

III

The Matrix of the Thus-Come One

The Five Aggregates Are the Matrix of the Thus-Come One

“Ananda, you have not yet understood that the objects we perceive are unreal and illusory. They are subject to change, appearing here and there and disappearing here and there. Yet these illusions, each with its conventional designation, are in fact within the essential, wondrous enlightenment. The same is true of the five aggregates, the six faculties, the twelve sites, and the eighteen constituent elements. It is an illusion that they come into being when both their causes and their conditions are present, and it is an illusion that they cease to be when either their causes or their conditions are absent. You simply have not yet understood that, fundamentally, everything that comes and goes, that comes into being and ceases to be, is within the true nature of the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, which is the wondrous, everlasting understanding — the unmoving, all-pervading, wondrous suchness of reality. But, though you may seek within the everlasting reality of the Matrix of the Thus-Come One for what comes and goes, for confusion and awakening, and for coming into being and ceasing to be, you will not find them there.

A. The Aggregate of Form

“Ānanda, how is it that the five aggregates are, fundamentally, the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, whose nature is the wondrous suchness of reality? Consider this example, Ānanda: a clear-sighted person looks up at a clear sky, where nothing but empty space is to be seen. Suppose that, for no particular reason, this person happens to stare, without moving his eyes, until they are stressed to the point that he sees in the empty air a disordered display of flowers, along with various other images that are disordered and chaotic and lack any real attributes. You should know that the aggregate of form can be described in similar terms.

“Now, this disordered display of flowers, Ānanda, does not come into being from space, nor does it come into being from the person’s eyes. Suppose, Ānanda, that the display of flowers did come from space. But what has come into being from space would have to be subject to disappearing back into space; and space would not be empty if things came into being out of it and disappeared back into it. But if space were not empty, there would not be room in it for those displays of flowers to appear out of it or to disappear back into it, any more than there is room in your body, Ānanda, for another Ānanda.

“On the other hand, if this disordered display of flowers came from the person’s eyes, the display of flowers could disappear back into his eyes. Now, we may suppose that, if this display of flowers has come from the eyes, it must share in the visual awareness of the eye-faculty. If it were visually aware, then having come out from the eyes into the air, it would be able to see the eyes from the air. But if it does not share in the awareness of the eye-faculty, then having obscured a portion of the otherwise empty air, it will also obscure the vision of the eye-faculty as it returns to the eye-faculty. Besides, the person’s vision cannot have been obscured, since he is seeing the display of flowers. And did we not say to begin with that this person was clear-sighted as he looked up at the clear sky?

“Therefore you should know that the aggregate of forms is an illusion. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.

B. The Aggregate of Sense-Perception

“Ānanda, consider the example of someone whose hands and feet are at rest and whose entire body is at ease. At this moment, he has forgotten about his body, and he is feeling neither comfort nor discomfort. Then, for no particular reason, he rubs the palms of his hands together in the empty space

in front of him, and he has the illusory experience of roughness or smoothness and of cold or heat. You should know that the aggregate of sense-perception can be described in similar terms.

“Now, these illusory sense-perceptions, Ānanda, do not emerge from space, nor do they emerge from the palms of the person’s hands. That is to say, Ānanda, if space could cause tactile perceptions in the palms of his hands, would it not equally be able to cause tactile perceptions elsewhere on the body? But it makes no sense to say that space can cause tactile perceptions in one part of the body and not another.

“If the tactile perceptions had emerged from the palms of his hands, what need would there have been to rub the palms together in order to produce the perceptions? Further, if the tactile perceptions had emerged from the palms of his hands, then the person’s palms would have been aware of the perceptions emerging. And when the person moved his hands apart, the perceptions would have to sink back into his wrists and arms, into the bones and marrow, which would have to be aware of the path those perceptions took. In such a case, what the mind perceived as emerging and returning would have to be something that was capable of coming and going in the body. If there were such a thing, what need would there have been for the person to rub the palms of his hands together in order to experience these tactile perceptions?

“Therefore you should know that the aggregate of sense-perception is an illusion. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.

C. The Aggregate of Cognition

“Ānanda, consider the example of someone whose mouth waters at the mention of sour plums, or who feels a sudden ache in the sole of his foot as he thinks of walking along the edge of a precipice. You should know that the aggregate of cognition can be described in similar terms.

“Now, the circumstance of the mouth watering at the mention of the plums, Ānanda, was not caused by the actual plums that were mentioned, nor was it caused by the person’s mouth. Why? If the mouth watered because of the actual plums, Ānanda, that would mean that the plums were responsible for mentioning themselves. What need would there be for some person to mention them? On the other hand, if the mouth were responsible for the watering, would that mean that the mouth heard the plums being mentioned? Were not ears needed for that? If the ears were the cause, then would that not mean that the ears could produce saliva?

“The same points about the watering of the mouth at the mention of sour plums can be equally applied to the ache that is felt in the sole of one’s foot when one thinks of walking along the edge of a precipice.

“Therefore you should know that the aggregate of cognition is an illusion. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.

D. The Aggregate of Mental Formations

“Ānanda, consider the example of a stretch of rapids. The waves follow one upon another, and those that are behind never overtake those that are ahead. You should know that the aggregate of mental formations can be described in similar terms.

“Now, the rapids are not brought about by space, Ānanda, nor are they brought about by the water itself. They are not identical to the water, but though they are not themselves the water, they are at the same time not separate from the water. Nor are they separate from space.

“Understand it this way, Ānanda: if the rapids were brought about by space, then that would mean that space in its infinite reach throughout the ten directions would be a ceaseless deluge, and the entire universe would inevitably drown. If the rapids were brought about by the water, then the nature of the rapids would not be the same as the nature of water. The rapids and the water would be separate and

distinct; but clearly, they are not. On the other hand, if the rapids and the water were identical, then when the water became still, it would cease to be water. However, the rapids and the water cannot be separate either, since there can be no rapids without water. Nor can the rapids be separate from space, since outside of space nothing exists.

“In this way you should know that the aggregate of mental formations is an illusion. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.

