latter age realize that all illusory images have ceased, they then attain purity without direction, and boundless space is revealed through awakening."

"Because awakening is perfectly luminous, the mind appears pure. Because the mind is pure, the objects of seeing are pure. Because the objects of seeing are pure, the eye faculty is pure. Because the faculty is pure, eye consciousness is pure. Because consciousness is pure, the objects of hearing are pure. Because the objects of hearing are pure, the ear faculty is pure. Because the faculty is pure, ear consciousness is pure. Because consciousness is pure, the objects of awareness are pure. So it is, up to the nose, tongue, body, and mind; they too are likewise."

"Good man, because the faculties are pure, form is pure. Because form is pure, sound is pure. Smells, tastes, tangibles, and dharmas are likewise. Good man, because the six sense objects are pure, the earth element is pure. Because earth is pure, the water element is pure. Fire and wind are likewise."

"Good man, because the four great elements are pure, the twelve sense bases, the eighteen realms, and the twenty-five states of existence are pure. Because they are pure, the ten powers, four fearlessnesses, four unobstructed wisdoms, the Buddha's eighteen distinctive qualities, and the thirty-seven factors conducive to awakening are pure. So it is, up to the eighty-four thousand dhāraṇī gates: all are pure."

"Good man, because the nature of all true characteristics is pure, one body is pure. Because one body is pure, many bodies are pure. Because many bodies are pure, so too, up to all sentient beings in the ten directions, perfect enlightenment is pure. Good man, because one world is pure, many worlds are pure. Because many worlds are pure, so too, up to the ends of space, encompassing the three times, all is equally pure and unmoving."

"Good man, since space is thus equal and unmoving, know that the nature of awakening is equal and unmoving. Since the four great elements are unmoving, know that the nature of awakening is equal and unmoving. So too, up to the eighty-four thousand dhāraṇī gates, which are equal and unmoving: know that the nature of awakening is equal and unmoving."

"Good man, because the wondrous nature of awakening pervades all, is pure, unmoving, perfect, and without limit, know that the six sense faculties pervade the dharma realm. Because the faculties pervade all, know that the six sense objects pervade the dharma realm. Because the sense objects pervade all, know that the

four great elements pervade the dharma realm. So it is, up to the dhāraṇī gates, which pervade the dharma realm."

"Good man, because that wondrous awakened nature pervades all, the nature of the faculties and the nature of the sense objects are neither destroyed nor confused. Since faculties and sense objects are not destroyed, so too, up to the dhāraṇī gates, they are neither destroyed nor confused. It is like the light of hundreds of thousands of lamps illuminating one room: their light fills it completely, yet is neither destroyed nor confused."

"Good man, because awakening is fulfilled, know that bodhisattvas are not bound by dharmas and do not seek liberation from dharmas. They do not loathe birth and death or delight in nirvāṇa; they do not revere those who uphold precepts or despise those who violate them; they do not esteem long-practiced habits or slight beginners. Why? Because all is awakening. It is like the light of the eyes clearly discerning objects before them: the light is complete and has neither hatred nor love. Why? Because the substance of light is not two, and therefore has neither hatred nor love."

"Good man, when these bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the latter age cultivate this mind to fulfillment, there is therein neither cultivation nor fulfillment. Perfect enlightenment shines universally, and quiescence and cessation are nondual. Within it, hundreds of thousands of millions of asaṃkhyeyas of inexpressible Ganges-sand Buddha worlds arise and perish in disorder like flowers in empty space. They are neither identical nor separate; there is neither bondage nor liberation. Only then do they know that sentient beings have originally been Buddhas, and that birth and death and nirvāṇa are like yesterday's dream."

"Good man, because they are like yesterday's dream, know that birth and death and nirvāṇa have neither arising nor cessation, neither coming nor going. What is realized has neither gain nor loss, neither grasping nor relinquishing. The one who realizes has neither doing nor stopping, neither allowing nor extinguishing. Within this realization there is neither subject nor object. Ultimately there is no realization and no one who realizes. The nature of all dharmas is equal and indestructible. Good man, the bodhisattvas thus cultivate, thus proceed gradually, thus contemplate, thus abide and uphold, thus employ skillful means, and thus awaken. In seeking such Dharma, they do not become confused and troubled."

At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke in verse:

"Universal Eye, you should know:

All sentient beings' bodies and minds are like illusions; the bodily form belongs to the four great elements,

And the nature of mind depends on the six sense objects. When the substances of the four great elements each separate,

Who is there to make their conjunction? Thus cultivate gradually;

All becomes wholly pure, unmoving, and pervading the dharma realm.

There is neither doing, stopping, allowing, nor extinguishing, nor is there anyone who realizes.

All Buddha worlds are like flowers in empty space;

The three times are all equal; ultimately there is no coming or going.

Bodhisattvas who first arouse the resolve, and sentient beings in the latter age,

Who wish to enter the Buddha Way should cultivate in this manner."

The intent of Universal Eye's question was to seek a thoroughly clear dharma eye. Without clarity of the dharma eye, one cannot enter proper skillful means or proper contemplation. Upon hearing the Buddha explain samādhi, one's mind becomes confused and troubled, and one cannot awaken to the realm of perfect enlightenment. What had previously been heard concerned principle. Although principle may be suddenly awakened to, phenomena belong to gradual cultivation. But how can one contemplate the true and the false, giving rise to contemplative wisdom? How can one abide securely in the supreme state, gain firm mastery, and give rise to the wisdom of cultivation? And how may sentient beings who have not awakened be skillfully guided so that they may all awaken as one and become Buddhas? This is the overall intent of Universal Eye's question.

The Buddha begins by saying that the gradual stages of practice are merely a provisional exposition of various skillful means. "Novice students" refers to those at the very beginning. There is no other method: maintaining right mindfulness and departing from illusion is the foundation for beginning practice. Right mindfulness is not no thought; it is freedom from false discriminating thoughts. To be free of false discrimination is to depart from illusion. Since there is no fixed method, it is called a skillful means. One should employ the light of wisdom to break through the realm of illusion; when mind and objects are both empty, pure awakening is fulfilled. What follows explains the method of right mindfulness.

A. First rely on the Tathāgata's practice of śamatha, that is, cessation. At the causal stage it is cessation; at the fruition stage it is samādhi. One rests in profound

quiescence, gathers the mind into one, and then contemplates where that one returns. Methods of gathering the one and attaining samādhi exist in Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism; here they are only briefly mentioned.

B. Firmly uphold the precepts. Precepts are medicine, used to cure illness. Sentient beings' great illness lies in their inability to restrain body and mind, whereby false agitation and confusion arise of themselves. Therefore, decorum must provide a model. Worldly people take orderly rules and solemn conduct to be decorum, but this meaning is not broad enough. They do not know that purity and ease are true decorum. Otherwise, would motionless wooden puppets all be called great beings of freedom?

What are called precepts are medicine prescribed according to the illness. If a person is excessively restless, stillness is used to counteract it; if one is overly stubborn, liveliness is used to counteract it. Thus one enters the realm of free and pure emptiness, where there is no one who observes precepts and no precepts to be observed, and the mind naturally gathers and returns to oneness. Though the categories of precepts are many, they are broadly divided into three collections: first, the collection of rules of discipline; second, the collection of wholesome dharmas; and third, the collection of benefiting sentient beings. Inwardly, they contain the essence of precepts; outwardly, they fully express their forms. Uphold them firmly and do not lose them; use them to support diligent practice.

C. Settle among companions. This refers to people who share the same understanding and practice. One should not associate with those who doubt or slander, nor should one force them. Assistance from others is indispensable.

D. Sit peacefully in a quiet room. "Quiet room" has two meanings. First, it means a dwelling with few external conditions, so that disturbances may be avoided. Second, where there are companions, it is not outwardly quiet; yet those who share the same understanding and practice will certainly not disturb me and may help prevent me from sinking into drowsiness. Thus we know that the quiet room is the empty and pure chamber within one's own intrinsic nature. When the mind is at leisure, circumstances are still; when desires are few, the mind is at peace. Once all conditions are empty, the chamber of the mind is naturally quiet.

Once these conditions are present, one may single-mindedly investigate and constantly contemplate thus. "Constantly" means at all times and in all places; investigation means observing everywhere. The preceding was cessation; this is contemplation. The sequence is as follows:

1. Contemplate that one's own body is merely a conjunction of the four great elements, illusory and not real.

2. Contemplate that one's own mind is merely the six sense faculties relating to deluded conditions, provisionally named mind.

3. Contemplate that body and mind are both illusions, and that each illusion ceases; yet the ever-abiding nature is not illusory. It neither arises dependently nor ceases dependently, but is ever present and unchanging. This nature is also like a maṇi jewel, displaying colors according to the kinds of things reflected in it. The foolish suppose that the jewel possesses colors, not knowing that the arising of mind through conditions is like colors reflected upon the jewel and has nothing to do with perfect enlightenment. The foolish therefore insist that perfect enlightenment must possess a particular inherent characteristic of its own.

Mao: Contemplate defilement as color on a pearl; understand that it is originally nonexistent, and the defilement is thereby removed. This is what is meant by "knowing illusion is itself release from it."

Chen: Contemplate the so-called defilement as merely a provisional name. The name that can be spoken and the defilement to which it refers are likewise nonexistent. When one realizes that all is illusion, one knows that ultimately no images can be obtained.

Through these various wisdom-contemplations, one attains purity in the ten directions—that is, purity everywhere. This is revealed through awakening; it is function arising from the essence. From the phrase "revealing the purity of mind" straight through to "seeking such a Dharma" and "not falling into bewilderment," the expansive text unfolds layer upon layer, all to clarify the two Chinese characters "originally so."

Sentient beings are originally Buddhas. Here the Buddha opens the first wondrous gate, revealing what those before him had not revealed. This is the fundamental point on which Buddhism differs from other religions.

Therefore, Buddhism cannot be regarded wholly as a religion. Other religions generally seek to have people revere something other than themselves, whereas Buddhism alone teaches people to revere themselves, saying that they themselves are Buddhas and that all sentient beings are Buddhas. Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are without distinction. Speaking only of what is original, all alike are Buddhas; but sentient beings' minds are impure, and their awakened nature has not yet become perfectly clear. If the mind is pure, then the six sense faculties, six sense objects, six consciousnesses, and eighteen realms are pure.

Knowing that the fundamental essence is unmoving, one knows that the four elements and the twenty-five modes of existence are pure. Knowing that the fundamental essence is unmoving, one knows that all dharmas—the ten powers,

four fearlessnesses, and even the eighty-four thousand dhāraṇī gates—are also pure as one essence. Knowing that the fundamental essence is unmoving, one knows that one body and many bodies, and even sentient beings in the ten directions, share this purity. Knowing that the fundamental essence is unmoving, one knows that one world and many

worlds are pure; indeed, throughout empty space, encompassing the three divisions of time, all is pure. Knowing that the fundamental essence is unmoving, that things exist provisionally through combination, that they have no self-nature, and that they are equal, one knows that this awakened nature pervades the dharma realm, is pure and unmoving, and is perfectly without boundary.

You should know that there is neither destruction nor admixture. Because awakened nature has neither destruction nor admixture, all things likewise have neither destruction nor admixture. Since there is neither destruction nor admixture, awakened nature is originally accomplished; and since it is originally accomplished, it is originally liberated. There is no need for dharmas, and so there is neither bondage nor liberation. There is no need to seek further, and so there is neither birth and death nor nirvāṇa. Nor need one further give rise to aversion or attachment.

Keeping the precepts and violating prohibitions both lack self-nature; therefore, do not give rise to reverence or aversion. Beginners and longtime practitioners are equally one; appearances cannot be obtained, so whence comes discrimination? Why? Because all is awakening, and awakening is accomplished; it does not fall within inferential comparison and is like empty space. From this contemplation of emptiness, one infers layer by layer that sentient beings cultivate this mind so that it becomes perfect enlightenment. It is precisely like a theatrical performance: originally there is no one who cultivates and nothing cultivated, no one who accomplishes and nothing accomplished.

Before cultivation and after cultivation, before accomplishment and after accomplishment, its perfect enlightenment—quiescent and illuminating—has no difference in essence. If there were completeness or deficiency, there would be destruction or admixture. As it is for one person, so it is for all; throughout Buddha worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, none is otherwise. They are like flowers in empty space, arising and ceasing chaotically. This is not to say that there is no arising and ceasing, nor that there is no bondage and liberation, nor that there is no birth and death or nirvāṇa. From the four elements to the eighty-four

thousand dhāraṇīs, all belong to illusory appearances. They are neither identical with nor separate from it: because they are not identical with it, they are not existent; because they are not separate from it, they are not nonexistent. Sentient

beings are not identical with perfect enlightenment, yet neither are they separate from perfect enlightenment. It is exactly like a dream: in the dream, things are not absent; upon waking, they are not there. Because it is like a dream, ultimately there is no arising or ceasing, coming or going, gain or loss, taking or discarding, action or cessation, or even anyone who realizes or anything realized. And this is decisively so, whether one practices suddenly

or gradually, or contemplates, maintains, employs skillful means, or awakens. In sum, the nature of all dharmas is equal and indestructible. However one turns it over and over, one ultimately does not doubt its nonduality; thus there is no bewilderment. Why? Because all is awakening. This is called the Universal Eye.

This passage proceeds from the shallow to the profound. The Buddha first has practitioners undertake the practices of calming and contemplation, making the mind continuous and undivided. They constantly contemplate body and mind as both illusory, as illusory defilements, thereby bringing forth the permanent nature that is neither illusion nor destruction. Using a mirror as an analogy: when the defilement is exhausted, brightness appears; the pure essence is revealed. It returns to the permanent extinction of the appearance of defilement and to purity in the ten directions. These two phrases lead the passage that follows, which repeatedly sets forth methods for eliminating defilement.

“Appearances” refers to all appearances of body and mind. The sense faculties and objects, all dharmas, and the dharma realm in the ten directions are pure in their fundamental essence; it is only because of the mind’s defiled deluded attachments that they become confined, obstructed, and unable to penetrate. Thus it next explains why one cannot remain distant from illusion: only realizing all illusions is the root for entering purity. When one knows illusion, its images vanish; when awakening becomes clear, its illumination is pure. “Revealed” means that wondrous functioning arises. Proceeding from near to far and from within to without, the faculties, objects, consciousnesses, and

eighteen realms are pure. Wisdom arises from consciousness; where there is no wisdom, there is also no attainment. All dharmas are pure, and thus this penetrates the three divisions of time: one body and many bodies, one world and many worlds, all equally pure and unmoving. Vertically and horizontally, the summary is nothing other than a return to the two Chinese characters “originally so”: the original accomplishment of awakened nature, which is unmoving, all-pervading, without destruction, and without admixture.

Further, through the immovability of the four elements and of the eighty-four thousand dharma gates, the all-pervasiveness of awakened nature is brought out by contrast. Because awakened nature pervades the dharma realm, the sense faculties

and objects, the four elements, and the myriad dharmas are likewise shown to pervade the dharma realm. This is what is meant by essence and function being inseparable, mutually containing and entering one another: they are present everywhere. Only at this point is awakening accomplished and equivalent to the Buddha's realm. There is no fixed acceptance or rejection; naturally, one is not bound by dharmas, does not delight in nirvāṇa,

and does not revere such things as keeping the precepts. Why? Because aversion and attachment have been cut off, and all is awakening. Moreover, one is not attached even to awakening, for awakening itself is like illusion. Since the fundamental essence perfectly illumines and is quiescently extinguished, what cultivation or accomplishment can there be to speak of? Thus one knows that Buddha worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are nothing but an illusory theater, merely a chaotic arising and ceasing.

Because it cannot be grasped as existent, it is said to be "not identical with"; because it cannot be called nonexistent, it is said to be "not separate from." Only then does one know that sentient beings are originally Buddhas. These two phrases fully disclose the Buddha's one great cause and condition. In all his thousands of words, the Buddha seeks only to make sentient beings understand that they are originally Buddhas. Who has taught you to enter a dream and not awaken? Once awake, all is just like yesterday's dream. Contemplate deeply the marvelous import of the words "only then does one know"; it is inconceivable. The two Chinese characters "ultimately" possess immeasurable force: ultimately, not even the smallest dharma can be obtained. Why? Because the nature of all dharmas is equal and indestructible.

Finally, the Buddha speaks the words "thus it is," repeating them seven times in succession, meaning that it is no more than thus. Yet even this "thus it is" cannot be obtained. If one rigidly clings to there being a "thus it is," then speak a word about it and see.

This passage begins with the emptiness and illusoriness of the body, then the illusoriness of the mind, then the emptiness and illusoriness of awakening, and finally the illusoriness of emptiness. It explains layer by layer and guides step by step, enabling people to enter perfect enlightenment without bewilderment. Not being bewildered is itself purity.

[Marrow] Bone marrow.

[Maṇi jewel] An utterly lustrous and pure jewel.

[Ying] It means to illuminate alike.

[Remove] To depart from.

[Guo] It means to be complete and all-pervading.

[Without boundary] Boundless.

[Admixture] Intermingling.

[Bondage] Entanglement.

[Aversion] Dislike.

[Asaṃkhyeya] An innumerable number.

Vajragarbha Bodhisattva

Then Vajragarbha Bodhisattva, in the midst of the assembly, rose from his seat, bowed with his head at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One of great compassion, you have skillfully proclaimed to all the bodhisattvas the Tathāgata's great dhāraṇī of pure perfect enlightenment, the gradual expedient methods of practice at the causal stage, thereby opening up the ignorance of all sentient beings. The Dharma assembly here, receiving the Buddha's compassionate instruction, has seen the illusory cataract clearly dispelled and the eye of wisdom purified."

"World-Honored One, if all sentient beings are originally Buddhas, why is there again all this ignorance? If sentient beings inherently possess ignorance, for what causes and conditions does the Tathāgata again say that they are originally Buddhas? If ordinary beings throughout the ten directions originally accomplished the Buddha Way and later gave rise to ignorance, when will all Tathāgatas again give rise to all afflictions?"

"May you, without abandoning your impartial great compassion, open the treasury of secrets for all bodhisattvas and enable all sentient beings in the final age who hear such sūtra teachings and Dharma gates of definitive meaning to cut off doubt and regret forever." Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself with all five limbs on the ground. In this manner he made his threefold request, again and again.

Then the World-Honored One said to Vajragarbha Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good man. You are able to ask the Tathāgata on behalf of all bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age about the profound, secret, ultimate expedient means. This is the supreme instruction for bodhisattvas, the Mahāyāna of definitive meaning. It can enable bodhisattvas practicing throughout the ten directions, as well

as all sentient beings in the final age, to gain resolute faith and cut off doubt and regret forever. Listen carefully now, and I shall explain it to you." Vajragarbha Bodhisattva joyfully received the instruction, and the entire assembly listened silently.

"Good man, in all worlds, beginning and end, arising and ceasing, before and after, existence and nonexistence, gathering and dispersing, arising and stopping, the continuous succession of thought after thought, cyclical repetition, and all kinds of grasping and rejecting are all saṃsāra. If one has not emerged from saṃsāra yet seeks to discern perfect enlightenment, that perfect-enlightenment nature itself will seem to flow and turn with saṃsāra. To escape saṃsāra in this way is impossible."

"It is like moving one's eyes and thereby seeming to set clear water in motion; or like fixing one's gaze and still seeing a circle of fire turn. Clouds race, the moon seems to move; a boat travels, and the shore seems to shift. It is also like this. Good man, when the various rotations have not ceased, one cannot even find that the objects before one are still. How much less, when the defiled mind of revolving birth and death has never been purified, can one contemplate the Buddha's perfect enlightenment without making it revolve in turn. Therefore, you give rise to these three delusions."

"Good man, it is like an illusory cataract that falsely makes one see flowers in empty space. Once the illusory cataract is removed, one cannot say, 'Now that this cataract has ceased, when will all such cataracts arise again?' Why? Because the cataract and the flowers are not mutually dependent. It is also like flowers in empty space vanishing in space: one cannot say, 'When will empty space again produce flowers in empty space?'"

"Why? Because empty space originally has no flowers; they neither arise nor cease. Birth and death and nirvāṇa alike belong to arising and ceasing, whereas the wondrous awakening that perfectly illumines is free from flowers and cataracts. Good man, you should know that empty space is neither temporarily existent nor temporarily nonexistent. How much less can the Tathāgata's perfect enlightenment, which accords with and is the equal intrinsic nature of empty space, be so regarded?"

"Good man, it is like refining gold ore: gold does not come into being through refining. Once it has become gold, it does not become ore again. Though endless ages pass, the nature of gold is not destroyed. One should not say that it was not originally complete. The Tathāgata's perfect enlightenment is likewise. Good man, the wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment of all Tathāgatas originally has neither bodhi nor nirvāṇa, neither becoming a Buddha nor not becoming a Buddha, neither deluded saṃsāra nor non-saṃsāra."

“Good man, even the perfected realm of the śrāvakas, in which body, mind, and speech are all extinguished, can never attain the personally realized nirvāṇa that appears there. How much less can one use a mind that thinks and deliberates to measure the realm of the Tathāgata’s perfect enlightenment. It is like trying to burn Mount Sumeru with the light of a firefly: one will never ignite it. To give rise to views of saṃsāra with a saṃsāric mind and seek to enter the Tathāgata’s great ocean of quiescent extinction is ultimately impossible.”

“Therefore I say that all bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age must first sever the root of beginningless saṃsāra. All thought and deliberation that is contrived arises from a conditioned mind; it is nothing but the breath of deluded thought conditioned by the six sense objects, not the substance of the true mind. It is already like flowers in empty space. To use such thought to discern the Buddha’s realm is like seeking to form fruit from flowers in empty space. Deluded thoughts multiply in succession; this is impossible. Good man, the floating mind of falsity abounds in clever views and cannot accomplish the expedient means of perfect enlightenment. Such discrimination is not a proper question.”

Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke in verse:

“Vajragarbha, you should know: the Tathāgata’s nature of quiescent extinction,”

“Has never had beginning or end. If one uses a saṃsāric mind,”

“Thought itself turns again; one reaches only the limits of saṃsāra,”

“And cannot enter the Buddha’s ocean. It is like refining gold ore:”

“Gold does not exist because of refining. Although it is originally gold,”

“It is only through refining that it is brought to completion. Once the substance of true gold is formed,”

“It does not again become ore. Birth and death and nirvāṇa,”

“Ordinary beings and all Buddhas, are alike appearances of flowers in empty space.”

“Thought itself is still like an illusion; how much less should one question what is false.”

“Only when you understand this mind may you then seek perfect enlightenment.”

The intent of Vajragarbha’s question was this: he had already heard of the practices at the causal stage for attaining Buddhahood, as well as the two gates of sudden and gradual attainment. Yet, if sentient beings are originally Buddhas, why do they again give rise to ignorance? If sentient beings inherently possess ignorance, why

does the Buddha again say that they are originally Buddhas? Further, if sentient beings throughout the ten directions were originally Buddhas and later gave rise to ignorance, then all Buddhas should likewise again give rise to ignorance. If so, when would all afflictions arise again? Buddhas and sentient beings are alike originally unborn. If, within the unborn, both alike give rise to delusion, what distinction in meaning remains between Buddhas and sentient beings? Therefore, he gave rise to these three delusions and asked this question.

This question concerns ultimate certainty in faith. Its hidden subtleties are exceedingly profound; without an expedient explanation, there would be no way to awaken to them clearly. Therefore, the Buddha granted the request.

The Buddha first refutes these three delusions. He says that sentient beings in the realms of sentient life and material objects never depart from discrimination: beginning and end, right and wrong, arising and ceasing, before and after, existence and nonexistence, gathering and dispersing, arising and stopping, and so forth. In the sentient realm, thoughts continue one after another; in the material realm, there is cyclical coming and going. Nothing is not established in reliance on delusion; all is saṃsāra. To discern this perfect enlightenment through saṃsāric views makes even perfect enlightenment seem to turn and flow, because the saṃsāric mind itself also arises from perfect enlightenment. This is illustrated by dreaming of real objects.

Such objects, too, are a dream. It is also like taking the moon to move when clouds move, or taking the shore to shift when a boat travels. The movement of clouds and boats is itself the defilement of the wheel of birth and death, which has never been purified; yet one instead doubts that the perfect enlightenment, still like the moon and the shore, is likewise subject to the defilement of this revolving motion. This is because the fundamental principle has not been understood, and so it is first refuted.

Next, he says that because of this illusory cataract, one falsely sees flowers in empty space; they have no real substance. Once the illusory cataract is removed, one cannot say when it will arise again. Why? The illusory cataract and flowers in empty space are not things joined together in mutual dependence. The cataract does not join with the flowers, nor do the flowers arise in accordance with the cataract. Deluded seeing is posited because of the cataract; the flowers do not actually arise. The two phenomena do not know one another. It is precisely like flowers in empty space vanishing in space: one cannot say when empty space will again give rise to such flowers.

Why? Empty space originally has no flowers, and so flowers neither arise nor cease. This wondrous awakening that perfectly illumines is now free from flowers and cataracts and is originally unmoving, like the moon and the shore. Ignorance, birth

and death, and nirvāṇa are no more than the arising and ceasing of an illusion—a single delusion and a single awakening. What relation do they ultimately have to the nature of awakening? Even empty space, considered as a worldly dharma, does not arise or cease with flowers, though it is spoken of in terms of temporary existence and nonexistence. How much less can perfect enlightenment, serene, quiescent, eternally abiding, and equal in its intrinsic nature, do so?

Therefore, once one has reached the fruition stage, one does not again become deluded; having become a Buddha, one certainly does not again give rise to ignorance. That sentient beings are originally Buddhas is like gold ore: it cannot be said not to be gold. Yet gold is mixed with sand and cannot function. The sand was not originally united with the gold, nor is gold first obtained through smelting, for gold is inherently present. Once it has become gold—once one has awakened and become a Buddha—one certainly does not again enter the state of ore. Though endless ages pass, gold's nature does not change. One should not maintain the mistaken view that the Tathāgata's perfect enlightenment was not originally complete and must await cultivation to be attained, or that after attaining it one again becomes deluded.

Next, he says that the wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment of all Tathāgatas is originally complete. Thus there is no basis even for speaking of bodhi or nirvāṇa, becoming a Buddha or not becoming a Buddha, saṃsāra or non-saṃsāra. Yet those in the realm of the śrāvakas, who have not entered personal realization, have not eliminated views of dharmas, and fall into annihilationism, still do not understand this principle. How much less can sentient beings with inferior views, using a self-attached mind of thought and deliberation as small as a firefly, measure the realm of perfect enlightenment as vast as Mount Sumeru? Therefore, with a saṃsāric mind they give rise to saṃsāric views, and though they seek to enter the Tathāgata's great ocean of quiescent extinction, they can never reach it.

The Buddha further says that this mind of thought and deliberation consists entirely of the conditioned breath of deluded thoughts arising from the six sense objects; it is not the substance of the true mind. To use a false mind in the hope of accomplishing something is precisely like seeking to form fruit from flowers in empty space. Delusion only multiplies in succession, adding useless clever views in vain; one can never accomplish the expedient means of perfect enlightenment.

He further states the decisive method relevant to the main subject: deluded views and discrimination ultimately bring no real benefit. One must first sever the root of beginningless saṃsāra—that is, use wisdom to dispel delusion, realize the mind and see one's true nature, and personally realize perfect enlightenment. Then there is no regression. If one establishes these three delusions with a discriminating mind, they

are erroneous views, not a proper question. In sum, this delusion is the cognitive obstruction that arises after practice.

This section directly refutes the cognitive obstruction. Because Vajragarbha's fundamental nature has not been understood, all kinds of deluded anxieties arise: coarser ones are views of self, while subtler ones are views of dharmas. People today who have not realized perfect enlightenment rashly judge right and wrong, engage in textual verification and inference, and increase their own arrogance; this is precisely this illness. At the point between understanding and not understanding, the whiteness of snow and the whiteness of a white bird may appear the same yet are in fact different, and confusion is easiest. This is a major critical point in cultivation and must be understood. One must first know the original nature and then seek deeper penetration. Therefore the verse says, "Only when you understand this mind may you then seek perfect enlightenment." This is nothing other than removing the cognitive obstruction.

The two Chinese characters "doubt and regret" in this section require attention. Doubt arises through practice, and regret is born from doubt; both are unstable dharmas, which strongly emphasizes the depth of this delusion. Whenever practitioners reach the middle of their course and suddenly give rise to cognitive views, doubt arises from their own incorrect understanding and views. When there is no good spiritual teacher to give them certainty, regret arises. Unless they seek the Buddha's revelation of the secret teaching, they cannot dispel this bewilderment and oppression. Hence the phrase "impartial great compassion."

When the Buddha gives his direct answer, he does not first refute the three delusions. He merely explains where the root of saṃsāra lies: it is precisely the root from which you yourself give rise to doubt and regret. With an inverted and deluded mind that has not emerged from saṃsāra, and with confused eyes, one seeks to discern perfect enlightenment. It is the mind taking its own mind—though not an illusion, it becomes an illusion. It instead makes the nature of perfect enlightenment itself seem to turn and flow in confusion. Like clouds and the moon, a boat and the shore, which moves and which remains still becomes ever harder to distinguish. In the end, one cannot emerge from this saṃsāra. This refutes the root of doubt and regret.

The middle passage is most important. It says only that there was originally no such thing; ignorance is merely the cause, and fantasy the result. Statements such as "empty space originally has no flowers, and so they neither arise nor cease," "gold does not exist because of refining," and "the nature of gold is not destroyed" reveal that the Tathāgata's perfect enlightenment is originally complete, without admixture or decay. How could there be such deluded views as bodhi, nirvāṇa, saṃsāra, or non-saṃsāra? Yet how could the annihilationist views of the two vehicles or the

eternalist views of ordinary beings measure this? It is exactly like trying to burn Mount Sumeru with a firefly or seeking fruit from flowers in empty space.

Next, it says that one should not indulge in successive deluded thoughts, vainly adding clever views and thereby turning them into misguided questions. One need only first cut off beginningless ignorance; then, even without deliberately destroying them, the three delusions will destroy themselves. This is a teaching by way of exclusion. Yet people of dull faculties may not necessarily understand it. The present reply says: sentient beings are originally Buddhas—this refers to their essence. Ignorance is like illusory grime: the essence is fundamentally indestructible, though the grime is not nonexistent. The essence is not damaged by the grime, and its luminosity remains as before, because it has been unmoving from the very beginning. This is the distinction between sages and ordinary beings.

This sūtra speaks only of the equal original ground, speaking from the fundamental standpoint. Therefore, all sentient beings are Buddhas; it is not a matter of whether ignorance is present or absent. As for a Buddha, gold has already been extracted from the ore and will not become ore again; therefore, ignorance will certainly not arise again. Your present question uses a mind of conceptual thought to vainly speculate about the Tathāgata's realm, and is therefore not a proper question. This is an affirmative teaching.

[Speck] An eye disease.

[Obscurity] Dimness and indistinctness.

[Obstruct] To hinder.

[Hesitation] Uncertain delusion.

[Melt] To liquefy.

[Mount Sumeru] Also called Mount Meru or Mount Sumeru. At its summit is the Heaven of the Thirty-Three; on its four slopes are the heavens of the Four Heavenly Kings.

Maitreya Bodhisattva

Then Maitreya Bodhisattva, amid the assembly, rose from his seat, bowed at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: "Greatly Compassionate World-Honored One, you have extensively opened the treasury of profound secrets for the bodhisattvas, enabling the entire assembly deeply to understand saṃsāra, distinguish the false from the true, bestow upon all sentient beings in the final age

the fearless Dharma eye, give rise to resolute faith in great nirvāṇa, and no longer follow the revolving states of transmigration or give rise to views of cyclical recurrence."

"World-Honored One, if bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age wish to enter the Tathāgata's great ocean of quiescence, how should they cut off the root of saṃsāra? How many kinds of dispositions are there within saṃsāra? In cultivating the Buddha's bodhi, how many distinctions of level are there? When returning to the dusts and labors to transform sentient beings, how many skillful means of teaching should be established?"

"We only pray that, without relinquishing your great compassion to save the world, you will enable all bodhisattvas who cultivate the path, as well as sentient beings in the final age, to purify their eyes of wisdom, illuminate the mirror of their minds, and perfectly awaken to the Tathāgata's unsurpassed knowledge and vision." Having spoken thus, he prostrated with all five parts of his body touching the ground. He made this threefold request, ending and beginning again.

At that time, the World-Honored One said to Maitreya Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good man! You and the others are able to ask the Tathāgata about these profound, secret, and subtle meanings for the sake of the bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age. This will purify the eyes of wisdom of the bodhisattvas and enable all sentient beings in the final age forever to cut off saṃsāra, awaken in mind to true reality, and possess the forbearance of the unborn. Listen carefully now, and I shall explain it to you." Maitreya Bodhisattva gladly received the teaching, and the entire assembly listened silently.

"Good man, from beginningless time, all sentient beings have undergone saṃsāra because they have had various forms of affection, attachment, and craving. Whatever their mode of birth in all worlds—egg-born, womb-born, moisture-born, or transformation-born—all establish their life and nature through sexual desire. You should know that attachment is the root of saṃsāra. Because the various desires assist in arousing the nature of attachment, birth and death continue without interruption."

"Desire arises from attachment, and life exists because of desire. Sentient beings cherish life and, in turn, rely upon desire as its root. Attachment and desire are the cause; cherishing life is the result. In relation to objects of desire, they give rise to favorable and adverse responses. When circumstances oppose their attached minds, aversion and jealousy arise, and they create various karmas. Therefore, they are again born as hell beings and hungry ghosts."

"Knowing desire to be detestable, they become attached to rejecting evil courses of action, abandon evil, and delight in good; thus they are again born among humans

and devas. Further, knowing the various attachments to be detestable, they cast aside attachment and delight in renunciation, yet thereby nourish the root of attachment. They then manifest the superior wholesome results of conditioned existence. All this belongs to saṃsāra and does not constitute the sacred path. Therefore, if sentient beings wish to transcend birth and death and escape all saṃsāra, they must first cut off craving and desire and eliminate the thirst of attachment."

"Good man, bodhisattvas manifest transformations in the world not on the basis of attachment, but through compassion, so that others may relinquish attachment. They provisionally employ craving and desire to enter birth and death. If all sentient beings in the final age can abandon all desires and eliminate hatred and attachment, they will forever cut off saṃsāra. If they diligently seek the Tathāgata's realm of perfect enlightenment, they will awaken through the pure mind."

"Good man, all sentient beings develop ignorance through their underlying craving and desire, which reveals five unequal and distinct dispositions. Their depth and shallowness appear in dependence upon two kinds of obstruction. What are these two obstructions? First, the obstruction of principle, which hinders right view; second, the obstruction of phenomena, which perpetuates birth and death."

"What are the five dispositions? Good man, if these two obstructions have not been eliminated, one is said not to have become a Buddha. If sentient beings forever abandon craving and desire, first eliminating the obstruction of phenomena but not cutting off the obstruction of principle, they can only awaken to the states of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas; they cannot manifest or abide in the bodhisattva realm."

"Good man, if all sentient beings in the final age wish to sail upon the Tathāgata's great ocean of perfect enlightenment, they must first make vows and diligently cut off the two obstructions. Once these two obstructions have been subdued, they can awaken to the bodhisattva realm. Once the obstructions of principle and phenomena have been forever eliminated, they enter the Tathāgata's subtle perfect enlightenment and fulfill both the bodhisattva path and great nirvāṇa."

"Good man, all sentient beings realize perfect enlightenment. Upon encountering a good spiritual friend, they practice according to the Dharma practices of the causal stage taught by that teacher; at that time, their cultivation may be sudden or gradual. If they encounter the Tathāgata's unsurpassed path of correct practice toward bodhi, there is no distinction between greater and lesser faculties: all attain Buddhahood. If sentient beings seek good spiritual friends but encounter those of wrong view and fail to attain correct awakening, this is called the disposition of non-

Buddhist paths. The error lies with the mistaken teacher, not with sentient beings. These are called the five distinct dispositions of sentient beings."

"Good man, bodhisattvas enter the various worlds solely through skillful means of great compassion, opening and guiding those who have not awakened. They even manifest various forms and favorable or adverse circumstances, engaging in the same activities as sentient beings in order to transform them and bring them to Buddhahood. All this relies upon their beginningless pure power of vows. If all sentient beings in the final age give rise to an earnest resolve for great perfect enlightenment, they should make the bodhisattva's pure great vow and say: 'May I now abide in the Buddha's perfect enlightenment, seek good spiritual friends, and never encounter non-Buddhist paths or the two vehicles. Practicing according to this vow, I shall gradually cut off all obstructions. When the obstructions are exhausted and my vows fulfilled, I shall ascend to the pure Dharma hall of liberation and realize the wondrously adorned realm of great perfect enlightenment.'"

At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:

"Maitreya, you should know:

All sentient beings fail to attain great liberation because of craving and desire;

They fall into birth and death. If they can cut off hatred and attachment,

As well as greed, anger, and ignorance, then, regardless of their differing dispositions,

All may attain the Buddha Way. When the two obstructions are forever extinguished,

They seek a teacher and attain correct awakening, in accordance with the bodhisattvas' vows.

Relying on great nirvāṇa,

The bodhisattvas of the ten directions all manifest entry into birth and death through their vows of great compassion.

Those who practice now, and sentient beings in the final age,

Need only diligently cut off all attachments and views, and they will return to great perfect enlightenment."

The import of Maitreya's question is this: such a state of certainty dispels all delusion, opens the fearless Dharma eye, and brings great certainty; it is indeed rare. Yet this unsurpassed knowledge and vision depends upon perfectly awakening

to the Tathāgata's realm. If one wishes to purify the eye of wisdom, how does one first cut off the root of saṃsāra? Although, with respect to the various appearances of saṃsāra, there is neither grasping nor rejection, dispositions nevertheless differ. How many kinds of disposition are there? In entering emptiness through provisional existence and cultivating the Buddha's bodhi, how many distinct Dharma gates are there? And how may bodhisattvas enter the dusts and labors to teach sentient beings? How many expedient Dharma gates should they establish so as not to fall into the view of the lesser compassion of attachment? Thus this question had to be asked.

The Buddha first answered that the root of saṃsāra is affection, attachment, greed, and desire. Among the four modes of birth—womb, egg, moisture, and transformation—none is without the external condition of sexual desire and the inward arousal of the nature of attachment, through which life is established. Desire arises from attachment: this is the cause. Life exists because of desire: this is the result. With respect to objects of desire, favorable and adverse responses arise. From favorable and adverse responses, attachment and aversion are established, and various karmas are created. Therefore, one is again born in the three lower realms as karmic retribution. This is the first case.

He also explained good and evil: knowing desire to be detestable, one loves good and rejects evil, takes up the ten wholesome deeds, and delights in creating wholesome results. Therefore, one is again born among humans and devas as karmic retribution. This is the second case.

When one reaches the stage of cultivation, one knows that even attachment to wholesome attainment is not ultimate. Since this attachment also grows from the root of attachment, it too must be abandoned. One enters the four dhyānas but does not know that these are still not ultimate, because they do not depart from the superior wholesome results of conditioned existence. This is the third case. These three types, whether superior or inferior, all belong to saṃsāra and do not constitute the sacred path. Therefore, if sentient beings wish to transcend birth and death and escape saṃsāra, they should not only cut off coarse craving and desire, but also eliminate the subtle thirst of attachment. For the thirst of attachment is the subtle habitual tendency of attachment to dharmas and is also the root of birth and death.

The Buddha further explained that bodhisattvas transform themselves into sentient beings out of compassion in order to liberate the many. Wishing to teach sentient beings and enable them to relinquish attachment, they themselves do not act on the basis of attachment; they merely provisionally employ craving and desire to enter birth and death, abiding in the samādhi of play. If all sentient beings can abandon the various desires of aversion and attachment, they will awaken, realize the pure

mind, and forever cut off saṃsāra. Readers, tell me: when bodhisattvas arouse the resolve to liberate sentient beings, is this a subtle thirst of attachment? The answer is yes. Yet although this activity cannot be absent, the corresponding mind need not be present. One must never become attached to it. The sūtra says: “Thus, although I liberate immeasurable sentient beings, in truth there are no sentient beings who attain liberation.”

It is further explained that, because of craving, desire, and ignorance, sentient beings manifest the five distinct dispositions, all of which do not depart from the two obstructions. First is the obstruction of principle, which hinders right view and leads into transformational birth and death. Second is the obstruction of phenomena, which gives rise to various defiled mental states and leads into segmented birth and death. What are the five dispositions?

First is the disposition of ordinary beings: when the two obstructions have not been cut off, one is called someone who has not attained awakening.