E. The Aggregate of Consciousness

“Ānanda, consider the example of a person who takes up an empty pitcher and plugs up its two spouts so that it seems he has confined some space in the pitcher. Believing that he is carrying this pitcherful of space, he travels a thousand miles to another country with the intention of making a present of it. You should know that the aggregate of consciousness can be described in similar terms.

“The space that is in the pitcher, Ānanda, does not in fact come from the place where the person began his journey, nor is it transported to the country he travels to. It is like this, Ānanda: if the space had been transported from the first country by being confined in the pitcher, there must have been a loss of space at the place where the pitcher had come from. Moreover, if the space had been brought to the second country, then if the spouts were unplugged and the pitcher turned upside-down, the space within it would be seen to pour out.

“In this way you should know that the aggregate of consciousness is an illusion. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.”

The Six Faculties Are the Matrix of the Thus-Come One

A. The Eye-Faculty

“Moreover, Ānanda, how is it that, fundamentally, the six faculties are the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, whose nature is the wondrous suchness of reality? Ānanda, you will recall the example of a person who stares into space to the point that his eyes become strained. What the eye-faculty perceives when it is under strain, and also the eye-faculty itself, come into being through the strain placed on the awakened mind. The strain causes the distortion in perception.

“For seeing to take place, the illusory phenomena of light and darkness must first enter the eye-faculty; this is what we call seeing. Apart from light and darkness, seeing has no ultimate basis. Understand it this way, Ānanda: what we call seeing does not take place because of light or darkness, nor because of the eye-faculty, nor because of space. Why? If what we call seeing took place because of light, it would cease in total darkness, and you would not see the darkness. If it took place because of darkness, it would cease once light were present, and so you would not see the light.

“Further, seeing cannot take place because of the eye-faculty, because clearly there is a need for light or for darkness if seeing is to occur. It follows that the eye-faculty has no independent existence. Finally, if seeing took place because of space, then when we look straight ahead, we would see the objects before us as usual, but we would also be able to look back on our own eyes from space. If space were doing the seeing, what would seeing have to do with the eye-faculty?

“In this way you should know that the eye-faculty is illusory. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.

B. The Ear-Faculty

“Ānanda, consider the example of a person who forcefully stops up his ears with his fingers. The strain exerted on the ear-faculty may cause a sound to be heard inside his head. What the ear-faculty perceives when it is under strain, and also the ear-faculty itself, come about through the strain placed on the awakened mind. The strain causes the distortion in perception.

“For hearing to take place, the illusory phenomena of sound and silence must enter the ear-faculty; this is what we call hearing. Apart from sound and silence, hearing has no ultimate basis. Understand it this way, Ānanda: what we call hearing does not take place because of sound or silence, nor because of the ear-faculty, nor because of space. Why? If it took place because of silence, it would cease once sounds were present, and so we would not hear sounds. If what we call hearing took place because of sound, hearing would cease in total silence, and we would not be aware of the silence.

“Further, hearing cannot take place because of the ear-faculty alone, because clearly there is a need for sound or for silence if hearing is to occur. It follows that the ear-faculty has no independent existence. Finally, if hearing took place because of space, then space would not be what we call space, because it would have the ability to hear. And if space could hear, what would hearing have to do with the ear-faculty?

“In this way you should know that the ear-faculty is illusory. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.

C. The Nose-Faculty

“Ānanda, consider the example of a person who, as he breathes in through his nose, continues to inhale sharply until at length the strain exerted on his nose-faculty gives rise to an illusory sensation of cold. As he experiences this sensation, he becomes aware of whether his nostrils are clear or blocked, and whether odors are pleasant or unpleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. What the nose-faculty perceives when it is under strain, as well as the nose-faculty itself, come about through the strain placed on the awakened mind. The strain causes the distortion in perception.

“For smelling to take place, the illusory phenomena of openness or blockage in the nasal passages must be present in the nose-faculty; then what we call smelling can occur. Apart from openness and blockage, smelling has no ultimate basis. Understand it this way, Ānanda; what we call smelling does not take place because of openness or blockage, nor because of the nose-faculty, nor because of space.

“Why? If what we call smelling took place because the nasal passages are open, it would cease when they are blocked, and you would not be aware of the blockage. If it took place because of the blockage, it would cease once the nasal passages were open, and so you would not be aware of odors, whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Further, smelling cannot take place because of the nose-faculty, because clearly there is a need for openness in the nasal passages if smelling is to occur. It follows that the nose-faculty has no independent existence.

“Finally, if smelling took place because of space, then space would be able to smell the nose. Besides, if space were doing the smelling, what would smelling have to do with the nose-faculty?

“In this way you should know that the nose-faculty is illusory. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.

D. The Tongue-Faculty

“Ānanda, consider the example of a person who licks his lips repeatedly to the point that his tongue-faculty is subjected to strain. If he is sick, he will experience a bitter taste; otherwise the taste will seem slightly sweet. His experience of sweetness or bitterness demonstrates that the tongue-faculty is still active when no tastes are present. What the tongue-faculty perceives when it is under strain, as well as the tongue-faculty itself, come about through strain placed on the awakened mind. The strain causes the distortion in perception.

“For tasting to take place, the illusory attributes of sweetness or bitterness, or else an absence of flavor, must come into contact with the tongue-faculty; this is what we call tasting. Apart from sweetness and bitterness, and from the absence of flavor, tasting has no apparent basis. Understand it this way, Ānanda: what we call tasting does not take place because of sweetness or bitterness or the absence of flavor, nor does it take place because of the tongue-faculty, nor does it take place because of space.

“Why? s If tasting took place because sweetness or bitterness is present, how would you become aware of an absence of flavor? If it took place because no flavor is present, it would vanish in the presence of a sweet or bitter taste. How then would you become aware of sweetness or bitterness? Further, tasting cannot take place because of the tongue-faculty, because there is clearly a need for a flavor such as sweetness or bitterness, or else the absence of flavor, if tasting is to occur. It follows that the tongue-faculty has no independent existence.

“Finally, if tasting took place because of space, then space would have the ability to taste, and space, not your tongue, would have awareness of flavors. If space were aware of flavors, what would tasting have to do with the tongue-faculty?

“In this way you should know that the tongue-faculty is illusory. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.

E. The Body-Faculty

“Ānanda, consider the example of a person who joins his hands together when one hand is warm and the other cold. If the cold hand is colder than the warm hand is warm, it will make the warm hand become cold, and if the warm hand is warmer than the cold hand is cold, it will make the cold hand become warm. With the exchange of warmth and cold from the prolonged contact between the two hands, the person becomes aware of contact and, subsequently, separation. What the body-faculty perceives when it is under strain, as well as the body-faculty itself, come about through strain placed on the awakened mind. The strain causes the distortion in perception.

“What we call tactile awareness occurs when the illusory phenomena of contact and separation are felt by the body-faculty. This tactile awareness of contact and separation may be pleasant or unpleasant, but without them, tactile awareness has no ultimate basis. Understand it this way, Ānanda: what we call tactile awareness does not take place because of contact and separation, nor because of any pleasantness or unpleasantness of the sensation, nor because of the body-faculty, nor because of space.

“Why? If tactile awareness took place because of contact, how would you become aware of separation when contact ceased? By the same logic, it cannot take place because sensation is pleasant or because it is unpleasant. Further, tactile awareness cannot take place because of the body-faculty, because clearly there is a need for contact or separation and for pleasantness or unpleasantness if tactile awareness is to occur. It follows that tactile awareness has no independent existence.

“Finally, if tactile awareness took place because of space alone, then space would be aware of tactile sensations; then what would tactile awareness have to do with the body-faculty?

“In this way you should know that the body-faculty is illusory. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.

F. The Cognitive Faculty

“Ānanda, consider the example of a person who is tired and falls asleep. Having slept enough, he awakens and tries to remember his dreams. He recalls some elements of his dreams but cannot remember others. This succession of sleeping, waking, remembering, and forgetting is an example of the distorted stages of coming into being, abiding, changing, and perishing within the cognitive faculty. What we call the cognitive faculty engages in a habitual process of bringing into our awareness an orderly succession of mental objects. What the cognitive faculty perceives when it is under strain, as well as the cognitive faculty itself, come forth from the strain placed on the awakened mind. The strain causes the distortion in perception.

“In their two aspects of coming into being and perishing, unreal perceived objects accumulate in our cognitive awareness. The cognitive faculty is attracted to these internal mental objects. What we call cognitive awareness is this internal flow of visible objects, sounds, and so forth before they enter the mind’s ground. Apart from the fluctuation between sleep and waking, cognitive awareness has no apparent basis. Understand it this way, Ānanda: what we call cognitive awareness does not take place because of waking and sleeping or because of the coming into being and perishing of mental objects; nor does it take place because of the cognitive faculty, nor does it take place because of space.

“Why? If cognitive awareness took place because of waking, you would have no cognitive awareness when you were asleep, and then how could you experience sleep? By the same logic, cognition cannot arise because cognitive objects arise, since when those cognitive objects perish, the cognitive faculty would perish also. Nor can cognitive awareness take place because of the perishing of cognitive objects, since when cognitive objects subsequently arose, cognitive awareness would perish. What then would be aware of the objects that arose? Further, cognitive awareness cannot be present because of the cognitive faculty. Why? Although sleeping and waking are dependent on the body’s becoming active or dormant, yet apart from a state of sleep or waking, cognitive awareness has

no more existence than a mirage of flowers in space. Finally, if cognitive awareness took place because of space, then space would be aware of cognitive objects. What then would cognitive awareness have to do with the cognitive faculty?

“In this way you should know that the cognitive faculty is an illusion. It does not come into being from causes and conditions, nor does it come into being on its own.”

The Twelve Sites Are
the Matrix of the Thus-Come One
A. The Eye-Faculty and Visible Objects

“Moreover, Ānanda, how is it that, fundamentally, the twelve sites are the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, whose nature is the wondrous suchness of reality? Ānanda, look once again at the fountains, the pools, and the trees of the Prince Jetri’s Grove. What do you think? Does the presence of visible objects cause your eye-faculty to see? Or to the contrary, does the eye-faculty cause the visible objects to be present?

“Ananda, if the eye-faculty caused the presence of visible objects, then when you looked at an empty sky, in which no visible objects are present, all the visible objects that you were not looking at would have to disappear. If everything were to disappear, such that nothing were present, then how could we know what space is? The corollary supposition — that space is present because your eye-faculty is there to see it — can be similarly rejected.

“Suppose, on the other hand, that the presence of visible objects caused your eye-faculty to see. Then when you looked at empty space, in which no objects are present, your eye-faculty would no longer exist. If your eye-faculty no longer existed, nothing would be seen, and in that case, how could we know what visible objects are — or what space is?

“Therefore, you should know that the eye-faculty and visible objects, and space as well, have no real existence. These two sites — the eye-faculty and visible objects — are illusions. Fundamentally, they are not dependent on causes or conditions, and yet they do not come into being on their own.

B. The Ear-Faculty and Sounds

“Moreover, Ānanda, you have heard the beating of the drum in Prince Jetri’s Grove when a meal is ready. The assembly gathers, and then the bell is struck. The drumbeats and the peals of the bell each follow one upon another in clear succession. What do you think? Do the sounds come to the ear-faculty? Or to the contrary, does the ear-faculty go out to the sounds?

“Ānanda, suppose the sounds come to the ear. Then the situation could be compared to my going on my alms round in Śrāvastī so that I am no longer in Prince Jetri’s Grove. Now if sounds came to your ear in order for you to hear them, Ānanda, then neither Mahākāśyapa nor Mahāmaudgalyāyana — not to speak of the rest of the twelve hundred-fifty elder monks — would hear the bell calling them to the meal. How would they know it was time to eat?

“Ānanda, suppose that the ear-faculty goes out to a sound in order for you to hear it. Then the situation can be compared to my returning to Prince Jetri’s Grove so that I am no longer in Śrāvastī. If your ear-faculty went out to the drum in order to hear it, then you would not be able to hear the bell at the same time — nor would you be able to hear other sounds, such as the noise made by elephants, horses, oxen, and sheep. On the other hand, if no sounds reached the ear-faculty, you would not be able to hear either.