Second is the disposition of the two vehicles: the obstruction of phenomena has been eliminated, but the obstruction of principle—the view of dharmas—has not been removed. Such persons can only awaken to the states of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas; this is not the bodhisattva realm.

Third is the bodhisattva disposition: one can make great vows, subdue these two obstructions, and awaken to the bodhisattva realm. Advancing further, one forever cuts off the roots of the two obstructions and thereby realizes the Buddha stage.

Fourth is the indeterminate disposition. The sūtra says that all sentient beings realize perfect enlightenment; the wording of the Chinese sūtra translation seems mistaken. This means that all sentient beings are already known to possess the nature of perfect enlightenment, though it has not yet been brought forth. If they encounter and take refuge in a good spiritual friend, then cultivate according to the Dharma gate that person teaches, there will be distinctions of sudden and gradual. If they obtain the correct path of practice toward unsurpassed bodhi, there is no distinction between greater and lesser faculties: sooner or later, they will certainly attain Buddhahood.

Fifth is the icchantika disposition, or the disposition of non-Buddhist paths. Although such persons diligently seek the sacred path, they encounter mistaken teachers and do not attain correct awakening. This is the fault of the mistaken teacher, not of sentient beings.

These are called the five distinct dispositions. They are explained only in terms of disposition, and the intention differs slightly from the preceding division of saṃsāra.

In sum, because sentient beings have different causes and conditions, distinctions arise. Through the power of their great compassionate vows, bodhisattvas enter the various worlds and manifest many forms, sometimes favorable and sometimes adverse. Whether through giving, loving speech, beneficial conduct, or engaging in the same activities, they do nothing but open and guide the unawakened and transform them into Buddhas. Yet at times they may also grow weary. Then they should raise up their beginningless pure power of vows as encouragement and practice the pāramitās of patience and diligence.

It is further said that all sentient beings in the final age who seek perfect enlightenment should make an earnest great vow. They should say to themselves: “I now seek to realize perfect enlightenment. I shall certainly not turn toward the two vehicles or non-Buddhist paths, but seek only good spiritual friends. Practicing according to my vow, fully endowed with compassion and wisdom, I shall gradually cut off all obstructions, attain great liberation, and ascend to the wondrously adorned realm.” The Buddha established various Dharma gates solely to enable sentient beings to liberate themselves. The essential instruction for self-liberation is simply to diligently cut off attachment and views.

[Fearless] Means resolute and without doubt.

[Cyclical recurrence] Means repeatedly revolving back and forth.

[Ocean] Conveys vastness and inclusiveness.

[Illuminate] Means light.

[Profound] Means hidden and distant.

[Continue] Means unceasing continuity.

[Adverse] Means contrary.

[Detestable] Means loathsome.

[Sail] Means to roam freely.

[Sudden and gradual] Refers to slowness and swiftness, or sharpness and dullness of faculties.

[Error] Means mistake.

[Fault] Means blame.

[Engaging in the same activities] Is one of the four means of embracing sentient beings: giving, loving speech, beneficial conduct, and engaging in the same activities.

[Encounter] Means to meet.

[Realm] Means a place or a state of mind.

Bodhisattva Pure Wisdom

Then Pure-Wisdom Bodhisattva, in the midst of the assembly, rose from his seat, bowed at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One of Great Compassion, you have extensively explained to us such inconceivable matters. We have never before seen or heard them. Now, through the Buddha's skillful guidance, our bodies and minds are at ease, and we have received great benefit."

"May you again proclaim, for all those in the Dharma assembly to come, the perfect awakened nature of the Dharma King. What distinctions are there between the realizations and attainments of all sentient beings, bodhisattvas, and Tathāgatas, World-Honored Ones? Thus may sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age hear this sacred teaching, accord with it and awaken, and gradually be able to enter it." Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself fully on the ground and made this request three times, each time repeating it from beginning to end.

At that time, the World-Honored One said to Pure-Wisdom Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good man. You are able to ask the Tathāgata, on behalf of sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age, about the gradual distinctions. Listen carefully now, and I shall explain it to you." Pure-Wisdom Bodhisattva gladly received the teaching, and he and the whole assembly listened silently.

"Good man, the intrinsic nature of perfect enlightenment is not a nature, yet natures exist in dependence upon it. Following the arising of all natures, there is neither grasping nor realization. Within true reality, there are in truth no bodhisattvas and no sentient beings. Why is this? Bodhisattvas and sentient beings are all illusory transformations. When illusory transformations cease, there is no one who grasps or realizes. It is like the eye faculty, which cannot see itself: its nature is inherently equal, and there is no one who establishes equality."

"Sentient beings, deluded and inverted, have not yet eliminated all illusory transformations. Amid what has and has not been extinguished, they mistakenly apply effort and thereby manifest distinctions. If they attain accordance with the Tathāgata's quiescent cessation, there is in truth no quiescent cessation and no one who quiescently ceases. Good man, from beginningless time, all sentient beings have clung to the imagined self and cherished the self. Never knowing that thoughts arise and perish moment after moment, they give rise to aversion and attachment and indulge in the five desires."

“If they encounter a good spiritual friend who teaches and enables them to awaken to the pure, perfect nature of enlightenment, then, discerning arising and ceasing, they know that this life is by nature toil and anxiety. If someone’s toil and anxiety are forever cut off and that person attains the purity of the dharma realm, the understanding of that purity itself becomes an obstacle. Therefore, such a person is not free within perfect enlightenment. This is called an ordinary being’s accordance with the nature of enlightenment.”

“Good man, for all bodhisattvas, understanding and views are obstacles. Though they may cut off the obstacle of understanding, they still abide in the awareness of views. Awareness itself becomes an obstacle, and they are not free. This is called the accordance with the nature of enlightenment of bodhisattvas who have not yet entered the bhūmis. Good man, wherever there is illumination or awareness, both are called obstacles. Therefore bodhisattvas constantly awaken without abiding; illumination and that which illuminates simultaneously fall into quiescent cessation.”

“It is like someone who cuts off his own head. Once the head has been cut off, there is no one capable of cutting. Thus, with the mind of obstruction, one extinguishes all obstructions; once the obstructions have been cut off and extinguished, there is no one who extinguishes obstructions. The teachings of the sūtras are like a finger pointing at the moon. If one sees the moon, one knows that what pointed to it was ultimately not the moon. So too are the Tathāgatas’ various verbal teachings and instructions to bodhisattvas. This is called the accordance with the nature of enlightenment of bodhisattvas who have entered the bhūmis.”

“Good man, all obstacles are ultimate enlightenment. Whether thoughts are present or absent, nothing is other than liberation. Establishing dharmas and destroying dharmas are both called nirvāṇa. Wisdom and ignorance alike are prajñā. The attainments of bodhisattvas and non-Buddhist practitioners are equally bodhi. Ignorance and suchness are not different realms. Precepts, samādhi, and wisdom, as well as lust, anger, and ignorance, are all pure conduct. Sentient beings and lands share one dharma nature. Hell realms and heavenly palaces are all Pure Lands. Those with Buddha-nature and those without it alike attain the Buddha Way. All afflictions are ultimately liberation. The oceanic wisdom of the dharma realm illuminates and comprehends all appearances, like empty space. This is called the Tathāgata’s accordance with the nature of enlightenment.”

“Good man, all bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age need only, at all times, refrain from giving rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it. Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing. In the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality. When sentient beings hear this dharma gate, have faith in it, understand it, receive and uphold it, and do not give rise to alarm or

fear, this is called accordance with the nature of enlightenment. Good man, you should know that such sentient beings have already made offerings to hundreds of thousands of millions of Ganges-sands of Buddhas and great bodhisattvas and planted roots of manifold virtue. The Buddha says that such people are called accomplished in the wisdom of all aspects."

At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:

Pure Wisdom, you should know: the nature of perfect bodhi,

Has neither grasping nor realization, neither bodhisattvas nor sentient beings.

Between awakening and not yet awakening, there are gradual distinctions.

For sentient beings, understanding is an obstacle; bodhisattvas have not yet left awareness behind.

Those who enter the bhūmis are forever quiescent and do not abide in any appearances.

Great awakening is wholly complete; this is called universal accordance.

For sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age, let the mind give rise to no delusion.

The Buddha says that such a person is, in this very life, a bodhisattva.

Having made offerings to Buddhas as numerous as Ganges sands, that person's merit and virtue are complete.

Though there are many skillful means, all are called wisdom of accordance."

The import of Pure Wisdom's question is this: such inconceivable matters had never before been seen or heard, and therefore subtle doubts remained. Now that each has been explained, all doubts have been exhausted; body and mind are at ease and have gained great peace and security. Yet from ordinary beings to the state of Buddhahood, the causal grounds differ, and thus the perfection of fruition must also have distinctions. How, then, should one perfectly realize awakening? He asks the Buddha to explain it again, so that all may accord with it, awaken, and enter it.

The Buddha first replies: "The intrinsic nature of perfect enlightenment is not a nature, yet natures exist in dependence upon it." This means that the nature of perfect enlightenment is not the nature of the preceding five destinies and their differing rounds of rebirth; rather, it is the nature originally inherent. Yet, because it does not remain fixed in its own nature, it arises in accordance with the five destinies. Thus it is said that the dharmakāya flows through the five paths, while

awakened nature turns in accordance with distinctions. It is like fire, which is the intrinsic nature of perfect enlightenment: at one moment it gives light, at another it burns, and at another it cooks; its manifestations differ.

Though its functions differ, the essence of fire as perfect enlightenment does not move, but turns in accordance with conditions. Speaking from the true reality that is unmoving and unchanging, although fire manifests various illusory transformations, there is in truth neither grasping and realization nor one who grasps and realizes. Therefore there are no bodhisattvas and no sentient beings. Why? Because all are illusory transformations.

When illusory transformations cease, there is ultimately no one who grasps or realizes. How much less are bodhisattvas and sentient beings anything more than provisional names established in contrast to one another? Since the names are empty, the original essence is equal, and there is no one who establishes equality. It is only because sentient beings are inverted and take illusion as real that what should be removed has not been removed, what should be extinguished has not been extinguished, and distinctions appear through the mistaken calculation of effort. Master Guifeng said: “Up to and including the seventh bhūmi, all cultivation of the Way is cultivation in a dream. Only upon perfect, luminous realization does one know that afflictions were originally nonexistent.” Thus the wisdom and effort that can cut off, and the ignorance that is cut off, both belong to delusion. It is like curing an illness with medicine in a dream: upon awakening, both medicine and illness are empty. Therefore even effort is said to be deluded.

Next it says that if one attains the Tathāgata’s quiescent cessation, one accords with it. “Accord” means to be in harmony; “follow” means to be without conflict. Since one is united with the essence, there is in truth no quiescent cessation and no one who quiescently ceases. This clarifies that all Tathāgatas alike realize this principle of original quiescent cessation and accord with the fundamental accordance. Thus both subject and object are empty. Since mind is originally unborn, one does not see any dharma of quiescent cessation or any self that can quiescently cease. What, then, could remain to be extinguished and made quiescent? This strongly states that the fundamental ground cannot be obtained. From where, then, could one falsely distinguish differences? The distinctions now spoken of are merely provisionally explained in reliance upon delusion. The following is a separate discussion in sequence:

I. Ordinary beings: From beginningless time, all sentient beings have clung to the imagined self, thereby fostering self-love. Unaware that their thoughts arise and perish moment by moment, they discriminate between aversion and attachment and greedily cling to the five desires—wealth, sex, food, fame, and sleep. In this way they long remain submerged and can never escape suffering. If they encounter a

good spiritual friend who teaches and enables them to awaken, imparting the influence of hearing the Dharma, their awakened nature becomes manifest and turns into inner cultivation. Only then do they begin to realize how continuously they have been deluded throughout life.

Deluded thoughts arise and cease; in the emptiness of intrinsic nature, there is toil and anxiety. If one can forever cut off toil and anxiety, so that the mind no longer acts deludedly, the dharma realm naturally becomes pure. Yet merely speaking of purity still leaves an understanding of purity. This understanding of purity binds one and is not ultimate; it itself becomes an obstacle. Because one intentionally attends to awakening, one is not free. This is the state of awakening of ordinary beings.

II. Bodhisattvas who have not entered the bhūmis: All bodhisattvas recognize that the preceding understanding of purity is an obstacle and seek to cut it off. But this awareness again becomes a view; awareness of the view becomes an obstacle and results in a lack of freedom. This too is not ultimate. This is the state of awakening of bodhisattvas who have not entered the bhūmis.

III. Bodhisattvas who have entered the bhūmis: Wherever there is illumination or awareness, these are all dharma-obstacles. Therefore bodhisattvas constantly awaken without abiding. This means that they remain awake at every moment and no longer deliberately attend to awareness or illumination. Since subject and object are empty, there is neither illumination nor one who illuminates, for both simultaneously become empty and cease. The root has been cut off, so there is no longer one who can cut off or anything to be cut off. It is like someone who cuts off his own head: once the head has been cut off, there is no one capable of cutting. The Buddha's teaching is like a finger pointing to the moon.

Its meaning lies beyond the pointing finger. If one sees the moon, one knows that what pointed to it was ultimately not the moon. All the Tathāgata's teachings are nothing but verbal expressions that reveal principle; they are likewise free from attachment. Ultimately, there is neither teaching nor hearing. This is the state of awakening of bodhisattvas who have entered the bhūmis.

IV. The Tathāgata: At the Tathāgata's level, which is the ultimate ground, wisdom brightly realizes perfect enlightenment and is utterly without discrimination. Because it is ever quiescent and unmoving, nothing can be spoken of as existing; there is no duality, the fundamental limit is equal, there are no appearances, and all dharmas have the characteristic of emptiness.

Once the fundamental ground is clear, one knows that all obstacles are also ultimate enlightenment; that whether thoughts are present or absent, nothing is other than liberation; that establishing and destroying are one suchness, both called nirvāṇa; that ignorance and wisdom are provisionally established and alike are prajñā; that

bodhisattvas and non-Buddhist practitioners, without wrong or right, alike are bodhi; that ignorance and suchness are originally one realm; that precepts, samādhi, and wisdom, together with lust, anger, and ignorance, are all pure conduct; and that sentient beings and lands share one dharma nature, while hells and heavenly palaces are all Pure Lands.

Since all dharmas are without appearances, like empty space, and the nature of consciousness is empty, how could afflictions bind one? They are ultimately liberation. Because they are ultimately liberation, whether persons of the three vehicles possess Buddha-nature or icchantikas lack Buddha-nature, all alike become Buddhas. Moreover, they do not become so through fabrication; they are ultimately accomplished from the very beginning. There are no ordinary beings, no bodhisattvas, and no Tathāgatas; at the fundamental limit, all are equal. This is the Tathāgata's state of awakening. (If one is not alarmed or afraid upon seeing this, that person is already accomplished.)

V. Summary: All bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age should simply follow the Buddha's teaching as follows:

(1) At all times and in all places, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; that is, do not cling to external circumstances and generate discriminations.

(2) When deluded mind suddenly arises, do not restrain it either; simply do not attend to it. This not attending to it is precisely the turning of a single thought into awakening, and it then vanishes without trace. If one tries to restrain it and hopes to extinguish it, that is adding delusion upon delusion, like trying to stop an echo by raising one's voice instead.

(3) Dwelling amid the realm of deluded thoughts, do not add further knowing. For once further knowing is added, one enters inferential discrimination and loses direct perception. The sūtra says, "What is not illusion becomes illusion." But only those who have realized perfect enlightenment can maintain this awareness, knowing that the substance of mind is originally perfect, luminous, and innately awakened. Why add knowing upon knowing? An ancient worthy wrote: "Seeking to remove afflictions only adds to the illness; moving toward suchness is also wrong." This is precisely the meaning.

(4) In the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is ultimate reality. "The absence of such knowing" means that there is no knower. Once the knower is absent, there is no need to distinguish reality further. What is called reality is the result obtained through discrimination. Once the knower is quiescent, reality itself is knowing; since reality itself is knowing, who is there to know reality? There is no need to add further discrimination. After delusion has ceased, one simply lets things take their natural course.

(5) Those who, on hearing this Dharma gate, are not startled, astonished, doubtful, or afraid have resolute faith and understanding; they resolutely uphold it, clearly penetrate its essence, and are calmly in accord with the Way. This is the true appearance of awakened nature: nothing is judged either acceptable or unacceptable. Therefore it is said, “Although there are many skillful means, all are called accordant wisdom.”

Again, the Buddha says that such people are themselves Buddhas, having already accomplished the Buddha’s wisdom of all aspects. Without having made offerings to immeasurable Buddhas and bodhisattvas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges in past lives, and planted the roots of many virtues, one could not be thus. Practitioners should know that this is the state attained after realization at the fruition stage. Therefore it is said, “In this present life, one is a bodhisattva.” To discern this is for the wisdom-eye to be pure.

This section explains the progression from ordinary beings to Buddhahood. In terms of the fundamental essence, there is not the slightest duality; originally, there is no distinction between sages and ordinary beings. Yet because delusion and awakening differ, degrees of depth and shallowness are spoken of in relation to delusion. The awakened nature and the ways of according with it therefore have various distinctions. Nevertheless, all such relationships concern intrinsic nature; apart from the Dharma of the mind-ground, there is truly no way to distinguish them. How could bodhisattvas have outward marks by which they could be displayed? Students nowadays often find fault with others in various ways, saying that one person is a Buddha and another a demon. They do not realize that their wisdom-eye has not yet opened and their various views have not yet been purified; thus they cannot remain impartial and calm.

[Following] To accord with.

[Attachment] To love and grasp.

[The Five Desires] The five kinds of craving for wealth, sex, food, fame, and sleep.

[Worrisome Thoughts] Afflictions.

[Indicate] To point out.

[Brahma Conduct] The essence of the precepts.

[Plant] To sow and cultivate.

[Wisdom of All Aspects] The Buddha’s wisdom.

[Entering the Bhūmis] Bodhisattvas who have ascended to the bhūmis.

Bodhisattva of Majestic Virtue and Sovereign Freedom

Then Sovereign-Might-and-Virtue Bodhisattva rose from his seat amid the assembly, prostrated himself at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One of great compassion, you have extensively elucidated for us this accordance with the nature of enlightenment, enabling the minds of the bodhisattvas to shine with light. By receiving the Buddha's perfect voice, we obtain great benefit without depending on cultivation."

"World-Honored One, it is like a great city with four gates: those who come from different directions do not enter by only one road. Likewise, for all bodhisattvas to adorn Buddha-lands and attain bodhi, there is more than one skillful means. We only pray that the World-Honored One will extensively explain for us all the successive stages of skillful means, and how many kinds there are in the practice of cultivators, so that the bodhisattvas in this assembly and sentient beings of the degenerate age who seek the Mahāyāna may swiftly awaken and freely sport in the Tathāgata's great ocean of quiescent extinction."

Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself with all five parts of his body touching the ground. He made this threefold request, ending and beginning again. Then the World-Honored One said to Sovereign-Might-and-Virtue Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good man. You are able to ask the Tathāgata about such skillful means for the sake of the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age. Listen carefully now, and I shall explain them to you." The Sovereign-Might-and-Virtue Bodhisattva joyfully received the teaching, and the whole assembly listened silently.

"Good man, unsurpassed wondrous enlightenment pervades the ten directions. It gives rise to the Tathāgatas and all dharmas and is equal in a single essence. In all forms of cultivation, there is truly no duality. The skillful means of accordance are innumerable; yet, when comprehensively gathered according to the differing capacities of beings, they are of three kinds."

"Good man, when bodhisattvas awaken to pure perfect enlightenment, they take stillness as their practice with the mind of pure enlightenment. By quieting all thoughts, they become aware of the restless agitation of discriminating consciousness. Still wisdom then arises, and the adventitious defilements of body and mind are forever extinguished. They thereby inwardly develop the ease of quiescence. Because of this quiescence, the minds of the Tathāgatas of the ten directions appear within it, like images in a mirror. This skillful means is called śamatha."

“Good man, when bodhisattvas awaken to pure perfect enlightenment, they know with the mind of pure enlightenment that the nature of mind, the faculties, and their objects all arise through illusion. They then employ illusory means to eliminate those who are deluded, transforming various illusions in order to awaken illusory beings. Because they arouse such illusory activity, they inwardly develop the ease of great compassion. All bodhisattvas begin their practice from this and advance step by step. Yet the one who contemplates illusion is not the same as illusion; and the contemplation that is not the same as illusion is itself also illusory. When illusory appearances are forever relinquished, this is the complete and wondrous practice of bodhisattvas. It is like seedlings growing from soil. This skillful means is called samāpatti.”