“Therefore, you should know that sounds and the ear-faculty have no real existence. These two sites — sounds and the ear-faculty — are illusions. Fundamentally, they are not dependent on causes or conditions, and yet they do not come into being on their own.

C. The Nose-Faculty and Odors

“Moreover, Ānanda, you can smell the sandalwood incense burning in a censer. A small pinch of this incense, once lit, can be smelled everywhere around Śrāvastī for a distance of a dozen miles. What do you think? Does the fragrance come into being from the sandalwood incense? Does it come into being from your nose-faculty? Or does it come into being from space?

“Ānanda, suppose that the fragrance comes into being from your nose-faculty. If it comes into being because of the nose, then the nose must emit fragrance. But the nose is not made of sandalwood; how then could it produce the fragrance of sandalwood? Clearly, the fragrance must enter the nose in order for you to smell it. It makes no sense to say that you smell it when the fragrance comes out of the nose.

“Suppose that the fragrance comes into being from space. Since space is by nature everlasting and unchanging, a fragrance that came into being from space would therefore be ever-present. What need would there be then to burn the sandalwood in the censer?

“Suppose that the fragrance comes from the wood. Now, the fragrant wood gives off smoke when it is burned. For the nose to smell the smoke, the smoke must come into contact with the nose-faculty. Yet the fragrance has already spread a dozen miles in every direction long before the smoke itself has risen very far into the air.

“Therefore, you should know that sandalwood incense and the nose-faculty have no real existence. These two sites — the nose-faculty and odors — are illusions. Fundamentally, they are not dependent on causes or conditions, and yet they do not come into being on their own.

D. The Tongue-Faculty and Flavors

“Ānanda, to obtain your two daily meals, you and the others in the assembly take up your alms bowls. In them you may receive curds, cheese, or ghee, which are considered to have excellent flavors. What do you think? Do these flavors come into being from space, from the tongue, or from the food?

“Suppose, Ānanda, that these flavors came into being from the tongue. Now, you have only one tongue. Suppose then that the flavor of the curds does come from the tongue. Then if a lump of sugar were placed on the tongue, the tongue would not be able to taste it unless it could change its nature. If the tongue cannot change its nature so that it can taste a variety of flavors, it cannot be capable of tasting. If it could change, that would mean you would have several tongues. How then does the one tongue you do have recognize a variety of flavors?

“Suppose the flavors come from the food. But the food has no consciousness; how could it be aware of flavors? If the food were aware of its own flavors, then it would be as if someone else were eating. How would you be able to taste it?

“Suppose that the flavors come from space. But suppose you were to take a mouthful of space: would it have a flavor? Let us say that it does — that it has a salty taste. If it could place a salty taste on your tongue, it would inevitably make your face salty as well. Everyone in the world would be like fish in the sea. Since you would perpetually be tasting salt, you would never be aware of a bland taste; and if you were never aware of a bland taste, you would not be able to distinguish a salty taste either. Indeed, you would not be able to taste at all. How then could you be said to have an awareness of flavors?

“Therefore, you should know that food and the tongue-faculty have no real existence. These two sites — the tongue-faculty and flavors — are illusions. Fundamentally, they are not dependent on causes or conditions, and yet they do not come into being on their own.

E. The Body-Faculty and Objects of Touch

“Ānanda, every morning at daybreak you touch your head with your hand. What do you think? Is the awareness of the contact present in your hand or in your head? If it is only your hand that is aware of the contact, then your head will not be aware of it; how can that amount to the sensation you experience? And if it is just your head that is aware of the contact, then your hand must not be aware of it; how could that be what we mean by the sensation you experience?”

“If both your head and your hand had a separate awareness of the contact, Ānanda, you must have two bodies. Conversely, if your head and hand together experience a single awareness of contact, then your head and your hand must be a single object. If they were a single object, how could there be contact between them? Given that your head and your hand are two separate objects, which of them is aware of the contact? The one that is aware cannot be the perceived object, and the one that is the perceived object cannot be what is aware. Nor can the contact be between you and space.

“Therefore, you should know that, in fact, your body-faculty and objects of touch have no real existence. These two sites — the body-faculty and the objects of touch — are illusions. Fundamentally, they are not dependent on causes or conditions, and yet they do not come into being on their own.

F. The Cognitive Faculty and Objects of Cognition

“Ānanda, objects of cognition are always arising in your mind in three categories: pleasant, unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Now, do these objects of cognition arise from your cognitive faculty, or do they arise from some source other than your cognitive faculty?”

“Ānanda, if these objects of cognition arose from your cognitive faculty, they could not be objects of cognition, and they would not then be what your cognitive faculty can interact with. How then could they be a site for the arising of your mind-consciousness?”

“Suppose they arose from some source other than your cognitive faculty. Would they be aware of themselves as objects of cognition, or would they not? If they were aware, they would have to be part of your cognitive faculty. If they were aware and yet arose from some place other than your cognitive faculty, but were not objects of cognition, they could only be located in someone else's cognitive faculty. But given that these objects of cognition are something you are aware of, they must be present in your cognitive faculty, and so they cannot after all be present in someone else's cognitive faculty.

“Finally, if these objects of cognition are not aware and arise from some other source than your mind, then at what site might they be located, given that they are neither visible objects, nor sounds, nor odors, nor flavors, nor such attributes as separation, contact, cold, and warmth? Nor are they space. Since there is nothing in the world humans perceive beyond visible objects, the other perceived objects, and space, and since objects of cognition are distinct from the cognitive faculty, what place is left for objects of cognition to be located?”

“Therefore, you should know that, in fact, your cognitive faculty and objects of cognition have no real existence. These two sites of perception — the cognitive faculty and objects of cognition — are illusions. Fundamentally, they are not dependent on causes or conditions, and yet they do not come into being on their own.”

The Eighteen Constituents Are the Matrix of the Thus-Come One

A. The Coming into Being of the Eye-Consciousness

“Moreover, Ānanda, how is it that, fundamentally, the eighteen constituents are the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, which is the wondrous suchness of reality? Ānanda, according to your understanding of it, the eye-faculty and visible objects are the conditions for the coming into being of the eye-consciousness. But does this consciousness come into being from the eyes, such that it is restricted by the boundaries of the eye-faculty? Or does it come into being from visible objects, such that it is restricted by the boundaries of visible objects?

“Suppose, Ānanda, that the eye-consciousness came into being from the eye-faculty. Now, without the presence of visible objects or of space, the eye-consciousness could not make distinctions, and even if it existed in this situation, what use would it be? Your eye-consciousness is neither blue, yellow, red, nor white. There is nothing to indicate where it is. On what then would the constituent that is the eye-consciousness be based?

“Suppose the eye-consciousness came into being from visible objects. Then in the presence of space, where there are no visible objects, your eye-consciousness would cease to be. How then could it be aware of space?

“Again, if your eye-consciousness came into being from visible objects, then when the objects changed, your eye-consciousness would change along with them. If it came into being from visible objects and yet did not change along with them, where would it exist? But if it did change, it would no longer have the characteristics of eye-consciousness. Also, it cannot come from visible objects because, if it did, given that it does not change, it could not become aware of space.

“Suppose then that the eye-consciousness came into being from both the eye-faculty and visible objects. But it cannot arise from a combination of the two, because then it would be internally divided. Nor can the eye-consciousness arise from the two as separate entities, because then it would be a chaotic mixture. How could the eye-consciousness be something so undefined?

“Therefore, you should know that the eye-faculty and visible objects cannot be the conditions for the coming into being of the eye-consciousness, because none of these three constituents — eye-faculty, visible objects, and eye-consciousness — has an independent existence. Fundamentally, they do not come into being from causes and conditions; nor do they come into being on their own.

B. The Coming into Being of the Ear-Consciousness

“Moreover, Ānanda, according to your understanding of it, the ear-faculty and sounds are the conditions for the coming into being of the ear-consciousness. But does this consciousness come into being from the ear-faculty such that it is restricted by the boundaries of the ear-faculty? Or does it come into being from sounds, such that it is restricted by the boundaries of sound?

“Suppose, Ānanda, that it came into being from the ear-faculty. But without the presence of either sound or silence, the ear-faculty would not be aware of anything. If the ear-faculty lacked awareness, because there would be no objects for it to be aware of, then what attributes could the consciousness have? You may insist that it is the ears that hear. But without the presence of sound or silence, no hearing can take place. Also, the ear is covered with skin, and the body-faculty is involved with objects

of touch. Could the ear-consciousness come into being from that faculty? Since it cannot, what can the ear-consciousness be based on?

“Suppose the ear-consciousness came into being from sounds. If the ear-consciousness owed its existence to sounds, then it would have nothing to do with hearing. But if no hearing is taking place, how would you know where sounds are coming from? Suppose, nevertheless, that the ear-consciousness did arise from sound. Since a sound must be heard if it is to be what we know as a sound, the ear-consciousness would also be heard as a sound. And when it is not heard, it would not exist. Besides, if it is heard, then it would be the same thing as a sound; it would be some-thing that is heard. But what would be able to hear it? And if you had no awareness, you would be as insentient as grass or wood.

“Do not say that sounds, which have no awareness, and the ear-faculty, which is aware, can intermingle to create the ear-consciousness. There can be no such place where these two can mix together, since one is internal and the other is external. Where else then could the ear-consciousness come into being?

“Therefore, you should know that the ear-faculty and sounds cannot be the conditions for the coming into being of the ear-consciousness, because none of these three constituents — ear-faculty, sounds, and ear-consciousness — has an independent existence. Fundamentally, they do not come into being from causes and conditions; nor do they come into being on their own.

C. The Coming into Being of the Nose-Consciousness

“Moreover, Ānanda, according to your understanding of it, the nose-faculty and odors are the conditions for the coming into being of the nose-consciousness. But does this consciousness come into being from the nose-faculty, such that it is restricted by the boundaries of the nose-faculty? Or does it come into being from odors, such that it is restricted by the boundaries of odors?

“Ānanda, suppose it came into being from the nose. Now, in your opinion, what should we consider the nose to be? Should we take it to be a part of the body that is shaped like a pair of talons? Or should we take it to be the faculty that is aware of the natures of various odors?

“Suppose we take the nose to be a part of the body shaped like a pair of talons. But then the nose belongs to the body-faculty, which is aware of objects of touch. What belongs to the body-faculty is not the nose-faculty, and the body-faculty perceives objects of touch. Nothing would remain to be called ‘nose-faculty.’ How could the nose-consciousness be based on it?

“Ānanda, suppose that we take the nose to be the faculty that is aware of odors, then once again, in your opinion, what is it that is aware? Is it the part of the body shaped like a pair of talons? If so, then it would be its nature to be aware of objects of touch. It could not be the nose-faculty that is aware of odors.

“Suppose it is space that is aware of odors. If space were itself aware, then it would not be a part of your body that would be aware. In that case, space, given that it is aware, would have to be you, and your body would have no awareness. Then you, Ānanda, would not be here now at all.

“Suppose it is odors that are aware. If awareness were really a function of odors, how would you expect to be involved? If your nose were what produced odors, both pleasant and unpleasant, then such odors would not come from sandalwood incense or from the foul smelling airāvaṇa.

“If those odors don’t come from those two things, then clearly it must be your nose itself that has an odor. Would its odor be pleasant or unpleasant? If it were pleasant, it could not be unpleasant, and if unpleasant, it could not be pleasant. Thus if it really were odors, both pleasant and unpleasant, that were aware, then you would have to have two noses, or else I would be questioning two people about the Path. Which one would be you? Since you after all have only one nose, which cannot both stink and be fragrant, then if odors were in fact aware, stench would have to be fragrant and fragrance would have to stink. Neither would have a nature of its own. On what then would the nose-consciousness be

based?