“Good man, when bodhisattvas awaken to pure perfect enlightenment, they do not grasp illusions or any appearances of purity. They clearly know that body and mind are all hindrances. In the luminosity of non-knowing and non-awareness, they do not rely on any hindrance and forever transcend the states of hindrance and non-hindrance. They make use of worlds, bodies, and minds while dwelling amid the realm of dust. It is like the ringing of a vessel: its sound issues outward. Afflictions and nirvāṇa do not obstruct one another. They thereby inwardly develop the ease of quiescent extinction. Wondrous enlightenment accords with the realm of quiescent extinction, beyond the reach of one’s own or others’ bodies and minds. The lives of sentient beings are all floating thoughts. This skillful means is called dhyāna.”

“Good man, these three dharma gates are all intimate forms of accordance with perfect enlightenment. The Tathāgatas of the ten directions attained Buddhahood through them, and the various skillful means of the bodhisattvas of the ten directions, whether alike or different, all depend upon these three modes of practice. If they are perfectly realized, one attains perfect enlightenment. Good man, suppose someone cultivated the noble path and taught and brought to fruition hundreds of thousands of millions of arhats and pratyekabuddhas. This would not equal someone hearing this unobstructed dharma gate of perfect enlightenment and practicing in accordance with it for a single instant.”

Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:

Majestic Virtue, you should know: the mind of unsurpassed great enlightenment,

At its primal source has no dual appearances. Its skillful means of accordance,

Are indeed innumerable; yet the Tathāgata’s comprehensive teaching

Sets forth three kinds: quiescent śamatha,

Like a mirror reflecting all images; illusory samāpatti,

Like seedlings gradually growing; and dhyāna, solely quiescent extinction,

Like the ringing within a vessel. These three wondrous dharma gates

Are all accords with enlightenment. The Tathāgatas of the ten directions

And all great bodhisattvas attain the Way through them.

Because these three are perfectly realized, this is called ultimate nirvāṇa.

The intent of Majestic Virtue's question was this: by receiving the Buddha's perfect voice and thus according with the nature of enlightenment, listeners' minds of enlightenment may immediately become luminous and they may already obtain great benefit without cultivation. How much more so if they diligently practice it! Yet beings differ in their capacities; how can practitioners enter gradually and open the great gate of skillful means?

The Buddha first explains that unsurpassed wondrous enlightenment is what all Buddhas throughout the ten directions cultivate and realize alike. It is originally equal: namely, eliminating craving and attachment, and bringing wisdom and compassion into joint operation. All bodhisattvas are thus, and in this intent there is no duality. Yet beings differ in capacity, and so the skillful means of accordance are innumerable. When gathered comprehensively, however, they may be summarized as three gates: calming, contemplation, and meditative absorption.

I. When bodhisattvas realize the correct cause for attaining Buddhahood, they must first awaken to the pure nature of perfect enlightenment. They take the dharma of stillness to counter the habitual tendency toward chaotic movement. Through stillness, they become clear and settled; no thoughts arise, and the mind accords with stillness. They then see the various appearances of discriminating consciousness and agitated disturbance. This seeing is the arising of wisdom that awakens to consciousness. From stillness it arises, revealing that the adventitious defilements of body and mind are entirely illusory. To know illusion is to be free of it; the adventitious defilements are forever extinguished, and naturally the realm becomes empty.

The mind is at ease—pure, open, and tranquil. The clamor of dust forever ceases, and one is harmonized, at peace, and still. This is called the ease of quiescence. One communicates with all Buddhas of the ten directions, like a mirror's light free of defilement that reveals all images, without further confusion. This skillful means is called śamatha, rendered in Chinese as "calming," or meditative stability. It is the characteristic of quiescent meditative stability: amid such states as defilement and purity, the mind does not falsely cling to conditions.

II. Bodhisattvas awaken to pure perfect enlightenment and know with the mind of pure enlightenment that the nature of mind, the faculties, and their objects all arise through illusion. They must still use illusion to dispel illusion—that is, use illusory wisdom to extinguish illusory ignorance. Accordingly, in response to beings' capacities, they benefit others by expounding the Dharma and giving instruction. They contemplate illusory beings amid the toil of worldly dust and see that they too are originally pure, neither obstructed nor obscured. Clarifying the original nature, they arouse illusory functioning and naturally develop the ease of great compassion of a single essence. From this they gradually advance until reaching Buddhahood.

When bodhisattvas bring wondrous practice to perfection, illusory appearances are forever relinquished. The illusory appearances spoken of are the appearances of both the contemplated object and the contemplating subject. One knows that what is contemplated is an illusory realm, while the wisdom that contemplates it may seem not to be illusory. Yet one does not know that the wisdom which contemplates is also illusory. Both subject and object are illusory and must both be relinquished. It is like soil growing seedlings: when the rice and grain have been harvested, both seedlings and soil are discarded. This skillful means is called samāpatti, rendered in Chinese as "contemplation," or wisdom. It is the samādhi of arousing great functioning; reaching the supreme stage, one accomplishes, among other attainments, the wisdom of wondrous observation.

III. Bodhisattvas awaken to pure perfect enlightenment and clearly know that body and mind are all hindrances. Thus, contemplation of illusion and the appearance of quiescence are both dharmas of illusion and need not be grasped. Even in non-knowing and non-awareness, they have already attained clear understanding; that is, they have attained the wondrous luminosity of non-knowing and non-awareness.

Contact through the body is called awareness; mental apprehension is called knowing. Such discrimination obstructs right view. Hence it is called non-knowing and non-awareness. To understand this meaning clearly is called the luminosity of non-knowing and non-awareness. It says "luminosity" rather than "knowing" because the word "knowing" may give rise to discrimination and suggest function, leaving subject and object still present. Here it is simply called luminosity, directly revealing the numinous and wondrous essence: above it has no summit, below it has no bottom, and it has neither middle nor boundaries, inside nor outside, east nor west. To call it empty and quiescent is like speaking of vast space,

while its appearances and functions do not arise dependently. Its knowing and seeing differ from discrimination; its non-sentient dullness differs from wood and stone. Its awareness differs from initial awakening, and its luminosity differs from the sun and moon. If one says there is quiescent emptiness, one has already fallen

into a mistaken lesser view. Therefore, knowing, seeing, luminosity, and awareness mutually dissolve and mutually remain; collectively, they are called luminosity.

One directly transcends the states of hindrance and non-hindrance. One's own body and mind and one's use of the world dwell amid the dusty realm without differing from the ordinary. It is like the ringing of a vessel: its sound is heard outside, resounding clearly. What obstruction is there to the vessel? What obstruction is there to the sound? The sound has never left the vessel, nor has it ever left the sound. One is free and transcendent. Afflictions cannot diminish it, and nirvāṇa cannot add to it; neither remains as an obstruction. Therefore, one does not grasp illusion: illusion is itself quiescent. One does not grasp the appearance of stillness: the appearance of stillness is itself extinguished. It is not that one deliberately makes them quiescent or extinguishes them, nor that stillness comes from ceasing movement or extinction comes from arising and ceasing. Rather, the original essence is fundamentally quiescently extinct; hence it is said that this arises inwardly.

As for the realm with which wondrous enlightenment accords, it too is quiescent extinction. It cannot be fabricated by one's own mind and wisdom or seen by the external consciousness of others. Hence it is said to be beyond the reach of one's own and others' bodies and minds.

The lives of sentient beings are all like floating clouds in a single fantasy, without any remaining obstruction; hence it is called ease. This skillful means is called dhyāna, rendered in Chinese as "quiet contemplation." Quiet means unmoving; contemplation is not blank unconsciousness. It is numinous, empty, and free, without falling into annihilation. Unless one has the highest faculties, one cannot transcend directly in a sudden leap. The first two methods still do not depart from dharmas: having dharmas is an obstruction, but not having dharmas is also an obstruction. To forever transcend the states of hindrance and non-hindrance is for both person and dharmas to be empty, entering the great ocean of quiescent extinction. This is the most ultimate point of the Buddhadharma; nothing can be added to it.

Next, it explains that these three dharma gates are the most immediate gates for those seeking to realize perfect enlightenment. The Tathāgatas of the ten directions all realized it by means of them. The bodhisattvas of the ten directions, regardless of differences or similarities among their gates, likewise all rely on these three gates to enter realization. Whenever they achieve perfect realization, at that very time they accomplish perfect enlightenment. How could the merit and virtue involved possibly be conceived?

In comparing merits, even teaching and bringing to fruition hundreds of thousands of millions of arhats at the fruition stage by means of the noble path does not equal someone's hearing this unobstructed dharma gate of perfect enlightenment and practicing it for a single instant. From this we may know that the ultimate and the nonultimate, grasping at appearances and seeking the mind, cannot be measured by reasoning. Therefore, apart from the single gate of prajñā and the single dharma of the mind-ground, there is no possibility that one may realize the Way for oneself and attain Buddhahood. Those today who rely on dharmas and seek teachers, forgetting the majestic virtue of their own nature while seeking freedom, hold demonic views and engage in demonic practices; they are certainly not children of the Buddha.

The first section of this division explains that methods of practice are fundamentally not twofold. It is only because capacities differ that skillful means vary, though in summary they do not exceed three gates. The second section explains calming: at the first point of entry, it is nothing other than stilling this wild mind and taking stillness as the remedy, thereby realizing the essence of great perfect mirror wisdom. The third section explains contemplation: it arouses the functioning of great-compassionate skillful means, thereby accomplishing the wisdom of wondrous observation and the wisdom of equality.

The fourth section explains dhyāna, precisely expressing that essence and function are suchness, and realizing the wisdom of the dharma realm's essential nature, transforming the ninth consciousness into amalavijñāna. This refers to pristine purity. The fifth section is the conclusion. Yet this work, while being cultivated, seems like crossing a thousand mountains and ten thousand rivers; when accomplishment comes, it occurs in only a single instant. How is it accomplished? After awakening to pure perfect enlightenment, one simply enters correct cultivation. But how could one speak of this to those who have not cultivated and realized it?

[Perfect Voice] The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma is called the perfect voice: it is bestowed in response to capacities, so that everyone may comprehend it, and no Dharma sound is incomplete.

[Buddha-land] The nature of enlightenment.

[Sporting] Freedom in skillful means.

[Gather] To collect.

[Adventitious defilements] The temporary contamination of worldly dust and toil; synonymous with the dusty realm.

[Śamatha] Calming; it means quiescence.

[Samāpatti] Contemplation; also called attainment of equality. Within meditative equipoise, one can reach the supreme stage.

[Huáng] The sound produced by a metal vessel.

[Dhyāna] Through meditative contemplation one attains samādhi and wisdom; this is dhyāna.

[Arhat] Refers to a śrāvaka.

[Pratyekabuddha] Refers to a pratyekabuddha.

Bodhisattva Who Discerns Sounds

Then Eloquent-Sound Bodhisattva, in the midst of the assembly, rose from his seat, bowed at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One of Great Compassion, this Dharma gate is exceedingly rare. World-Honored One, how many ways of cultivation are there, within the gate of perfect enlightenment, through these skillful means for all bodhisattvas? We pray that you will expediently explain them for the assembly and for sentient beings in the latter age, enabling them to awaken to the true reality."

Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself fully to the ground. In this way he made the request three times, repeating it from beginning to end. Then the World-Honored One said to Eloquent-Sound Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good man. You are able to ask the Tathāgata about such practices on behalf of the great assembly and sentient beings in the latter age. Listen carefully, and I shall explain them to you." Eloquent-Sound Bodhisattva joyfully received the teaching, and the entire assembly listened silently.

Good man, the perfect enlightenment of all Tathāgatas is pure; originally, there is neither cultivation nor one who cultivates. Yet all bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the latter age cultivate in reliance on the illusory power of non-awakening. Thus, there are twenty-five kinds of pure meditative wheels.

If bodhisattvas seek only utmost stillness and, through the power of stillness, forever sever afflictions and attain ultimate accomplishment, so that without rising from their seats they enter nirvāṇa, such bodhisattvas are said to cultivate śamatha alone.

If bodhisattvas contemplate only the illusory, and through the Buddha's power transform worlds and perform various functions, fully practicing the pure and wondrous conduct of bodhisattvas, while in dhāraṇī never losing tranquil mindfulness and the various wisdoms of stillness, such bodhisattvas are said to cultivate samāpatti alone.

If bodhisattvas only extinguish all illusions, undertake no activity, and independently sever afflictions, then, when afflictions are wholly cut off, realize true reality, such bodhisattvas are said to cultivate dhyāna alone.

If bodhisattvas first seek utmost stillness and then, with the wisdom of stillness, illumine all illusions, thereby undertaking bodhisattva conduct, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate śamatha and afterward samāpatti.

If bodhisattvas, through the wisdom of stillness, realize the nature of utmost stillness, thereby sever afflictions and forever transcend birth and death, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate śamatha and afterward dhyāna.

If bodhisattvas, with the wisdom of tranquility, further manifest illusory power and various transformations to liberate sentient beings, and afterward sever afflictions and enter quiescent extinction, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate śamatha, then samāpatti, and afterward dhyāna.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of utmost stillness, first sever afflictions and afterward undertake the pure and wondrous conduct of bodhisattvas to liberate sentient beings, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate śamatha, then dhyāna, and afterward samāpatti.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of utmost stillness, sever the afflictions of mind, further liberate sentient beings, and establish worlds, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate śamatha and simultaneously cultivate samāpatti and dhyāna.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of utmost stillness, support and give rise to transformations, and afterward sever afflictions, such bodhisattvas are said to cultivate śamatha and samāpatti simultaneously, and afterward cultivate dhyāna.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of utmost stillness, employ it to support quiescent extinction, and afterward undertake activity to transform worlds, such bodhisattvas are said to cultivate śamatha and dhyāna simultaneously, and afterward cultivate samāpatti.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of transformation and various responsive adaptations, seek utmost stillness, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate samāpatti and afterward śamatha.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of transformation and various states, seek quiescent extinction, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate samāpatti and afterward dhyāna.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of transformation, perform the Buddha's work, abide in tranquility, and sever afflictions, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate samāpatti, then śamatha, and afterward dhyāna.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of transformation and unobstructed activity, sever afflictions and therefore abide in utmost stillness, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate samāpatti, then dhyāna, and afterward śamatha.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of transformation and skillful activity, accord equally with utmost stillness and quiescent extinction, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate samāpatti and simultaneously cultivate śamatha and dhyāna.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of transformation, initiate various functions that support utmost stillness, and afterward sever afflictions, such bodhisattvas are said to cultivate samāpatti and śamatha simultaneously, and afterward cultivate dhyāna.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of transformation, support quiescent extinction and afterward abide in pure, effortless meditative contemplation, such bodhisattvas are said to cultivate samāpatti and dhyāna simultaneously, and afterward cultivate śamatha.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of quiescent extinction, give rise to utmost stillness and abide in purity, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate dhyāna and afterward śamatha.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of quiescent extinction, undertake activity and, in all circumstances, harmonize quiescence and activity, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate dhyāna and afterward samāpatti.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of quiescent extinction, abide in meditative contemplation amid the various inherent natures and give rise to transformations, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate dhyāna, then śamatha, and afterward samāpatti.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of quiescent extinction and the nature of non-doing, undertake activity, return from pure states to meditative contemplation, such bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate dhyāna, then samāpatti, and afterward śamatha.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of quiescent extinction, abide in meditative contemplation amid various purities and give rise to transformations, such

bodhisattvas are said first to cultivate dhyāna and simultaneously cultivate śamatha and samāpatti.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of quiescent extinction, support utmost stillness and give rise to transformations, such bodhisattvas are said to cultivate dhyāna and śamatha simultaneously, and afterward cultivate samāpatti.

If bodhisattvas, through the power of quiescent extinction, support transformation and give rise to utmost stillness and lucid wisdom of states, such bodhisattvas are said to cultivate dhyāna and samāpatti simultaneously, and afterward cultivate śamatha.

If bodhisattvas, through the wisdom of perfect enlightenment, perfectly unite everything, and among all natures and appearances never depart from the nature of awakening, such bodhisattvas are said to cultivate perfectly the three kinds of inherent nature, in pure accordance.

Good man, these are called the twenty-five wheels of bodhisattvas. All bodhisattvas practice in this way. If bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the latter age rely on these wheels, they should uphold pure conduct, contemplate in tranquility, and earnestly repent for twenty-one days. They should then place a marker on each of the twenty-five wheels, pray with utmost sincerity, and draw one at random. According to the wheel drawn, they will receive instruction and thus know whether their practice is sudden or gradual. Should a single thought of doubt or regret arise, accomplishment will not be attained.

Then the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:

Bianyin, you should know:

All bodhisattvas' unobstructed, pure wisdom

Arises in dependence upon meditation—

Namely, śamatha, samāpatti, and dhyāna.

These three dharmas, cultivated suddenly or gradually,

Have twenty-five forms.

All Tathāgatas throughout the ten directions,

And practitioners of the three times,

Without exception attain bodhi through these dharmas,

Except those of sudden awakening and those not in accord with the Dharma. All bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the latter age should always uphold these wheels and diligently cultivate in accordance with them. Relying on the Buddha's great compassionate power, they will soon realize nirvāṇa.

The intent of Bianyin's question was this: Such a Dharma gate is exceedingly rare, but he did not know how many kinds of practice there were—whether one should cultivate a single method, cultivate them simultaneously, or whether there was some fixed method. How should one be given further skillful instruction, so that each person might awaken and see true reality?

The Buddha first explained that, fundamentally, there is originally neither one who cultivates nor what is cultivated, because the fundamental essence is itself pure perfect enlightenment. Yet those who are not awakened cannot dispense with remedies suited to their condition. Thus, one uses illusion to cultivate illusion and cultivates through illusory power, provisionally positing twenty-five wheels. A wheel is a wheel-treasure, bearing the meaning of impelling and turning: it impels the removal of delusion and karma and turns one toward right wisdom. Speaking in terms of function, it is inseparable from the wheel of skillful means; speaking in terms of essence, it is inherently endowed with a pure essence. Hence they are called pure meditative wheels. This meditation is neither a rigid definition nor a determinate definition; it is a skillful means adapted to conditions and treated as ultimate.

"Pure" refers to the essence upon which the twenty-five wheels rely. Since it is pure, what need is there to cultivate further? Thus we know that it is the essence; what is called cultivation merely removes habitual tendencies. Among these three methods, one may attain cessation through any one of them. Among these twenty-five kinds, whichever one is cultivated may lead to ultimate attainment; hence they are called "meditative." Because they are cultivated in rotation, they are called "wheels." Cultivating one portion brings realization of one portion, while cultivating them simultaneously brings simultaneous realization; none fails to sever delusion and realize the truth.

These twenty-five wheels are merely an expedient teaching offered out of necessity. If someone understands the definitive meaning, one is three and three are one. Though the text distinguishes them separately, their meaning is complete in each: contemplation is present within cessation; contemplation does not depart from meditation; and meditation completely contains both cessation and contemplation. The foolish divide them into three, whereas the wise certainly know them to be one. The meaning of cessation fully encompasses the meaning of all twenty-five wheels.

The Heart-of-Heart Dharma that you are cultivating today belongs precisely to simultaneous cultivation and perfect realization. During meditation sessions, you cultivate śamatha; off the meditation cushion, contemplation is samāpatti; and, relying on prajñā to sweep away everything, you awaken to nothing whatsoever to be attained and directly realize the source of mind—this is dhyāna. Because it relies on the Buddha's power, cultivation and realization are relatively swift; it is not necessary to adopt any particular one of these twenty-five wheels. Yet these twenty-five wheels reveal, conversely, twenty-five kinds of faculties, each with a different mode of realization. Let us provisionally discuss them one by one according to the sūtra's meaning. If one practices according to the Tiantai three contemplations, this provides an even firmer basis. This must be clearly understood.

1. Cultivating śamatha alone: Entering through the cultivation of cessation—namely, cultivating only the contemplation of emptiness—one takes up the power of utmost stillness, accomplishes awakened wisdom, and forever severs afflictions.

2. Cultivating samāpatti alone: Entering through the cultivation of contemplation—namely, cultivating only the contemplation of provisional existence—one contemplates all things as provisional and accomplishes pure and wondrous conduct.

3. Cultivating dhyāna alone: Entering through the cultivation of meditative concentration—namely, cultivating only the middle contemplation—one merely extinguishes all illusions, undertakes no activity, and directly severs afflictions.

4. First cultivating cessation and then contemplation: Accomplishment comes through bringing forth the function of wondrous contemplation from the mind of utmost stillness; this is the successive cultivation of emptiness and provisional existence.

5. First cultivating cessation and then dhyāna: Through the mind of utmost stillness, one realizes the nature of utmost stillness and accomplishes the permanent transcendence of the two kinds of birth and death; this is the successive cultivation of emptiness and the middle.

6. First cultivating cessation, then contemplation, and afterward dhyāna: Beginning with the power of still wisdom, one gives rise to wondrous functioning to liberate sentient beings and then transcends birth and death; this is the joint cultivation of emptiness, provisional existence, and the middle.

7. First cultivating cessation, then dhyāna, and afterward contemplation: Through the power of still wisdom, one realizes pure and wondrous conduct and then liberates sentient beings; this is the complete cultivation of emptiness, the middle, and provisional existence.

8. First cultivating cessation and simultaneously cultivating contemplation and dhyāna: Through the power of utmost stillness, one simultaneously severs afflictions and liberates sentient beings; this is the simultaneous cultivation in which emptiness merges with provisional existence and the middle.

9. Cultivating cessation and contemplation simultaneously, then cultivating dhyāna: From utmost stillness one gives rise to great functioning; one cultivates essence and function together and further severs birth and death. This is cultivation in which emptiness and provisional existence merge with the middle.

10. First Cultivate Cessation and Meditation Together, Then Cultivate Contemplation: Enter the realm of quiescent cessation through the power of utmost stillness, then give rise to illusory functioning. This is to cultivate by merging provisionality and the Middle into emptiness.

11. First Cultivate Contemplation, Then Cessation: Attain meditative stability through wisdom cultivation; this is then to cultivate emptiness again within the Middle.

12. First Cultivate Contemplation, Then Meditation: Realize quiescent cessation through wisdom contemplation; this is then to cultivate provisionality again within the Middle.

13. First Cultivate Contemplation, Cultivate Cessation in the Middle, Then Cultivate Meditation: Through the wondrous functioning of wisdom contemplation, perform various illusory activities; abiding in quiescence and cutting off afflictions. This is the complete cultivation of the Middle, emptiness, and provisionality.

14. First Cultivate Contemplation, Cultivate Meditation in the Middle, Then Cultivate Cessation: Through the power of wisdom, give rise to unobstructed functioning; having cut off afflictions, abide in utmost stillness. From the fifteenth onward, all are cultivated through integration.

15. First Cultivate Contemplation, While Cultivating Cessation and Meditation Together: Through the power of wisdom, give rise to unobstructed functioning and simultaneously realize utmost stillness and quiescent cessation.

16. Cultivate Cessation and Contemplation Together, Then Cultivate Meditation: Use the power of wisdom to support utmost stillness, then cut off afflictions.

17. Cultivate Meditation and Contemplation Together, Then Cultivate Cessation: Directly realize quiescent cessation through the power of wisdom, then abide in the ground of purity and non-contrivance.

18. First Cultivate Meditation, Then Cessation: Through the power of quiescent cessation, give rise to utmost stillness.

19. First Cultivate Meditation, Then Contemplation: Through the power of quiescent cessation, give rise to all forms of functioning; amid all circumstances, quiescence and functioning respond in harmony.

20. First Cultivate Meditation, Cultivate Cessation in the Middle, Then Cultivate Contemplation: Through the power of quiescent cessation, abide in utmost stillness and give rise to wisdom-functioning.

21. First Cultivate Meditation, Cultivate Contemplation in the Middle, Then Cultivate Cessation: From the uncontrived nature of quiescent cessation, give rise to the realm of pure functioning, then return to utmost stillness.

22. First Cultivate Meditation, While Cultivating Cessation and Contemplation Together: Through the power of quiescent cessation and various forms of purity, abide in utmost stillness and give rise to illusory functioning.

23. Cultivate Meditation and Cessation Together, Then Cultivate Contemplation: Through the power of quiescent cessation, support utmost stillness, and then give rise to illusory functioning.

24. Cultivate Meditation and Contemplation Together, Then Cultivate Cessation: Through the power of quiescent cessation, support illusory functioning, and then enter utmost stillness.

25. Perfectly Cultivating the Three Forms of Intrinsic Purity: Through the wisdom of perfect enlightenment, perfectly unite all things. Since, with respect to all natures and appearances, one does not depart from awakened nature, this is the perfect cultivation of the three contemplations in accordance with it.

These twenty-five rounds are properly provisional classifications, adapted to beings' capacities and explained for those who have not awakened; they differ from the section on the Merits and Virtues, which concerns those who have already awakened to perfect enlightenment. Dharma Master Dixian's classification of these twenty-five rounds by means of the Tiantai three contemplations is extremely precise: he said that in every round there must be a person for whom it is appropriate.

Anyone who begins with quiescence necessarily practices the contemplation of emptiness; anyone who begins with illusory transformation necessarily practices the contemplation of provisionality; anyone who begins with non-grasping necessarily practices the contemplation of the Middle. Those who cultivate perfect contemplation begin by awakening to pure, perfect enlightenment; every contemplation is perfect, and so forth. How profound these words are! Practitioners should not therefore give rise to views of superiority and inferiority. Whether

cultivated singly or jointly, these are all expedient means. In reality, every round is perfect: when one emptiness is realized, all is empty; when one provisionality is realized, all is provisional; when one Middle is realized, all is Middle. All is one, and one is all. This is how bodhisattvas practice.

Next, it explains the method of making one's selection. After twenty-one days, when a responsive connection is established, choose one and decide firmly; do not doubt or regret. Doubt arises from greed and falsely discriminates superior from inferior. One does not know that each of the twenty-five gates can lead to the ultimate destination. Before entering a gate, one is ordinary; having entered a gate and reached the ultimate destination, one is a sage. What difference is there between sage and ordinary being? Ordinary beings are at the causal stage, called the causal ground; sages are at the stage of fruition, called the virtue of fruition. Whether one becomes a Buddha or not does not depend on the Buddha.

It does not depend on the Dharma or the Saṅgha, but on one's own cultivation. What is important in cultivation is actual practice, not extensive learning. The Buddha and Ānanda, for example, were both hearers of the Dharma countless kalpas ago; yet when the Buddha attained Buddhahood, Ānanda was still his attendant. This was the error of seeking extensive learning rather than diligence.

To uphold Brahma conduct, remain serene, and reflect is to cultivate precepts, samādhi, and wisdom. This is the initial work of gathering in the mind. Precepts are mentioned first because without precepts there can be no meditative stability. Thus, conduct in accord with the precepts comes first. To gather the mind into one is itself precept. When one thoroughly understands the characteristics of the mind-nature, one fully possesses the precepts; to enter nonduality is to fully possess the precepts; to take non-precept as precept, and to receive rightly by not being bound by dharmas, is to fully possess the precepts. Precepts are the gateway to entering virtue; they do not merely mean observing deportment as precepts. Therefore, only those of sudden awakening need not receive these; they do not accord even with dharmas, for it is said that even the true Dharma must be relinquished.

[Cut off]: eliminate.

[Support]: assist.

[Brahma conduct]: precepts.

[Quiescence]: samādhi.

[Reflection]: wisdom.

[Marker]: a book title.

[Making one's selection]: choosing.

Bodhisattva Who Purifies All Karmic Obstacles

Then Purifying-All-Karmic-Obstacles Bodhisattva, in the midst of the assembly, rose from his seat, paid homage at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: "Compassionate World-Honored One, you have extensively explained to us such inconceivable matters—the practices undertaken by all Tathāgatas at the causal stage—granting this whole assembly what it has never before received. We behold the Tamer, and see that the hardships of countless kalpas and all their exertions are as though a single thought. We bodhisattvas rejoice deeply and take comfort in this."

"World-Honored One, if the intrinsic nature of this awakened mind is originally pure, why is it defiled, causing sentient beings to be confused and unable to enter? We only pray that the Tathāgata will explain the nature of dharmas extensively for us, enlightening this assembly and sentient beings of later ages, so that it may serve as their future eye." Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself with all five parts of his body touching the ground. He made this request three times, repeating it from beginning to end.

At that time, the World-Honored One said to Purifying-All-Karmic-Obstacles Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good man! You are able to ask the Tathāgata about such skillful means for the sake of this assembly and sentient beings of later ages. Listen carefully now, and I shall explain it to you." Then Purifying-All-Karmic-Obstacles Bodhisattva joyfully accepted the teaching, and the entire assembly listened silently.

"Good man, from beginningless time, all sentient beings have falsely imagined and clung to a self, a person, sentient beings, and a life span. Taking the four inverted views to be their real self-essence, they give rise to the two objects of aversion and attachment. Upon a false basis, they further cling to falsity; these two falsities depend upon one another and give rise to the path of false karma. Because there is false karma, they falsely perceive transmigration. Those who tire of transmigration falsely perceive nirvāṇa. For this reason, they cannot enter pure awakening."

"It is not that awakening bars those able to enter it. Yet if there is someone able to enter, it is not awakening that enters. Therefore, whether thoughts arise or cease, all returns to confusion. Why? Because beginningless fundamental ignorance has arisen and is taken as one's master. All sentient beings are born without the eye of wisdom; the nature of body and mind alike is ignorance. It is like someone who cannot cut off his own life. Therefore, know that those who love self also comply with what accords with self, while toward what does not accord with self they give

rise to aversion and resentment. Because the mind of aversion and attachment nourishes ignorance, their continued seeking of the Way can never succeed."

"Good man, what is the mark of self? It is what sentient beings' minds take as realized. Good man, it is like someone whose hundred limbs are well regulated and who suddenly forgets his body. But when the four limbs become slack and their care and nourishment go awry, even a slight application of needle or moxa lets him know that there is a self. Thus, the self-essence appears only when something is apprehended as realized. Good man, even if the mind realizes the Tathāgata and fully knows pure nirvāṇa, this is still the mark of self."

"Good man, what is the mark of person? It is what sentient beings' minds awaken to and realize. Good man, one who awakens to there being a self no longer identifies with that self; what is awakened to is not self, and awakening itself is likewise so. Even when awakening has transcended all realizers, this is entirely the mark of person. Good man, even if the mind has perfectly awakened to nirvāṇa and all this is still taken as self, if the mind retains even a slight awakening, though it has exhaustively realized principle, it is all called the mark of person."

"Good man, what is the mark of sentient beings? It is what sentient beings' minds cannot reach through their own realization and awakening. Good man, suppose someone says, 'I am a sentient being.' Then know that the person who speaks of sentient beings is neither self nor other. Why is it not self? Since I am a sentient being, it is not self. Why is it not other? Since I am a sentient being, it is not the other self."

"Good man, whatever sentient beings understand, realize, or awaken to is a mark of self or person. What the marks of self and person cannot reach, yet is retained as something understood, is called the mark of sentient beings. Good man, what is the mark of life span? It is what sentient beings' minds apprehend through illuminating pure awakening: all karmic knowledge that does not see itself, like the life faculty. Good man, if the mind illuminates and sees all awakenings, they are all defilements. That which awakens and that which is awakened to do not depart from defilement. It is like hot water melting ice: no separate ice remains. To know that the ice has melted while retaining a self that awakens to itself is likewise so."

"Good man, sentient beings of later ages who do not understand the four marks may diligently cultivate the Way through many kalpas, yet theirs is only conditioned practice; in the end, they cannot attain any of the fruits of the noble ones. Therefore, this is called the latter age of the true Dharma. Why? Because they take every self to be nirvāṇa, and call having realization and awakening accomplishment. It is like someone who mistakes a thief for his son: his household wealth can never be secure."

“Why is this so? Those who love self also love nirvāṇa, taking the suppression of the root of self-love as the mark of nirvāṇa. Those who hate self also hate birth and death, not knowing that attachment itself is true birth and death. To set birth and death apart as something hated is called not being liberated. How, then, can one know the Dharma of non-liberation?”

“Good man, sentient beings of later ages who cultivate bodhi take their own slight realization as their personal purity, yet they have still not exhausted the fundamental root of the mark of self. If someone praises their Dharma, they become joyful and immediately wish to liberate others. If someone slanders what they have attained, they become angry and resentful. Then know that the mark of self is firmly and tenaciously held, lying hidden in the storehouse consciousness and playing through the sense faculties without ever ceasing.”

“Good man, practitioners who do not remove the mark of self cannot enter pure awakening. Good man, if one knows that self is empty, there is no one who can destroy that self. Yet if there is a self that expounds the Dharma, then self has not been cut off; the marks of sentient beings and life span are likewise so. Good man, sentient beings of later ages take illness as Dharma; therefore, they are called pitiable. Though they diligently strive, they only increase their illnesses. Therefore, they cannot enter pure awakening.”

“Good man, sentient beings of later ages who do not understand the four marks take the Tathāgata’s understanding and sphere of practice as their own cultivation, and in the end they do not succeed. Some sentient beings claim attainment when they have not attained, and claim realization when they have not realized. Seeing those who make superior progress, they become jealous. Because such sentient beings have not cut off self-love, they cannot enter pure awakening.”

“Good man, sentient beings of later ages who hope to realize the Way must not seek awakening; they should only increase their learning, thereby increasing their view of self. They should diligently subdue afflictions, arouse great courage and vigor, make the unattained attained and the uncut cut off, so that greed, anger, attachment, pride, flattery, crookedness, and jealousy do not arise in response to circumstances, and all attachment to self and other, gratitude and affection, is stilled. The Buddha says that such a person gradually attains accomplishment. Seek a good spiritual friend and do not fall into wrong views. If, regarding what one seeks, one gives rise to separate aversion and attachment, one cannot enter the ocean of pure awakening.”

At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:

Purifier of Karma, you should know:

All sentient beings,

Because they cling to self-love, falsely transmigrate from beginningless time.

Without removing the four kinds of marks, they cannot attain bodhi.

Attachment and aversion arise in the mind; flattery and crookedness remain in their thoughts.

Therefore, they are much confused and cannot enter the city of awakening.

If they can return to the realm of awakening, they must first remove greed, anger, and ignorance.

When attachment to dharmas does not remain in the mind, they may gradually attain accomplishment.

My body is originally nonexistent; how could aversion and attachment arise?

Such a person seeks a good friend and will never fall into wrong views. If a separate mind arises regarding what is sought, there can ultimately be no accomplishment.

The intention behind Purifier of Karmic Obstructions' question concerns right cultivation after awakening. The sūtra says, "as though a single thought," which precisely indicates the state of awakening. This section has already appeared in the ninth section. Thus, with respect to karmic obstacles, one must first undergo thorough awakening and understand their root source; only when one is able to eliminate karmic obstacles does one enter the section on right cultivation. One must also first break through ignorance and remove obstacles before there can be a practical method. Otherwise, even if one exhausts one's whole strength, it is merely blind cultivation and aimless practice.

Karma has many kinds and appears according to its categories: the evil karma of the three lower realms, the wholesome karma of the human and deva realms, the immovable karma of the form-realm heavens, the undefiled karma of the two vehicles, and the karma of the bodhisattvas' two extremes. Though these differ in depth, shallowness, magnitude, and smallness, all alike become obstacles, causing confusion and preventing entry. Practitioners of middling and lesser faculties do not know the dependent arising of karma: it all comes from the mark of self. From the mark of self arise the four marks. Though dharma marks are many, dharma-nature is one. Since karmic obstacles are all matters within dharma-nature, when all obstacles are purified, the eye becomes pure. But how can all obstacles be purified? This is the intent of the question concerning purification of karma.

The Buddha first explains that the reason sentient beings cannot enter pure awakening is that the four marks obstruct them. These are the marks of self, person, sentient beings, and life span. They are not truly the essence of self, yet people falsely cling to them as existent, thereby forming the four inverted views. From a false basis arise false functions; the two falsities mutually reinforce one another and establish all kinds of false karma. Whether one feels aversion or attachment, one falsely perceives transmigration; and when one reaches awakening, one detests transmigration, wishes to leave it, and clings greedily to nirvāṇa. This too is false, because one has still not left behind the four marks of arising and ceasing.

The reason one cannot realize and enter pure awakening is that beginningless ignorance is taken as one's master, and one naturally lacks the eye of wisdom. Whether thoughts arise or cease, there is nothing that is not confusion; this has not the slightest connection with the true awakening of the fundamental essence. It is not that awakening can bar one from entering, nor is the ability to enter awakening an achievement of faith, understanding, practice, and realization, for the essence of awakening neither enters nor exits, and the nature of awakening stands solemnly unmoving. Once sentient beings take ignorance as their master, their body is nothing but ignorance.

Their mind too is nothing but ignorance. They cling firmly and tenaciously, never willing to let go. Whether circumstances accord with them or oppose them, whether through aversion or attachment, they do nothing but nourish ignorance and strengthen it. Since ignorance continues without interruption, how can seeking the Way succeed? This is why it becomes an obstacle.

Next, the four marks are explained.

First is the mark of self. At first, people do not know that there is a self. When the hundred limbs are well regulated, one may suddenly forget one's body; likewise, when asleep without dreams, it is as though there were no self. But when one receives a sensation—even a slight application of needle or moxa—one knows that there is a self, because the mind has felt and apprehended something. Similarly, when a practitioner realizes a fruition and knows what has been realized to be pure nirvāṇa, this too is the mark of self. The single word "able" fully reveals the mark of self.

Second is the mark of person. After a sentient being's mind awakens, what it awakens to and realizes—if it is set in opposition to another—establishes the mark of person. Even being apart from all self is the mark of person. Though one's mind may have perfectly awakened to nirvāṇa and exhaustively realized all principle —"exhaustively" meaning completely—though one has fully understood all principle,

what is realized has not yet been exhausted; this is still the mark of person. The single word “what” fully reveals the mark of person.

Third is the mark of sentient beings. It refers to that which the mind cannot reach through its own realization and awakening: neither other nor self, beyond the distinction of person and self. If the mind still retains something it falsely understands, this is called the mark of sentient beings.

Fourth is the mark of life span. This refers to continuity without interruption: one awakens to all karmic knowledge that does not see itself and clings to it as a life span. These four marks are collectively nothing more than attachment to self.

Next, it is explained in general that if the mind illuminates and sees all awakenings, they are all merely marks and all defilements. Because such a mind exists, it sees the preceding awakenings; the one who awakens and that which is awakened to do not depart from defilement. It is like water, which is the fundamental nature, becoming ice through delusion. When the hot water of wisdom melts it, the hot water and ice are both gone, and only the nature of water remains. When wisdom and delusion are both exhausted, there is no knower. If even a subtle awareness remains that takes wisdom to exist, it has not been fully exhausted.

Next, the reasons for being unable to enter pure awakening are explained. First, sentient beings of later ages do not understand the four marks and have not clarified their root source. Though willing to cultivate the Way, though diligently and arduously cultivating it, though cultivating it diligently through immeasurable kalpas, they ultimately continue to revolve within the conditioned four marks and cannot attain any of the fruits of the noble ones. This is because they cultivate the Way with realization of nirvāṇa as the ultimate fruition, not knowing that once there is a view of nirvāṇa, there is a self that realizes and awakens, and a path that is realized and awakened to. None of these has departed from self. To call this accomplishment falsely is not nirvāṇa.

It is like someone who mistakes a thief for his son: unable to distinguish true from false or good from evil, he takes attachment to nirvāṇa itself to be attachment to self, while the root of attachment lies hidden within.

Again, birth and death likewise arise from attachment to self and aversion; the root of attachment also lies hidden within. Yet one takes this to be the mark of nirvāṇa without realizing it. Everywhere, one remains bound by dharmas. Sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age understand only peripheral matters concerning the dharmakāya. Although they gain slight realization and understand that the sense faculties and their objects are provisionally compounded, and that awakened nature is clear and still, their dharma-view has not been exhausted. When they encounter

circumstances, they may easily resist coarse appearances; but when they encounter subtle ones, they are turned by them without realizing it.

For example, if someone praises their Dharma, they become greatly delighted and wish to liberate that person. If someone slanders what they have attained, they become angry and resentful. This shows that their tenacious attachment to the mark of self still lies hidden at the root and has not been severed. Although they cultivate the true Dharma, they are exactly like those in the Dharma-ending age. Although they seek realization, they instead grasp at marks. Thus it is called the Dharma-ending age within the true Dharma. If one is in the Dharma-ending age while cultivating the true Dharma, then the Dharma-ending age need not be devoid of the true Dharma. It depends on whether one grasps at marks or does not grasp at marks; it has nothing to do with the true Dharma or the Dharma-ending age.