“Suppose, again, that the nose-consciousness came into being from odors. If that were the case, then just as the eye-faculty can see every-thing but itself, so the nose-consciousness, if it came into being from odors, could not be aware of odors. Since it is aware of odors, it cannot come into being from them; and if after all it were not aware of odors, it would not be the nose-consciousness. Besides, since odors have no awareness, the constituent element of the nose-consciousness cannot come into being from them; and if it did, the consciousness could not become aware of odors. Therefore the nose-consciousness cannot come into being from odors.

“Finally, since there can be no place that is intermediate between a faculty, which is internal, and its object, which is external, the nose-consciousness must ultimately be a distortion and an illusion.

“Therefore, you should know that the nose-faculty and odors cannot be the conditions for the coming into being of the nose-consciousness, because none of these three constituents — nose-faculty, odors, and the nose-consciousness — has an independent existence. Fundamentally, they do not come into being from causes and conditions; nor do they come into being on their own.

D. The Coming into Being of the Tongue-Consciousness

“Moreover, Ānanda, according to your understanding of it, the tongue-faculty and flavors are the conditions for the coming into being of the tongue-consciousness. But does this consciousness come into being from the tongue-faculty, such that it is restricted by the boundaries of the tongue-faculty? Or does it come into being from flavors, such that it is restricted by the boundaries of flavors?

“Ānanda, suppose it came into being from the tongue-faculty. Then you would not be able to taste the flavors that we find in the world, such as sugar cane, sour plums, coptis rhizome, salt, wild ginger, ginger, and cinnamon. You would only be able to taste your own tongue-faculty. Would it be sweet or bitter? Suppose it were bitter: what would be tasting it? Since the tongue-faculty cannot taste itself, what would the tongue-consciousness consist of? If your tongue-faculty were not bitter, bitter flavor could not come into being from it. On what then would the tongue-consciousness be based?

“Suppose the tongue-consciousness came into being from flavors. Then the tongue-consciousness would itself have flavor, and just as in the previous case of the nose-faculty, the tongue-consciousness would not be able to taste its own flavor. How then would it be aware of the presence or absence of any flavor? Further, flavors do not come into being from any one thing. Since flavors come from many different things, there would have to be many tongue-consciousnesses. But given that there is after all just one tongue-consciousness, then if that single tongue-consciousness indeed came into being from flavors, it would have to itself be a combination of such flavors as salty, bland, sweet, and hot. Their various characteristics would have to change into a single flavor, and you would not be able to distinguish one from another. Since your tongue-consciousness could not make distinctions among them, it could not be what we call a consciousness, and so could not be the constituent that is the tongue-consciousness. Nor could it come into being from space.

“Do not say that the tongue faculty and flavors come into contact and combine to create a constituent at their place of contact. If flavors, which are external, and the tongue-faculty, which is internal, did combine, then there would be no place of contact. They would cease to exist as separate constituents.

“Therefore, you should know that the tongue-faculty and flavors cannot be the conditions for the coming into being of the tongue-consciousness, because none of these three constituents — tongue-faculty, flavors, and tongue-consciousness — has an independent existence. Fundamentally, they do not come into being from causes and conditions; nor do they come into being on their own.

E. The Coming into Being of the Body-Consciousness

“Moreover, Ānanda, according to your understanding of it, the body-faculty and objects of touch are the conditions for the coming into being of the body-consciousness. But does this consciousness come into being from the body-faculty, such that it is restricted by the boundaries of the body-faculty? Or does it come into being from objects of touch, such that it is restricted by the boundaries of objects of touch?

“Suppose it came into being from the body-faculty. Then there could be no contact with objects of touch or separation from them, and these are said to be two conditions for the body-consciousness’s awareness. How then could the body-consciousness be limited to the body?

“Suppose it came into being from objects of touch. Then your body would not be involved. Yet who can be without a body and still be aware of contact with and separation from objects of touch? Insentient things cannot have tactile awareness; and it is the body-consciousness that is aware of objects of touch. Only with a body-faculty can there be awareness of contact with objects.

“Further, for you to be aware of your body as an object of touch in itself, there needs to be contact, but it is your body-faculty that comes into contact with objects. But an object cannot be identical with a faculty; the body-faculty cannot be an object. Fundamentally, neither the body-faculty nor objects of touch are sufficient as places of support for the body-consciousness. If the body-consciousness were joined to the body-faculty, it would have the essential nature of the body-faculty; yet if it were not joined to the body-faculty, it would have the same nature as space.

“Since the body-consciousness cannot come into being either from the faculty, which is internal, or its objects, which are external, how could it exist between them? Since it cannot exist between them, and since the internal faculty and the external objects are all empty of an inherent nature, what could the body-consciousness be based on?

“Therefore, you should know that the body-faculty and objects of touch cannot be the conditions for the coming into being of the body-consciousness, because none of these three constituents — body-faculty, objects of touch, and body-consciousness — has an independent existence. Fundamentally, they do not come into being from causes and conditions; nor do they come into being on their own.

F. The Coming into Being of the Mind-Consciousness

“Moreover, Ānanda, according to your understanding of it, the cognitive faculty and its objects are the conditions for the coming into being of mind-consciousness. But does this consciousness come into being from the cognitive faculty, such that it is restricted by the boundaries of the cognitive faculty? Or does it come into being from its objects, such that it is restricted to the boundaries of its objects?

“Ānanda, suppose the mind-consciousness came into being from the cognitive faculty. Now, your cognitive faculty has to be considering something in order for it to be functioning. If no objects of cognition are present, the cognitive faculty does not arise. If the cognitive faculty has not manifested, how would the mind-consciousness function?

“Further, the natures of both your mind-consciousness and your cognitive faculty are such that they make distinctions. Do they differ from one another, or are they the same? If the mind-consciousness were the same as the cognitive faculty, it would be the cognitive faculty; then how could the mind-consciousness come into being from the cognitive faculty? If the mind-consciousness were different from the cognitive faculty, it would not be conscious of anything. If it were not conscious of anything, how could it come into being from the cognitive faculty? If it is conscious, how can you differentiate it from the cognitive faculty? Since neither a sameness nor a difference can be identified, on what can the mind-consciousness be based?