One who cultivates the Way without removing the mark of self can never enter the realm of purity. The Chinese expression shigu ( ), "therefore," is categorical and allows no compromise. Next, it is said that teaching the Dharma to sentient beings becomes an illness: because one has not yet become free of dharmas, they become an illness. If one knows that the self is empty, one does not see anyone who reviles oneself, nor is there an I who teaches. If one knows that there is someone who reviles oneself and that one has something to teach, then the self has still not been severed. If the mark of self has not been severed, all four marks remain. Though one diligently strives forward, one instead increases all manner of illnesses. Therefore, one cannot enter pure enlightenment.

Next, it is said that sentient beings who have not understood the four marks may wish to take the Tathāgata's definitive and correct understanding as their practice, yet will never attain accomplishment. For the rampant arising of views of self is nothing but discrimination. Because there are notions of self and others, gain and loss, they have not attained principle yet claim to have attained it; they have not realized wisdom yet claim to have realized it. Their minds give rise to overweening arrogance, becoming a great falsehood. If they see others making superior progress, they become jealous. At root, all this is due to attachment to self not having been severed. Therefore, they cannot enter pure enlightenment.

Next, it is said that sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age hope to realize the Way, yet do not seek inward awakening in the mind. They only wish to hear much and increase their wisdom, not knowing that this merely increases their views of self and brings no benefit in actual circumstances. They should simply apply themselves diligently to removing and subduing afflictions, arouse great courage and vigor, cause what has not been attained to be attained, and cause what has not been severed to be severed. When all circumstances arise before them, they should not give rise to such illnesses as greed, anger, attachment, arrogance, flattery,

crookedness, and jealousy. Affectionate attachments to self and others should all be extinguished at once. By entering this proper course, they may gradually attain accomplishment.

One must seek a good spiritual friend as a guide; only then will one not fall into erroneous views. If one seeks anything else and still does not depart from aversion and attachment, one will ultimately be unable to enter the ocean of pure enlightenment. The two Chinese characters “simply should” are likewise categorical and unequivocal. “Ocean” means vast and boundless—the realm of the great ease of spontaneous play. In sum, whether karmic obstacles are coarse or subtle, so long as the mark of self remains, even one who has reached equal enlightenment still has residual habitual tendencies and cannot be called pure. Only when principle and phenomena fully interpenetrate, and both self and phenomena are empty, can this be called pure karma.

Tamer Refers to the Buddha.

Nourish To foster and increase.

Continuity Ignorance and aversion and attachment mutually condition one another without ceasing.

Bone The joints of the bones.

Tense Urgent.

Slow Sluggish.

Nurture and Restrain To tame and subdue.

Improper Not appropriate.

Exhaust To bring to an end.

Slander To malign in one’s heart and revile with one’s mouth.

[Compassion] Same as “compassion.”

Flattery To curry favor.

Crookedness Not upright or straight.

Jealousy Envious resentment; the most inferior and base disposition in cultivation.

Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva

Then Universal-Enlightenment Bodhisattva, in the midst of the assembly, rose from his seat, bowed his head at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: "Greatly Compassionate World-Honored One, you have well explained the ailments of Chan, enabling the whole assembly to attain what they had never before attained, their minds utterly freed, and to gain great peace and security."

"World-Honored One, sentient beings in the degenerate age are ever farther removed from the Buddha; worthy sages remain hidden, while deviant teachings grow ever more prevalent. What kind of people should sentient beings seek? Upon what Dharma should they rely? What practices should they undertake? What ailments should they eliminate? How should they arouse their resolve, so that those multitudes of blind ones will not fall into wrong views?" Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself fully to the ground. He asked three times in this manner, each time beginning again after he had finished.

At that time, the World-Honored One said to Universal-Enlightenment Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good man! You are able to ask the Tathāgata about such cultivation and thereby bestow upon all sentient beings in the degenerate age the fearless Dharma eye, enabling them to accomplish the noble path. Listen carefully now, and I shall explain it for you." Then Universal-Enlightenment Bodhisattva joyfully received the teaching, and the entire assembly listened silently.

"Good man, when sentient beings in the degenerate age who are about to arouse the great resolve wish to seek a good spiritual friend and cultivate practice, they should seek those who possess right view in every respect. Their minds do not abide in appearances, nor are they attached to the realms of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. Though they manifest amid worldly afflictions, their minds remain ever pure. Though they display various faults, they praise pure conduct and do not lead sentient beings into conduct contrary to the precepts. Whoever seeks such a person will attain anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi."

"When sentient beings in the degenerate age encounter such a person, they should make offerings to them without begrudging even their bodies or lives. In the four deportments, such a good spiritual friend constantly manifests purity. Even if they display various faults, one should harbor no arrogance in one's mind—how much less should one begrudge wealth, wives, children, or dependents. If a good man does not give rise to an evil thought toward such a good friend, he will ultimately accomplish perfect enlightenment; the flower of his mind will blossom in radiance, illuminating a hundred thousand Buddha lands."

"Good man, the wondrous Dharma realized by such a good spiritual friend must be free from four ailments. What are these four? The first is the ailment of contrivance.

If someone says, ‘Within my original mind, I perform all manner of practices in seeking perfect enlightenment,’ this is called an ailment, because the nature of perfect enlightenment cannot be attained through contrivance.”

“The second is the ailment of letting things take their course. If someone says, ‘We now neither cut off birth and death nor seek nirvāṇa. Since nirvāṇa and birth and death give rise to no thoughts of arising or ceasing, let everything follow the natures of dharmas; in this way we seek perfect enlightenment,’ this is called an ailment, because the nature of perfect enlightenment is not present through mere letting things take their course.”

“The third is the ailment of cessation. If someone says, ‘I shall now forever still all thoughts in my own mind, thereby attaining the quiescent equality of all natures, and seek perfect enlightenment,’ this is called an ailment, because the nature of perfect enlightenment is not attained through cessation. The fourth is the ailment of extinction. If someone says, ‘I shall now forever cut off all afflictions; body and mind are ultimately empty, with nothing whatsoever. How much more so are the illusory realms of sense faculties and objects! When all is eternally quiescent, I shall seek perfect enlightenment,’ this is called an ailment, because the nature of perfect enlightenment is not characterized by quiescence. Those free of these four ailments know purity. Such contemplation is called right contemplation; any other contemplation is called wrong contemplation.”

“Good man, sentient beings in the degenerate age who wish to cultivate should devote their whole lives to making offerings to good friends and serving good spiritual teachers. If such a good spiritual teacher wishes to draw near, they should abandon arrogance. If the teacher withdraws, they should abandon anger. Whether favorable or adverse circumstances arise, they should regard them as empty space, clearly knowing that body and mind are ultimately equal and no different in essence from all sentient beings. Only by cultivating in this way may they enter perfect enlightenment.”

“Good man, sentient beings in the degenerate age fail to accomplish the Way because, from beginningless time, they have had seeds of aversion and attachment toward self and others, and thus have not yet attained liberation. If one regards one’s enemies as one’s own parents, with no distinction in one’s mind, one thereby eliminates all ailments. The same applies to attachment and aversion toward self and others among all dharmas. Good man, sentient beings in the degenerate age who wish to seek perfect enlightenment should arouse this resolve: ‘As long as space endures, for all sentient beings, I shall enable them all to enter ultimate perfect enlightenment. Yet within perfect enlightenment there is no one who attains enlightenment.’ Eliminating all appearances of self and person, one who arouses such a resolve does not fall into wrong views.”

At that time, the World-Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke these verses:

Pujue, you should know: sentient beings in the degenerate age,

Who wish to seek a good spiritual friend should seek one of right view.

Their minds should remain distant from the two vehicles; within the Dharma, eliminate the four ailments:

Contrivance, cessation, letting things take their course, and extinction. When drawing near, be without arrogance;

When separated, be without anger. When encountering all manner of circumstances,

Let the mind give rise to rare and wondrous reverence, as though the Buddha had appeared in the world.

Do not violate conduct contrary to the precepts; the root of precepts will remain forever pure.

Liberate all sentient beings, enabling them ultimately to enter perfect enlightenment.

Without appearances of self or person, rely upon right wisdom,

And you will transcend wrong views and realize enlightened parinirvāṇa.

The import of Pujue's question is this: the principles to be realized and the practices to be cultivated have already been heard and received as instruction. Yet in cultivation, Chan ailments are not absent. When practice reaches a stage of vigor, the obstruction of knowledge naturally arises. How can one make the mind utterly free and unattached, thereby attaining great peace and security? Sentient beings in the degenerate age are far removed from the Buddha, and deviant evils have increased. If they wish to arouse the resolve without falling into wrong views, what kind of people should they seek, what Dharma should they rely upon, and what ailments should they eliminate? To understand these three is to possess the Dharma eye; through this Dharma eye one accomplishes the noble path. This is true Dharma giving, and therefore the Buddha permits the question.

The Buddha first explains that arousing the great resolve is the proper cause, and seeking a true good spiritual friend is the proper condition. But one called a person of right view must himself be able to let the mind abide in no appearances and

remain unattached to the stagnant quiescent realm of the two vehicles. As it is said, one would rather remain in hell than give rise to the mind of the two vehicles.

Moreover, such a person must fully possess skillful means—not merely expedient means, but skillful expedient means. Though manifesting amid worldly afflictions, appearing perhaps to be greedy or angry, or to scheme for wealth and status, or to have a wife and children, the mind remains ever pure and never departs from bodhi. Since such actions truly have a purpose, they are undertaken as skillful means and are not truly greed or anger. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says that bodhisattvas living at home with wives and children have never abandoned the mind of bodhi.

Worldly people cling to appearances and presumptuously assess depths and heights. Seeing the result without understanding its cause is a grave error indeed.

When using skillful means to liberate beings, one may intentionally display faults, such as entering houses of prostitution and the like, in order to guide and liberate sentient beings who have such faults. One first joins them in their activities to gather in their minds, then seeks to instruct them. Yet one continues to praise pure conduct and the precepts; one never leads faultless sentient beings into conduct contrary to the precepts. One would rather bear the blame oneself than mislead others. Thus Dharma Master Kumārajīva acknowledged that he had broken the precepts, but did not urge others to imitate him. Since self and others are both empty, he did not reckon with praise or blame. Though his conduct seemed flawed, he was not attached to views. Such a person differs from worldly opinion and is a good spiritual friend.

Only by seeking such a person can one realize unsurpassed bodhi. Upon seeing such a person, one should make offerings without begrudging body or life. Nowadays, however, people not only fail to make offerings, but instead doubt and slander such a person, even obstructing others from drawing near. This is because they themselves lack the eye to recognize one. Therefore, one who can recognize a good spiritual friend already possesses no ordinary Dharma eye.

Next, it explains that such a good spiritual friend, in the four deportments of walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, is free and at ease in all that he does, whether favorable or adverse. In response, we should neither show him reverence merely because his conduct appears pure nor become suspicious, slanderous, or arrogant because his conduct appears faulty. The manifestations of bodhisattvas through skillful means, whether favorable or adverse, cannot be fathomed. We should honor them no differently from the Buddha, yet rely upon the Dharma rather than outward conduct. If they benefit us, we should always revere them. It is like traveling at night

on a dangerous road: if an evil person holds a torch, one must not refuse its light because he is evil. This is the difficulty in the relationship between teacher and student. If one fears suspicion and slander, one establishes self and others and finds it difficult to liberate beings. Therefore, one should make offerings without begrudging body or life; how much more should one make offerings rather than selfishly cling to food, wealth, wives, children, and dependents? If a good man can hold no arrogance toward such a good friend and give rise to wholesome intentions, the good friend will naturally draw near. The benefits will be immeasurable; one will ultimately accomplish great enlightenment, with boundless light illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction.

Next, it explains that if the wondrous Dharma realized by such a good spiritual friend contains an ailment of mind, that person is unfit to be a teacher. Mental ailments are countless, but all arise from self-approval, and from self-approval arise the four ailments. What are the four?

The first is the ailment of contrivance, namely, deliberately producing activity in the mind. Such a person thinks, “I must diligently seek with focused effort and undertake all manner of activities—building stupas and monasteries, making offerings to Buddhas and monastics, withdrawing into mountain forests, lecturing on sūtras, and upholding mantras—in the belief that these are merit and virtue. In this way I shall realize perfect enlightenment.” Clinging to this exclusive view becomes a great ailment. Such a person does not know that the self-nature of perfect enlightenment is originally complete and luminous, and is not realized through contrivance. There is no need to stir up the mind in pursuit of further benefit. Wherever the mind comes to rest, one accords with perfect enlightenment. With enlightenment, delusion is exhausted; when delusion is exhausted, the nature naturally opens in clarity. To engage in deliberate contrivance is therefore called an ailment.

The second is the ailment of letting things take their course, namely, drifting and sinking at will. Such a person thinks, “Since nirvāṇa and birth and death are originally quiescent, why need one cultivate or seek? There is no need to loathe them and seek to cut them off, nor to delight in them and diligently pursue them. One may simply follow the natures of dharmas and let everything take its natural course; this is perfect enlightenment.” Clinging to this biased view, such permissiveness becomes an ailment. Such a person does not know that although the nature of perfect enlightenment is fundamentally quiescent, it cannot be realized through letting things take their course. Before realizing right enlightenment, one remains within illusory powers and illusory views; before awakening, one is still a deluded person. If one no longer distinguishes good from evil and falls into an indeterminate biased emptiness, body and mind become unrestrained and remain constantly in illusion. This is called an ailment.

The third is the ailment of cessation, namely, stilling thoughts and suppressing feelings. Such a person thinks, “Afflictions and inverted views arise from thoughts. If I become mindless and stop thoughts, establishing no appearances, delusion will naturally not arise. Therefore I should forever still all thoughts; my nature will naturally become quiescent and equal. Once delusion is stopped, that is perfect enlightenment.” Clinging to this annihilationist view becomes an ailment. Such a person does not know that the nature of perfect enlightenment is inherently numinous and lucid, neither nonexistent nor existent, neither attained through union nor through cessation. Therefore it was previously said: with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it. If one forcibly suppresses it into stillness, one directly contravenes the nature of enlightenment. This is called an ailment.

The fourth is the ailment of extinction, namely, eliminating mind and objects. Such a person thinks, “Body and mind are ultimately devoid of anything. Since body and mind are the root of afflictions, if one wishes to cut off afflictions, one must first cut off body and mind. When all appearances are obliterated and everything is eternally quiescent, the quiescent aspect of the enlightened nature will naturally appear.” Clinging to this view of extinction becomes an ailment. Such a person does not know that perfect enlightenment is neither movement nor stillness. Its numinous and luminous essence is neither real nor unreal. If one abides in quiescence, that abiding is itself not quiescence and contradicts principle; how could one accord with it? Therefore, one must not cling to a truly existent appearance of quiescence and seek it vainly. This is called an ailment.

In sum, those afflicted by contrivance misunderstand such earlier statements in the contemplation of illusion as the bodhisattva’s arousing practices to liberate beings, and thus become biased toward activity. Those afflicted by letting things take their course misunderstand the earlier statement that perfect enlightenment is originally pure and has no cultivation, and thus become biased toward permissiveness. Those afflicted by cessation misunderstand earlier statements in the contemplation of stillness, such as taking stillness as practice and clarifying all thoughts, and thus become biased toward stopping. Those afflicted by extinction misunderstand earlier statements in the contemplation of quiescence, which all speak of quiescent extinction and cutting off afflictions, and thus become biased toward cessation and extinction. These are therefore called the four ailments.

Practitioners should first examine themselves inwardly for these four ailments. If even one is present, it is called an ailment; when they are free of them, they are pure.

These four maladies all arise from the cognitive hindrance. After one has applied oneself to practice, if one does not take the teachings as one’s standard or rely on a teacher as one’s refuge, one naturally falls into a non-Buddhist path and acts

according to one's own ideas. One may first fall into the malady of contrivance and then turn to another malady; or, content with a little attainment, one may merely cling to a single insight and take it to be complete. These are the causes of these maladies. If one does not cling one-sidedly to the four approaches, but comprehends them without obstruction, then one knows that the four approaches are dharmas, not maladies, and they are no longer maladies.

Act without becoming attached to acting. Spontaneous functioning comes only after one's strength has been fully developed. Habitual tendencies will then naturally cease. Use the methods without clinging to the methods, and the malady will disappear of itself; it cannot be eliminated by discarding the methods altogether. Such understanding through wisdom is right contemplation. If one gives rise to separate views and wishes to depart from the four maladies by also eliminating the four methods, this is called wrong contemplation. Furthermore, in considering a teacher, only one who is free of these four maladies may be my teacher. Having found such a teacher, my own cultivation should likewise be so; therefore, there need not be a fixed distinction between teacher and oneself.

Next is the method of making offerings to a good spiritual friend. If a good friend is willing to come near and instruct you, do not belittle them because they have come to teach you, thereby giving rise to arrogance and pride. If a good friend is distant from you but close to another, recognize that the coming together of causes and conditions may occur sooner or later; do not resent them for being distant from you. Regard these two circumstances, favorable and adverse, as like empty space. The two appearances of body and mind are ultimately equal. Give rise to the great compassion of shared identity, and see self and other as nondual; then anger will naturally cease. Practicing in this way, one can humbly serve one's teacher, forget one's own body in propagating the Way, and directly realize perfect enlightenment.

Next, it is said that sentient beings in the latter age cannot realize the Way because the seeds of beginningless aversion and attachment toward self and others have not yet been liberated. Therefore, one should regard enemies and friends among people with equal regard; with respect to dharmas, one should regard them as nondual and accord with them. One should also arouse a great resolve and think: "Throughout empty space, I shall lead all sentient beings into ultimate perfect enlightenment. As sentient beings are inexhaustible, so are my vows inexhaustible." Yet in perfect enlightenment there is no distinction between self and others, nor is there anyone who grasps at awakening.

Thus, there are no four marks of self and others. When one arouses such a great resolve, petty views naturally find no footing. The maladies of clinging and abiding all arise from petty views. When the mind is great, it is vast and free from all attachment. Therefore, the great resolve is the wondrous key to selflessness and

also the wondrous method for not falling into wrong views. Wrong views are nothing more than partial, narrow clinging and abiding. If there is even one such view, one is not all-embracing. When the Buddha had spoken to this point, the essential meaning of perfect enlightenment was complete.

Swept clean To cleanse by sweeping away.

Concealed Existing, though unseen by others.

Blazing Flourishing.

Tuán To take food.

Perfect Enlightenment Bodhisattva

Then Perfect-Enlightenment Bodhisattva rose from his seat amid the assembly, bowed with his head at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: "Greatly Compassionate World-Honored One, you have extensively explained for us various skillful means of pure enlightenment, bringing great benefit to sentient beings in the degenerate age. World-Honored One, we have now attained awakening; but after the Buddha's passing, how should sentient beings in the degenerate age who have not attained awakening undertake the retreat and cultivate this pure realm of perfect enlightenment? Among the three pure contemplations within this perfect enlightenment, which should be taken up first? We pray that, in your great compassion, you will bestow great benefit upon this assembly and sentient beings in the degenerate age."

Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself with all five limbs on the ground. He made this request three times, repeating it from beginning to end. Then the World-Honored One said to Perfect-Enlightenment Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good man! You are able to ask the Tathāgata about such skillful means, thereby bestowing great benefit upon sentient beings. Listen carefully, and I shall explain them to you." The Perfect-Enlightenment Bodhisattva respectfully received the teaching with joy, and the entire assembly listened silently.

"Good man, whether the Buddha is in the world, after the Buddha has passed into extinction, or in the age of decline of the Dharma, if sentient beings possess the Mahāyāna disposition and have faith in the Buddha's secret mind of great perfect enlightenment, then those who wish to cultivate should, if they dwell in a monastery among a community of practitioners and have circumstances or duties to attend to, examine these matters according to their capacity, as I have already explained. If

they have no other circumstances or duties, they should establish a place of practice and set a fixed period."

"For a long period, set one hundred and twenty days; for a medium period, one hundred days; and for a short period, eighty days. Establish oneself in a pure dwelling. If the Buddha is present, one should contemplate correctly; if the Buddha has passed into extinction, one should set up an image, hold it in mind and before one's eyes, and give rise to right recollection, as though the Tathāgata were still constantly present."

"Hang banners and flower canopies. For three periods of seven days, bow in homage while reciting the names of the Buddhas of the ten directions, seek their compassion, and repent. When favorable states arise and the mind becomes light and at ease, after the three periods of seven days, gather the thoughts wholly into one. If the beginning of the three-month summer retreat is reached, then, for the sake of pure bodhisattvas, abide in retreat, keeping the mind apart from the śrāvaka vehicle and without dependence on a community of followers."

"On the day the retreat begins, before the Buddha make this declaration: 'I, bhikṣu, bhikṣuṇī, upāsaka, or upāsikā, named so-and-so, rely upon the bodhisattva vehicle and cultivate the practice of quiescence. Together, we enter and uphold the pure true reality. Taking great perfect enlightenment as my monastery, I let body and mind abide peacefully in the wisdom of equality. Since the self-nature of nirvāṇa is without attachment or dependence, I now respectfully request that, without relying on the śrāvaka vehicle, I may undertake a three-month retreat together with the Tathāgatas of the ten directions and the great bodhisattvas, in order to cultivate the supreme and wondrous awakening of bodhisattvas as a great causal condition, without being bound to a community of followers.'"

"Good man, this is called a bodhisattva's manifesting a retreat. When the chosen retreat period has ended, one may go wherever one wishes without hindrance. Good man, if sentient beings cultivating in the degenerate age seek the bodhisattva path and enter into one of these three periods, they must never grasp at any state that does not accord with the teaching they have heard."

"Good man, if sentient beings cultivate śamatha, they should first attain utmost stillness and allow no thoughts to arise. At the extreme of stillness, awareness arises. This initial stillness extends from one's own body to an entire world; awareness extends likewise."

"Good man, if awareness pervades an entire world, then whenever a single sentient being in that world gives rise to one thought, one can know it all. The same is true of a hundred thousand worlds. Yet one must never grasp at any state that does not accord with the teaching one has heard."

“Good man, if sentient beings cultivate samāpatti, they should first recollect and contemplate the Tathāgatas of the ten directions, their worlds, and all bodhisattvas. Relying on various gateways, they cultivate samādhi gradually and diligently through hardship, extensively arouse great vows, and permeate themselves so that these become seeds. Yet they must never grasp at any state that does not accord with the teaching they have heard.”

“Good man, if sentient beings cultivate dhyāna, they should first take up the gateway of counting. They clearly know in their minds the arising, abiding, and ceasing of thoughts, distinguishing their boundaries and counting them. Thus, throughout the four postures of walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, they discriminate and know the number of thoughts without fail. They gradually advance until they can know a single drop of rain in a hundred thousand worlds as plainly as an object seen before their eyes and used by their hands. Yet they must never grasp at any state that does not accord with the teaching they have heard.”

“These are called the initial skillful means of the three contemplations. If sentient beings cultivate all three extensively and practice diligently, this is called the Tathāgata appearing in the world. If, in the latter degenerate age, sentient beings of dull faculties wish to seek the Way but cannot attain accomplishment because of former karmic obstacles, they should diligently repent, constantly arouse aspiration, first cut off hatred, attachment, jealousy, flattery, and crookedness, and seek a higher resolve. Among the three pure contemplations, they may practice whichever one they choose. If they do not attain this contemplation, they should again practice the other; without letting the mind abandon the effort, they should gradually seek realization.”

At that time, wishing to restate this meaning, the World-Honored One spoke these verses:

“Perfect Enlightenment, you should know: all sentient beings,”

“Who wish to seek the unsurpassed Way should first choose one of the three retreat periods,”

“And repent of beginningless karma for three periods of seven days.”

“Then they should contemplate correctly; states that do not accord with the teaching they have heard,”

“Must never be grasped at. Śamatha is utmost stillness;”

“Samāpatti is right recollection and sustaining; dhyāna clearly knows the gateway of counting.”

“These are called the three pure contemplations. If one can cultivate them diligently,”

“This is called the Buddha appearing in the world. Those of dull faculties who have not yet attained accomplishment”

“Should always repent diligently of all beginningless offenses.”

“If all obstacles are eliminated, the realm of Buddha will appear before them.”

The intent of Perfect Enlightenment’s question was this: by this point, the Buddha had explained all manner of skillful means fully and completely. We have now cultivated the Buddha’s teaching and attained awakening, so further cultivation is easy for us. But after the Buddha’s passing, sentient beings in the degenerate age who have not attained awakening will see these pure-contemplation Dharma gates and not know which to choose. From which method should they first begin their preliminary practice? Without a definite decision, their minds will have no place of rest. He therefore wished for a further broad explanation to bring the matter to completion.

The Buddha first explains that there is no fixed distinction of the true Dharma age, semblance Dharma age, and Dharma-ending age: all sentient beings possessing the Mahāyāna disposition may enter cultivation. They should first have right faith in the secret mind of great perfect enlightenment already taught by the Buddha and, among the various methods of practice, examine their own faculties according to circumstances. When there are no other circumstances or duties, they may establish a place of practice, arrange companions, set a period, and devote themselves diligently to the work: the long period is one hundred and twenty days, the middle period one hundred days, and the short period—

—eighty days. According to the circumstances at hand, one chooses a fixed period. At that time, one should purify body and mind, inwardly and outwardly. If the Buddha were present, one should contemplate correctly; after the Buddha’s passing, one should establish an image, hold it in mind and before one’s eyes, and give rise to right recollection, as though the Buddha were constantly present. One thereby guides the mind into contemplation: the true body of one’s self-nature and the Buddha alike are constantly present and undying. One should also adorn the place of practice and hang banners. During three periods of seven days, one bows in homage to

the Buddhas of the ten directions, reverently recites their names, and requests the Buddha’s blessing and protection as witness. “I now repent: all the evil karma I have created in the past arises from beginningless greed, anger, and ignorance and is produced through body, speech, and mind. I now repent of it all.” By sincerely

seeking in this way, after three periods of seven days one naturally finds body and mind peaceful and at ease. Through responsive communion with the Way, one gathers one's thoughts into unity and becomes continuous and undivided. This is a favorable state.

If that time happens to coincide with the beginning of the summer retreat, when one formally declares one's intention, there is no need to adopt the śrāvaka vehicle's method of practice—bowing to the abbot and undertaking the retreat in harmony with the community. One may directly declare before the Buddha: "I, so-and-so, seek to enter the ground of the Tathāgata and cultivate the practice of quiescence. I now take mind-nature as my retreat and do not take the realm of physical form as my retreat. Therefore perfect enlightenment is my monastery. The faculties and their objects are unstained, body and mind abide in retreat, and, since the objects of mental engagement are quiescent, inward

nature is equal. The self-nature of nirvāṇa is originally without attachment or dependence. During these three months, I wish, together with the Tathāgatas of the ten directions and the great bodhisattvas, to abide in retreat within the ocean of awakening, with thought after thought uninterrupted. I do not rely on the lesser practices of the śrāvaka vehicle in seeking supreme wondrous awakening, and therefore am not bound to a community of followers." This is called a bodhisattva's manifesting a retreat. If the period of one's place of practice has ended while the Lesser Vehicle's summer-retreat period has not yet concluded, there is likewise no need to continue practicing its lesser methods; one may go elsewhere freely and without hindrance. Thus, practitioners in the degenerate age who seek the bodhisattva path must never grasp at Lesser Vehicle states, which are not what these practitioners are meant to hear, because their cultivation and realization differ.

Next, the Buddha explains sentient beings' cultivation of the three contemplations. Those who cultivate cessation enter through contemplation of emptiness. As in the preceding retreat practice, they first attain utmost stillness and allow no thoughts to arise. When utmost stillness is reached, perfect enlightenment appears. Awareness extends from awareness of one's own body to an entire world. If one sentient being within it gives rise to one thought, nothing is not fully known. So it extends through a hundred thousand worlds, all of which are known everywhere. Yet they must never grasp at Lesser Vehicle states, which are not what these practitioners are meant to hear, because their cultivation and realization differ.

If sentient beings cultivate contemplation, they enter through contemplating illusion. They recollect and contemplate the Tathāgatas of the ten directions, the worlds of the ten directions, and all bodhisattvas, all of whom take great compassion as their basis. Through various Dharma gates, they cultivate diligently and gradually through

hardship, realize samādhi, and then give rise to the great functioning of liberating sentient beings. The former concerns realization of the essence; this concerns its function. They naturally cultivate and make it into a seed, extensively arousing great vows. Yet they must never grasp at Lesser Vehicle states, which are not what these practitioners are meant to hear, because their cultivation and realization differ.

If sentient beings cultivate dhyāna, they enter through the middle contemplation. They first take up the gateway of counting, such as the Six Wonderful Dharma Gates of counting the breath. They regulate the breath and quiet the mind, clearly and distinctly knowing the characteristics of arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing within the mind. Every point is the Way. Beginning with the awareness of seated meditation, they extend this until, throughout the four postures, nothing is not clearly known. Gradually advancing, they penetrate a hundred thousand worlds, so that even a single drop of rain is as though seen before their eyes, and they receive such benefit. Yet they must never grasp at Lesser Vehicle states, which are not what these practitioners are meant to hear, because their cultivation and realization differ.

The foregoing are the skillful means for initially cultivating the three contemplations. If sentient beings can cultivate each of them fully and practice diligently, such a person is a Tathāgata appearing in the present world. If those of dull faculties in the degenerate age fail to accomplish what they cultivate, it is because they are covered by karmic obstacles from the past. These karmic obstacles are such states of mind as hatred, attachment, jealousy, flattery, crookedness, and inferiority. They should diligently repent and aspire to cut them off, striving to advance. Among these three pure contemplations, they may practice whichever one they choose. If they do not attain this contemplation, they should again practice the other. So long as the mind does not become lax, they will gradually deepen their practice and naturally gain verification of realization. As it is said, “If all obstacles are eliminated, the realm of Buddha will appear before them.”

This section shows that practitioners need only arouse the resolve, and they will certainly attain accomplishment in this very life. If faith and vows are not firm, even the Buddha has no way to liberate them.

Apart from these three methods, one can never accomplish great awakening. Those who have merely heard much or understood the meaning only grasp at words and will ultimately find it difficult to enter realization.

People of dull faculties should first remove their coarse habitual tendencies; this is the initial step of entering the gate. First, hatred and attachment are the deepest fundamental obstacles in one’s own mind. Second, jealousy is an evil habit in relation to others. Third, flattery and crookedness: one who is flattering must be

frivolous and restless in mind and lowly in conduct; one who is crooked is not upright and straightforward in mind, and is circuitous and petty in conduct. Such a person is deeply calculating in views of self and others and certainly cannot arouse a great resolve. Unless these habits are removed, the great gate will not open. How difficult, then, it is to seek entry into the hall and inner chamber!

If this contemplation is not accomplished, one should cultivate another contemplation—that is, contemplate emptiness, provisional existence, and the middle. Practitioners need only fear not contemplating; once they contemplate, there is nothing that cannot be accomplished. This is the arising of function. Therefore, before practice, arousing the resolve is difficult; after beginning practice, arousing great compassion is difficult; and after arousing great compassion, obtaining skillful means is difficult. Only prajñā can make it great and complete. Thus this section was spoken for Perfect-Enlightenment Bodhisattva; there is nothing further to say. The explanation of contemplation ends here.

[Rao] means abundance.

[Qielan] means a practice center.

[Fan] means banners and streamers.

[Hua] means floral canopies.

[Gathering the Thoughts] To gather the myriad thoughts and return them to empty quiescence.

[Bhikshu] A monk; a mendicant.

[Bhikshuni] A female monastic.

[Upāsaka] A male lay devotee who attends upon bhikshus.

[Upāsikā] A female lay devotee who attends upon female monastics. These four assemblies are all called the saṅgha. Saṅgha means an assembly; it does not refer exclusively to bhikshus. The Lesser Vehicle is limited to two assemblies, whereas in the Mahāyāna both monastics and laypeople are included, all equally.

[Ju] It means dwelling or residing.

[Dull Faculties] Those attached to lesser teachings and unfit as vessels for the Mahāyāna Dharma.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva

Then Worthy-Good-Head Bodhisattva, in the midst of the assembly, rose from his seat, bowed at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, knelt upright with palms joined, and addressed the Buddha: "Greatly Compassionate World-Honored One, you have extensively awakened us and sentient beings of the latter age to such inconceivable matters."

"World-Honored One, what is the name of this Great Vehicle teaching? How should it be upheld? What merit and virtue do sentient beings gain by practicing it? How should we protect those who uphold this sūtra and spread this teaching, and how far should it be disseminated?" Having spoken thus, he prostrated himself fully to the ground. He made this threefold request again and again. Then the World-Honored One said to Worthy-Good-Head Bodhisattva: "Excellent, excellent, good man. For the sake of all bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the latter age, you are able to ask the Tathāgata about the merit, virtue, and name of such a teaching. Listen carefully now, and I shall explain it to you." Then Worthy-Good-Head Bodhisattva respectfully accepted the instruction with joy, and he and the entire assembly listened silently.

"Good man, this sūtra has been expounded by as many Buddhas as grains of sand in hundreds of thousands of millions of Ganges rivers. It is protected by the Tathāgatas of the three times, relied upon by the bodhisattvas of the ten directions, and is the pure eye of the twelve divisions of the scriptures. This sūtra is called the Great Vaipulya Dhāraṇī of Perfect Enlightenment; it is also called the Sūtra of Definitive Meaning; it is also called the Samādhi King of Secrets; it is also called the Tathāgata's Definitive Realm; and it is also called the Distinctions of the Tathāgata-Garbha's Intrinsic Nature. You should uphold it."

"Good man, this sūtra reveals only the realm of the Tathāgata, which only Buddhas and Tathāgatas can fully expound. If bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the latter age practice in reliance on it, they will gradually advance until they reach the ground of Buddhahood. Good man, this sūtra is called the Great Vehicle of sudden teaching. Sentient beings of sudden capacity awaken through it, and it also embraces all beings who cultivate gradually."

"It is like the great ocean, which does not reject even the smallest streams. Even mosquitoes, gnats, and asuras that drink its water are all filled. Good man, suppose someone filled a three-thousand-great-thousand world entirely with the seven treasures and gave them as alms. This would not equal hearing the name of this sūtra and the meaning of a single line."

"Good man, suppose someone taught sentient beings as numerous as one hundred Ganges rivers' sands and enabled them to attain arhatship. This would not equal expounding half a verse of this sūtra. Good man, if someone hears the name of this

sūtra and has faith without doubt, know that this person has planted roots of goodness and wisdom not merely before one or two Buddhas, but before all Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, and has heard this teaching. You good men should protect practitioners in the latter age. Do not allow evil māras or non-Buddhist paths to trouble their bodies and minds and cause them to become discouraged."

Then, in the assembly, Fire-Headed Vajra, Crushing Vajra, Nīlāmba Vajra, and others—eighty thousand vajras together with their retinues—rose from their seats, bowed at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, and addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, if any sentient being in the latter age can uphold this definitive Great Vehicle, I shall protect that person as I protect my own eyes. Wherever they cultivate, even at their place of practice, we vajras shall personally lead our followers in guarding them morning and evening, so that they will not regress. Their household shall forever be free of calamities and hindrances; epidemics and illnesses shall be eliminated; and they shall have abundant wealth and treasures, never lacking or impoverished."

Then King Mahābrahmā, the twenty-eight heavenly kings, the king of Mount Sumeru, the guardian kings of the realm, and others rose from their seats, bowed at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, and addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, we too shall protect those who uphold this sūtra, always keeping them safe and secure, so that their minds do not regress."

Then there was a powerful king of ghosts named Kiṃbhāṇḍa. Together with one hundred thousand ghost kings, he rose from his seat, bowed at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him three times to the right, and addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, I too shall protect those who uphold this sūtra, serving as their guard morning and evening so that they do not become discouraged. Within one yojana of where such a person resides, if any ghosts or spirits invade that person's domain, I shall cause them to be shattered into minute dust."

After the Buddha had spoken this sūtra, all the bodhisattvas, devas, dragons, ghosts, spirits, and their retinues of the eight classes, together with the heavenly kings, Brahmā kings, and the entire assembly, having heard what the Buddha said, rejoiced greatly, received it with faith, and put it into practice.

The intent of Worthy Virtue Chief's question was this: such inconceivable matters have now been directly indicated, and nothing further can be said. Yet provisional names are not to be discarded, so that later generations may likewise have something on which to rely and which they may uphold. Merit and virtue are empty in nature, but their protection, preservation, and dissemination cannot be dispensed with. The unconditioned does not depart from the conditioned, yet does not abide

in the conditioned; this is true non-contrivance. Thus, there is no impediment in establishing names for merit and virtue, and the Buddha therefore granted the request.

The Buddha first speaks of a single reality that is not empty, saying that the Tathāgata has nothing to say—yet this itself is speaking. One utterance is many utterances; one Buddha is as many Buddhas as the sands of countless Ganges rivers. Is this true of Buddhas alone? Sentient beings and Buddhas are equal, and the Tathāgatas of the three times are all of one essence. In terms of the written sūtra, it was spoken by the World-Honored One Śākyamuni—what connection would it have with other Buddhas? But in terms of the dharmakāya and perfect enlightenment, all who possess buddha-nature share in this protection.

Bodhisattvas attain Buddhahood; from arousing the resolve through reaching the stage of enlightenment, their practices at the causal stage must also rely on this as their basis. Among the twelve divisions of the scriptures, when one traces the source to its end and penetrates principle, one never departs from this Treasury of the True Dharma Eye. In direct pointing upward, there is only this one eye; hence it is called the pure eye.

In terms of essence, this sūtra is the perfect, sudden, and secret treasury; hence it is called the Great Vaipulya Dhāraṇī of Perfect Enlightenment. In terms of function, it is the Great Vehicle of sudden teaching, of definitive meaning suited to the capacities of its recipients, and accords with the secret sovereign of the samādhi of perfect enlightenment. This is what the Mahāvairocana Sūtra calls the Secret Lord.

If one wishes to realize the ground of the Tathāgata, what is its realm like? Only this sūtra determines it. If one wishes to realize the Tathāgata's unchanging treasury and yet bring forth its differentiated function, only this sūtra makes it clear. To awaken to this is itself to uphold it.

This sūtra concerns mutual correspondence and confirmation after realization; only Buddhas together with Buddhas can realize and know it. Whenever it reveals the various realms of ignorance, craving, and attachment, the Tathāgata speaks in accord with intrinsic nature, leaving nothing unexplained. If bodhisattvas practice in reliance on it, they gradually reach the Buddha stage. Even sentient beings of the latter age who may not be of sudden capacity are all embraced, just as the great ocean does not reject small streams: even mosquitoes and gnats that drink this Dharma-water are all liberated.

Although giving the seven treasures so as to fill one three-thousand-great-thousand world does not equal hearing the meaning of one line of this sūtra, and although teaching sentient beings as numerous as one hundred Ganges rivers' sands to attain arhatship does not equal expounding half a verse of this sūtra, if someone hears

this sūtra and has faith without opposition, know that this person has already planted roots of goodness before Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Such a person can no longer be judged as a beginner, nor described in terms of three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas.

Next it is said: “You good men should, in the latter age, protect and keep in mind these practitioners; do not allow māras or non-Buddhist paths to trouble their bodies and minds.” This means that they must certainly be shown the right Dharma, so that they do not give rise to views of birth and death, thereby bringing forth māra-obstacles; or arbitrarily develop views based on what they know and become adherents of non-Buddhist paths. If the causal ground is not correct, nothing is attained at the fruition ground. Confusion and discouragement will inevitably follow. One may know, then, that the assembly at Vulture Peak has certainly not dispersed even now. Guests at today’s Perfect Enlightenment practice center are precisely those who attended that assembly in former times. Take heart!

Then countless vajra retinues simultaneously aroused the resolve to protect these practitioners. Here, “vajra” means firmness and possesses the three virtues of firmness, sharpness, and luminosity. Whoever can uphold this definitive Great Vehicle has already achieved vajra accomplishment. To have no calamities or hindrances means to be free from the five hindrances; to have no epidemics or illnesses means to be free from the four marks and four diseases; to have abundant wealth and treasures means to become well nourished in the Way; and never to lack means that the wondrous gates are immeasurable.