“Suppose, finally, that the mind-consciousness came into being from objects of cognition. Now, all your experiences of the external world are experiences of visible objects, of sounds, of odors, of flavors, or of objects of touch. Each of these categories of objects has the attribute of complementing one of five faculties. None of them complements the cognitive faculty. If you nevertheless insist that your mind-consciousness must come into being from objects of cognition, you should consider carefully what the essential attributes of objects of cognition and the other perceived objects might be. If you exclude the essential attributes of visible objects and if you exclude their absence — as well as excluding the essential attributes of sound and silence, openness and blockage, and separation and contact — beyond these, what would be left for objects of cognition to be? Visible objects, the absence of visible objects, and the other kinds of perceived objects and their absence are what arise, and they are what perish, while objects of cognition, which we are now supposing to be the cause of the mind-consciousness, cannot come into being independently without another perceived object being present. Therefore, if objects of cognition were what cause the mind-consciousness to come into being, what essential attributes would it have? Since objects of cognition have no independent attributes, how could the mind-consciousness arise from them?

“Therefore, you should know that the cognitive faculty and objects of cognition cannot be the conditions that are necessary for the coming into being of the mind-consciousness, because none of these three constituents — cognitive faculty, objects of cognition, and mind-consciousness — has an independent existence. Fundamentally, they do not come into being from causes and conditions, nor do they come into being on their own.”

The Seven Primary Elements Are the Matrix of the Thus-Come One

Ānanda said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, the Thus-Come One has often discussed causes and conditions and aggregating and merging. He has shown that the various phenomena that we see in the world are caused by the merging or aggregating of the four primary elements. Why has the Thus-Come One now rejected causes and conditions and self-generation as explanations? I cannot reconcile this idea with the Buddha’s previous teachings. Only pity us and instruct us and all beings how to know the ultimate truth of the Middle Way. Teach us the Dharma that is not mere words devoid of meaning.”

The World-Honored One then said to Ānanda, “Since you have renounced the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle — of the Hearers of the Teaching and the Solitary Sages — and since you have resolved to strive diligently to realize the supreme awakening, I will now instruct you in the ultimate truth. You need no longer bind yourself up with words that are devoid of meaning and with distorted thinking about causes and conditions. You are very learned, but you are like someone who can discuss medicines yet cannot identify them when they are actually set before him. The Thus-Come One says that you are indeed to be pitied. Listen carefully now. For your sake and for the sake of all who in the future will undertake the Bodhisattva’s journey, I will explain in detail how you can come to thoroughly understand the ultimate truth.” Ānanda was silent and waited for the Buddha’s enlightened instruction.

“Ānanda, according to what you have said, the merging or aggregating of four primary elements brings about the various phenomena that are found in the world and that are subject to change. Let us suppose, Ānanda, that the primary elements have separate essential natures that cannot aggregate or merge. In that case, their external attributes, too, could not aggregate or merge any more than space can aggregate or merge with perceived objects. Suppose, on the other hand, that the essential natures of the primary elements can aggregate and merge. Then their aggregating and merging would not differ from the various changes that take place in the world and that cause things to arise and perish through an unending process of coming into being and ceasing to be. Beings, too, are born and die, and having died they are born again, forever coming to life and perishing again, Ānanda, like a torch that is swung endlessly in a circle to form a wheel of flame, or like water that turns to ice and then becomes water again.

A. The Primary Element Earth

“Let us consider the nature of the primary element earth. It may take as large a form as a continent and as small a form as a mote of dust. In its most subtle aspect, the primary element earth appears as particles that are so fine that they can hardly be distinguished from space itself. If these minute particles were divided further into seven parts, they would then be as small as perceived objects can be. If they were divided yet further, nothing would be left but space.

“Now if these most minute particles could be divided until they became space, Ānanda, then space would be capable of bringing perceived objects into being. You asked just now whether the various phenomena that we see in the world are caused by the merging or aggregating of the four elemental qualities. You should see that space, in whatever amount, could never be accumulated in order to bring into being even a single one of these most minute particles. Nor can it be true that these most minute particles are created by the particles themselves. Further, if these most minute particles could be divided to assume the nature of space, then conversely, how many such particles must be aggregated to bring space into being?

“In fact, when perceived objects are aggregated or merged, they do not become space; and when space accumulates, it does not become a perceived object. Besides, although perceived objects can indeed be divided, how can space be accumulated?

“You simply do not know that, in the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, the real nature of the primary element earth is identical to the real nature of emptiness. The real nature of the primary element earth is fundamentally pure and extends throughout the Dharma-Realm. The extent to which beings are aware of that real nature depends on the capacity of their understanding. The primary element earth appears to them in accord with their karma. Ordinary beings, in their ignorance, mistakenly suppose that the primary element earth comes into being from causes and conditions or that it comes into being on its own. These are distinctions and constructs made by the conscious mind. They are mere words, devoid of meaning.

B. The Primary Element Fire

“Ānanda, the nature of fire is such that it has no independent existence but is dependent on conditions. Let us consider a family in the city. They have not yet eaten dinner. When they set about to cook their meal, someone holds up a reflecting surface to the sun in order to start a fire.

“Ānanda, an example of an aggregation is our community here, which includes you, the twelve hundred and fifty monks, and myself. Although there is but one community, we can discern that it consists of separate individuals, each of whom was born into a certain class, clan, and family. For example, there is Śāriputra, who is a Brahmin; Uruvilvā, who belongs to the Kāśyapa clan; and you, Ānanda, who are of the Gautama family.

“In the example of the family starting a fire to cook a meal, Ānanda, then suppose that the sun, the reflecting surface, and the tinder act together to create the fire. Then when the reflecting surface is held up to the sun so that a fire may be lit, does the fire emerge from the reflecting surface? Does it emerge from the tinder? Does it come from the sun?