Never to regress is itself the protection given morning and evening. Since practitioners are protected and kept in mind by Buddhas and bodhisattvas, they naturally receive the protection of vajra guardians. There is no need to make a fixed distinction between self and others. Thus, below there are King Mahābrahmā, the twenty-eight heavens, the Four Heavenly Kings who protect the realm, and one hundred thousand powerful ghost kings, all arousing this same resolve. When the Buddha expounds such a complete, vast, and supremely excellent sūtra, could any sentient beings in the nine realms fail to rejoice greatly, receive it with faith, and put it into practice?

To receive with faith but not put into practice is not true receiving with faith, for putting it into practice is itself receiving with faith. What one trusts in as the Buddha is this; what one receives from the Buddha is also this; and what I put into practice is likewise this. When response and the Way commune, that is true receiving with faith and putting into practice. But what is this? Can one turn the light back and contemplate it apart from Buddha and sūtra? If one does not understand this thing, one cannot be said to rejoice greatly.

[Dissemination] To transmit it to future generations.

[Eye] The eye of the true Dharma.

[Mosquitoes and Gnats] Mosquitoes and other small insects.

[Verse] In Sanskrit usage, four lines constitute one verse; that is, one stanza. A half-verse is two lines, or half a stanza. It does not mean that there is some other kind of four-line verse.

[Nīlāmba] The name of a vajra; its meaning is unknown.

[Kiṃbhāṇḍa] A king of ghosts that feeds on human vital essence and blood.

[One Yojana] A distance of somewhat more than ten li.

Ultimate Resolution

When the Tathāgata expounds the Dharma, what is called the perfect voice means that the speaker teaches in accord with each listener's capacity; nothing in the Dharma is not complete and thorough, and every hearer understands it inwardly. Each is awakened according to their capacity and attains great illumination.

This sūtra begins from the highest point and proceeds from the most ultimate ground. It first speaks of essence and then of function; first of the original nature—that sentient beings are originally Buddhas and originally have no illness, though from beginningless time they have somehow contracted illness. It then speaks of the symptoms of illness, the methods for treating it, the medicine and the illness, and the means of seeking a physician. Finally, it returns to the original nature, enabling people to realize their own perfect awakened nature. Such is its meaning.

At the outset, the Bhagavān enters samādhi and right absorption, seeing the pure ground of awakening of sentient beings: their original source is one, equal, and perfect. Those who understand this principle include twelve foremost bodhisattvas who share the same view and practice, as well as one hundred thousand others, all abiding together in the Tathāgata's equal Dharma assembly. This itself is the bodhimaṇḍa of perfect enlightenment; there would truly be no need to begin this further scene of illusory drama.

Yet among those assembled were some who had not awakened thoroughly, and some whose awakening was deep or shallow; and the teaching was to be transmitted to the latter age of the final Dharma. Therefore they had to request further exposition, and the request had to be made repeatedly, out of reverence for the Dharma. The words "thereupon" link what precedes and follows: various dharma

gates are revealed, and each bodhisattva asks in accordance with the occasion, in proper sequence. Speaker, questioners, and hearers all accord perfectly. Is this not the perfect voice?

Mañjuśrī's request concerns the dharma gate of practice. It extends no further than awakening at the level of principle and realization in actual practice: where should one begin in the causal-stage practices for attaining Buddhahood, and how may one remain far from all illnesses and avoid falling into wrong views?

The Buddha says that the unsurpassed Dharma King is perfect enlightenment: all pure suchness, bodhi, and nirvāṇa. Through this, all attain pāramitā. This Dharma may be taught only by bodhisattvas; it is not understood by the two vehicles. As for the causal-stage practices of all Tathāgatas, all rely on the perfect illumination of the marks of pure awakening to cut off ignorance. Only when ignorance is cut off does one become a Buddha.

What is called ignorance has no real substance. People cling to delusion and take illusion for reality; therefore there is cyclic turning. This is called ignorance. If one wishes suddenly to emerge from the deluded dream of birth and death, it lies in the single word "know": know that they are flowers in empty space, and there is no cyclic turning, nor is there a body or mind that undergoes that birth and death. This is not artificially made so; intrinsic nature is originally empty and quiescent, never inherently existent. Thus one knows that awareness is like illusion and like empty space.

Yet one must not say that awakened nature lacks knowing. Do not cling to either existence or nonexistence; this is conforming to pure awakening. Since at the causal stage it is originally like empty space, unmoving, without views of arising and ceasing, and ultimately all-pervading, sentient beings of the latter age who cultivate accordingly will not fall into wrong views. This speaks in the strongest terms of the Original Face before illness arose.

Those of the highest capacities awaken thoroughly as soon as they hear it. But how should those of middling and lesser capacities practice while the actual illness is present? Once they know that body and mind are illusory, how can they use illusion to cultivate illusion? If the nature of illusion is exhausted, there is no mind; who then practices, forever leaving all illusions and attaining liberation? This is the import of Samantabhadra's question.

The Buddha says that all is originally illusion, yet the various transformations of illusion still arise from the Tathāgata's wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment. All illusory dharmas seem to arise and cease, come and go, but the awakened mind never moves from beginning to end. One need only leave behind the realm of illusion. Yet even the thought of leaving it behind is itself within the realm of illusion;

every thought upon thought is no more than illusion. When there is nothing to leave behind, all illusions are thereby removed.

Yet this is not annihilation. Knowing illusion is itself departure from it; no expedient means need be contrived. Departing from illusion is awakening, and there are no gradual stages. This awakened knowing is not annihilation. To practice accordingly is to leave all illusions forever. This is the method of using awakened wisdom to dispel the ignorance of illusion. But how is illusion to be left behind in practice? How should one begin? How can principle and practice be brought into accord, so that all may realize perfect enlightenment? This is the import of Universal Eye's question.

The Buddha says that, if one wishes to purify the mind of perfect enlightenment, one should maintain right mindfulness; this is to leave all illusions behind. First rely on the practice of śamatha: choose a quiet room, obtain good companions, settle the mind in contemplation. Then undertake samāpatti, contemplating the illusory nature of one's body as composed of the four elements, and the illusory nature of the reflections of objects in one's mind. When all illusions are extinguished, the enduring nature that is not illusory is revealed. Function arises from essence: first begin with antidotal practice, then enter the state in which there is nothing to counteract, and then the state in which there is no one who counteracts. Subject and object are both empty; the shadow of the illusory mind vanishes; the ten directions are pure; and the sense faculties, body, and material world are all pure.

All dharmas are pure and still; this is called the true aspect. From this, one body and many bodies are pure; one lifetime and many lifetimes are pure.

Purity is unmoving and all-pervading. Because it is unmoving and all-pervading, it is without destruction or admixture. This is the state of one who has already attained realization. Having attained realization, one is no longer constrained by any dharma. One's light is perfect; there is neither aversion nor attachment, neither cultivation nor attainment. The Buddha worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are likewise no more than flowers in empty space arising and ceasing in confusion.

As the layers are opened one by one, one comes to know that sentient beings have originally attained Buddhahood, and that birth and death and nirvāṇa are like last night's dream. Once one knows it is a dream, birth and death and nirvāṇa have no illusory appearances of arising or ceasing, coming or going, gain or loss, grasping or relinquishing. Why is this so? Because the nature of all dharmas is equal and indestructible. To speak now of cultivation is no more than this. The phrase "such is the case" is repeated seven times; its meaning is profound beyond expression.

Yet if sentient beings have originally attained Buddhahood, why is there again ignorance? If one can become a Buddha and still have ignorance, then all present Tathāgatas must also one day have ignorance again. How can the treasury of secrets

be opened, so that one may attain decisive faith? This is the import of Vajragarbha's question.

The Buddha says that the beginnings and endings, arising and ceasing, of all worlds, and the continuing grasping and relinquishing of the minds of sentient beings, are all saṃsāra. If one uses a mind of saṃsāra to distinguish perfect enlightenment, then even the nature of perfect enlightenment becomes involved in that turning. It is like clouds racing and the moon seeming to move, or a boat traveling and the shore seeming to shift: one does not know what is still and what is moving.

Your mind is not yet pure. With an impure mind, you contemplate the Buddha's perfect enlightenment and remain confused from beginning to end; hence this doubt arises. You do not know that, although flowers in empty space arise and cease, the nature of empty space is neither destroyed nor defiled. Whether ignorance exists or not has nothing to do with awakened nature. Sentient beings are like a gold mine containing sand: when the sand is removed, gold appears. Gold was originally there; it does not come into being through refining. One should not say that it was not originally accomplished; and once it has become gold, it does not revert to ore. Thus a Buddha does not again give rise to ignorance.

Even those within the sphere of the śrāvakas find this meaning difficult to fathom; how much more so ordinary beings, using a discriminating mind, attempting to fathom inconceivable perfect enlightenment. Therefore one must first cut off the root of saṃsāra and open great wisdom; then all is penetrated. If one discriminates with a deluded mind, it is precisely like flowers in empty space bearing fruit in empty space. Such clever views can never be right.

The question is put as follows: the foregoing speaks in the strongest terms of the unmoving essence of perfect enlightenment, which is unrelated to whether ignorance exists or not. Yet what exactly is the method for refining gold? If one wishes to cut off saṃsāra, how many kinds of dispositions are there? In cultivating the Buddha's bodhi, how many levels of distinction are there? In entering the world to liberate sentient beings, how many expedient means are there? And how is this unsurpassed knowledge and vision to be perfectly realized? This is the import of Maitreya's question.

The Buddha says that the sole cause of the illness of saṃsāra in all sentient beings is the single word "attachment." Attachment to phenomena leads to segmented birth and death; attachment to principle leads to transformational birth and death. One thereby creates karma of the six realms. Even knowing that attachment should not exist, and delighting in abandoning attachment, is itself attachment; none of this is the noble path.

As for bodhisattvas, they enter birth and death because of their great vows to liberate sentient beings; their various expedient transformations are not birth and death born of craving. Sentient beings of the latter age who can relinquish every desire and attachment will naturally realize pure awakening. As for awakened nature itself, there is fundamentally no distinction; but because of craving, five dispositions are provisionally distinguished: first, the disposition of ordinary beings; second, the disposition of the two vehicles; third, the bodhisattva disposition; fourth, the indeterminate disposition; and fifth, the icchantika disposition. If they encounter good spiritual friends,

and hear the true Dharma, there is no distinction of greater or lesser capacities: all alike attain Buddhahood. You should arouse great vows, aspiring to abide in the Buddha's perfect enlightenment; seek good spiritual friends, do not encounter non-Buddhist paths, and practice in accordance with your vows. Then you will ascend to the wondrously adorned realm of great perfect enlightenment. This strongly emphasizes that cutting off attachment and views is cutting off birth and death. But exactly how is attachment to be cut off? The request is for a further explanation, clarifying the distinctions in realization so that practitioners may enter gradually. This is the import of Pure Wisdom's question.

The Buddha says that, in terms of the nature of perfect enlightenment, its essence does not differ because of the five dispositions. Dispositions merely arise in dependence upon conditions, and are provisionally divided into five. Within the true aspect, sentient beings and bodhisattvas alike are illusory transformations. It is only because sentient beings are confused and have not removed all illusory transformations that these distinctions appear amid deluded efforts. Sentient beings cling to a self and falsely grasp the five desires: wealth, sensual beauty, food, fame, and sleep.

When they encounter a good spiritual friend who instructs them, they know that this life has been spent vainly in toil and worry. This first awakening to awakening, though a pure understanding, itself becomes an obstruction; therefore they are not free. This is the realm of awakening of ordinary beings. Bodhisattvas have awakened, yet still retain a view of awakening. That view is an obstacle, and they too are not free. This is the realm of awakening of bodhisattvas who have not entered the bhūmis.

When it is clearly understood that having awakening and having illumination are both obstacles, one can remain constantly awake without abiding anywhere; knower and known both become still. It is like pointing at the moon: one no longer clings to the finger. All obstructions having been extinguished, this is the realm of awakening of bodhisattvas who have entered the bhūmis. When perfect penetration is nondual,

one moves freely in play, wholly without obstruction, equal to empty space. This is the realm of awakening of the Tathāgata.

At all times and in all places, do not give rise to deluded thoughts. When deluded thoughts arise, do not deliberately seek to extinguish them. Let them function naturally, without discrimination. Without discrimination, there is no knower, and what is known becomes still of itself. As for what reality truly is, there is no need to make further distinctions.

Those who hear this dharma gate and are not alarmed or afraid are in the realm of true awakening. Such people have already made offerings to countless Buddhas and planted roots of many virtues; they may be said already to have accomplished the wisdom of all aspects. This emphasizes that distinctions appear amid deluded efforts. Yet causes and conditions differ, and methods vary according to place. How many kinds are there among the practices cultivated and the people who cultivate them? The request is still for the Buddha to reveal expedient methods, enabling swift entry into the ocean of great perfect enlightenment. This is the import of Sovereign Virtue's question.

The Buddha says that all dharmas are equal in one essence. Whether one is a sage or an ordinary being, dharma gates of cultivation are no more than the joint operation of wisdom and compassion, freedom from marks, and the removal of views; in truth there are not two. If one speaks of expedient means, the forms of adaptation are countless. Yet one must first awaken clearly to the intrinsic nature of perfect enlightenment before one can practice. This is precisely right cultivation after awakening.

There are approximately three methods. First is cultivating cessation: from the utmost stillness wisdom arises; thoughts become clear and awakening appears. One becomes aware of the various disturbances and agitations of sensory objects and extinguishes them. Inner quietude and ease arise, like a bright mirror in which reflections appear; inward and outward interpenetrate completely. This is what is meant by saying that Buddha worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges enter my body, and my body constantly enters Buddha worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Second is cultivating contemplation: bodhisattvas, with the pure awakened mind, know that all is illusory transformation, and use illusion to remove illusion, thereby teaching and transforming

illusory sentient beings. Great compassion and ease then arise within. Yet this illusory contemplation is discarded as soon as it arises, like soil producing sprouts, sprouts producing rice and grain, and, once the harvest is gathered, both sprouts and soil being set aside. Third is cultivating dhyāna: directly realize the mind-ground and know that body and mind are both impediments. Inner luminous awareness

arises, transcendent and unobstructed, like a golden vessel giving forth a ringing sound without mutual obstruction. One thereby attains the ease of quiescence and cessation.

These three dharma gates are the most direct paths into perfect enlightenment. All Tathāgatas in the ten directions, and all bodhisattvas, rely on them for cultivation and realization. This states the essential outline of methods of practice. But how exactly are these three gates to be cultivated? Should one specialize in one, practice them together, or is there an expedient sequence? The request is for further instruction. This is the import of Bianyin's question.

The Buddha said: With regard to ultimate reality, there is originally neither one who cultivates nor that which is cultivated. One merely relies on illusory cultivation to cultivate illusion. In terms of provisional existence, there are twenty-five kinds of meditative wheels: they may be practiced singly or together, earlier or later, or through the complete cultivation of the three contemplations. One may sincerely repent, pray for the Buddha's blessing, mark each of the twenty-five wheels, and choose one at will to practice, in the hope of becoming single-minded. These three methods all pertain to meditative absorption. This fundamental point having been attained, and the great matter having been clarified, habitual tendencies nonetheless remain. This is the crucial key and the gateway to correct cultivation after awakening. Habitual tendencies are precisely karmic obstacles. How can they be completely swept away? This is the intent of the question about purifying karmic obstacles.

The Buddha said: The root of the illness lies solely in the four marks of self, person, sentient being, and life span. Even the subtle view of dharmas still belongs to the self. It is like a grain of sand in the eye: one cannot then be called pure. Moreover, the more diligently one strives, the more all these illnesses increase. The coarse forms of illness are flattery, deviousness, and jealousy; the subtle forms are the deluded arising of what one thinks one knows. Therefore, one must cut off the mark and view of self, so that everything becomes quiescent; only then does one enter the ocean of pure enlightenment. Yet one must seek a good spiritual friend.

This section explains that the root of sentient beings' illness penetrates to the marrow and cannot be cured without medicine. Yet too much medicine itself becomes an illness. In the degenerate age to come, people will know only how to practice, but not the illnesses acquired through practice. What kind of person should they seek, what kind of Dharma should they practice, and what kinds of illness should they remove? This is the intent of Universal Enlightenment's question.

The Buddha said: One should seek a person of right view. As for right view, it lies in that person's inner state, not in outward appearances. Though such a person may

freely sport at ease and appear to have various faults, he can skillfully liberate sentient beings. Without the wisdom eye, one cannot recognize him; otherwise, one may pass him by at arm's length.

Upon seeing such a person, one should not begrudge even one's life in making offerings to him. One must not rejoice because he is close to oneself, nor resent him when he is distant. If one can be thus, one may draw near and benefit. As for a good spiritual friend, he should first be free of the four illnesses of doing, stopping, letting be, and extinguishing. These four methods are methods, not illnesses; at the outset, they cannot be dispensed with. But if used to excess, one clings to them rigidly and cannot adapt, and they again become illnesses. Sentient beings in the degenerate age cannot be liberated because the two views of hatred and love have not been purified and the mark of self has not been removed. Therefore, they should arouse the impartial mind of great compassion, vowing to liberate all sentient beings and enable them all to become Buddhas. Yet I must not cling to the thought of liberating sentient beings; only then will I not fall into wrong views.

Having spoken to this point, the Buddha's exposition of all methods of practice may be called complete and thorough. But before cultivating these three contemplations, what preliminary practices should come first, so that they may be cultivated in their entirety? This is the intent of Perfect Enlightenment's question.

The Buddha said: This can certainly be cultivated to accomplishment within a fixed period. One may set a time limit for oneself and practice freely, without having to rely on the rituals of the Lesser Vehicle. One must never cling to minor methods, but should naturally attain perfect penetration. If one's practice does not succeed, it must be because of past obstructions. One should still repent, eliminate such illnesses as hatred, love, jealousy, and envy, refrain from abandoning the resolve in one's heart, and gradually seek realization.

This strongly emphasizes that, if one seeks complete realization, one cannot do without earnest and urgent effort. Accomplishment can definitely be attained in this very life. Yet one must not take the states of the Lesser Vehicle, nor does this mean abandoning the precepts. At this point, principle and phenomena interpenetrate, awakening and practice are complete, and there is nothing further to say. The exposition of the contemplations ends here. Yet provisional names cannot be discarded: without names, on what basis could sentient beings in the degenerate age to come transmit and disseminate these teachings? This is the intent of Virtuous Leader's question.

The Buddha said: This sūtra merely points out the path of cultivation and realization for those determined to enter the ground of the Tathāgata. It was not spoken by me, the Buddha, alone; rather, hundreds of thousands of millions of Ganges-sand

Buddhas have all taught it in this way. The Tathāgatas of the three times all protect it in this way and regard it with the same eye. Only a Buddha together with a Buddha can fully realize and know it.

This Dharma embraces all streams and includes sentient beings of the nine realms without exception. Its merit and virtue cannot be compared with anything else. If someone's faith is unwavering, then even in the degenerate age, that person's blessings and wisdom are already equal to those of a Buddha. Therefore, it should be protected in order to perfect one's merit and virtue. When the Buddha had spoken to this point, even all the hosts of Māra aroused the resolve to make offerings and turned toward great compassion. How then could human beings be inferior to kumbhāṇḍas? The explanation is complete.

[Editor's Note]: This essay originally had four "general principles" at its beginning, which are appended below:

1. This sūtra was Master Wang Xianglu's second series of lectures at Mind-Seal Vihara. It differs from his first exposition of the Dharma. He selected and integrated the essential meaning of the twelve sections, and therefore divided it into twelve sections, followed at the end by a general elucidation, so that readers might grasp it all at a glance. Every implicit meaning in the sūtra is explained in full detail; hence it is called Unlocking the Hidden Meaning of the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment.

2. Those who read this sūtra must pay close attention to the two Chinese characters "perfect contemplation." If they are not confined by their own feelings and views, they can penetrate deeply into it.

3. Before reading this sūtra, there is no need to read the lecture notes first. One may first read through the sūtra text and investigate what meaning one's own mind understands; then one may study it alongside the lectures. One will surely gain considerable realization of the Dharma of the mind-ground.

4. Most members of this vihara have realized the mind-ground through practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Entering Chan through Esoteric Buddhism and ultimately realizing the Pure Land, all do so through the compassionate gift of the Dharma bestowed by Patriarch Dayu. As one drinks water, one should remember its source; how could we dare forget where it came from? We respectfully append for publication at the end the Song of Liberation composed by the Master. Whoever realizes perfect enlightenment will surely attain great liberation, for the essential meaning of perfect enlightenment is fully contained in this song. Those who understand its definitive meaning will naturally comprehend it.