“Suppose that the fire came from the sun, Ānanda, such that the sun by itself would be able to set fire to some tinder that you were holding. Then it should also be able to set fire to a grove of trees merely by shining on it. Suppose that the fire emerges from the reflecting surface, such that the fire as it emerges ignites the tinder. Why doesn’t the reflecting surface melt as you hold it up? Far from melting, it doesn’t even become very hot. If the fire came into being from the tinder, what need would there be for sunlight to be reflected by the mirror? Carefully consider this further. Someone is holding up the reflecting surface, the sunlight comes from the sky, the tinder comes from an herb that has been grown in soil, but where does the fire come from? The sun and the reflecting surface are far apart and cannot come into contact. Yet it cannot be that the fire comes into being on its own.

“You still do not know that, in the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, the real nature of the primary element fire is identical to the real nature of emptiness. The real nature of the primary element fire is fundamentally pure and extends throughout the Dharma-Realm. The extent to which beings are aware of this real nature depends on the capacity of their understanding. You should know, Ānanda, that anywhere in the entire world, throughout the Dharma-Realm, a reflecting surface can be held up to the sun to start a fire. Since a fire can be started anywhere in the world, how could it be limited to one particular place? In fact, the primary element fire becomes apparent to beings in accord with their karma. Ordinary beings, in their ignorance, mistakenly suppose that the primary element fire comes into being from causes and conditions or that it comes into being on its own. These are distinctions and constructs made by the conscious mind. They are mere words, devoid of any real meaning.

C. The Primary Element Water

“Ānanda, the nature of water is variable, neither always flowing nor always still. Consider the ascetic

masters Kapila, Cakra, Padma, and Hastā, along with other great magicians in the city of Śrāvastī. On bright nights with the full moon shining, these magicians each hold up a bowl to the moon in order to collect water which contains the moon's essence, and this they mix with their hallucinatory herbs.

"Now, does the water come out of the bowl? Is it already present because it is inherent in space? Or does it come from the moon?

"Suppose, Ānanda, that it came from the moon. If moonlight coming from such a distance could cause water to emerge from the bowl, then while crossing that distance it would cause water to emerge from the trees that it passed. Then what need would there be for the bowl? But since water does not emerge from the trees, it is clear that the water does not in fact come from the moon.

"Suppose the water came from the bowl. Then the water would be flowing out of the bowl all the time. What need would there be to wait for a bright full moon at midnight?

"Suppose the water came from space. Since space is boundless, the water too should be boundless. Then the heavens and the world of people would all be immersed in a deluge. What then will have happened to the beings that move on land, in water, and in the air?

"Carefully consider this further. The moon moves through the sky. The magician holds up the bowl to collect the water. Where in fact does the water come from? The moon and the bowl are far apart; they cannot come into contact and they cannot merge. Yet it cannot be that water comes into being on its own.

"You do not yet know that, in the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, the real nature of the primary element water is identical to the real nature of emptiness. The real nature of the primary element water is fundamentally pure and extends throughout the Dharma-Realm. The extent to which beings are aware of that real nature depends on the capacity of their understanding. One person holds up a bowl in one place and water comes forth there and anywhere throughout the Dharma-Realm, such a bowl can be held up so that water will come forth. Since water can be found anywhere in the world, how could it be limited to one particular place? In fact, the primary element water becomes apparent to beings in accord with their karma. Ordinary beings, in their ignorance, mistakenly suppose that the primary element water comes into being from causes and conditions or that it comes into being on its own. These are distinctions and constructs made by the conscious mind. They are mere words, devoid of meaning.

D. The Primary Element Wind

"Ānanda, the nature of wind is insubstantial. It is neither always in motion nor always still. When you take your place in the great assembly, you always adjust your precept robe. Suppose that as you do so, the corner of your robe moves toward the person next to you. As a result, that person will feel a slight puff of wind against his face. Does this puff of wind arise from the corner of your robe? Does it arise from the space around it? Or does it come into being from that person's face?

"Ānanda, suppose the puff of wind arises from the corner of your robe. Then you would be wearing wind, and your robe would billow out and fly off your body. Yet as I now expound upon the Dharma in the midst of the assembly, my robe hangs straight down. Look at my robe: where is the wind? In fact there is nowhere in the robe for the wind to be hidden.

"Suppose the wind comes into being from space. Then what need would there be for your robe to move in order for someone to feel that puff of wind? Further, space is always present; if the wind arose from it, then the wind would always have to be blowing. Conversely, if no wind were blowing, then space would cease to exist. But, while we can observe an absence of wind, what would the absence of space look like? In truth, if space came into being and ceased to be, it would not be what we call space. Therefore, wind cannot come into being from what we do call space.

"Suppose then that the wind came into being from your neighbor's face. Then it would be you, rather than your neighbor, who would feel the puff of wind. Why is it your neighbor who in fact feels

the puff of wind when you adjust your robe?

“Consider this matter with care. It is you who adjust your robe. It is your neighbor who feels the puff of wind on his face. Space itself is still; it is never observed to move. From where then does the wind come when it blows against your neighbor’s face? Wind and space have different natures and cannot aggregate or merge with each other. And yet it cannot be that wind comes into being on its own, independent of anything else.

“You apparently do not know that, in the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, the real nature of the primary element wind is identical to the real nature of emptiness. The real nature of wind is fundamentally pure and extends throughout the Dharma-Realm. The extent to which beings are aware of that real nature depends on the capacity of their understanding. Ānanda, just as a puff of wind arises with a small movement of your robe, so a puff of wind will arise anywhere throughout the Dharma-Realm, in any land, when someone moves his robe. Since wind can arise anywhere in the world, how could it be limited to one particular place? In fact, the primary element wind becomes apparent to beings in accord with their karma. Ordinary beings, in their ignorance, mistakenly suppose that the primary element wind comes into being from causes and conditions or that it comes into being on its own. These are distinctions and constructs made by the conscious mind. They are mere words, devoid of any real meaning.

E. The Primary Element Space

“Ānanda, the nature of space is that it is invisible. It is discerned only in the presence of visible objects. Consider, for example, how the Brahmins — for example, the Bhāradvāja clan — and the Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Śūdras, and Caṇḍālas in the city of Śrāvastī dig wells to find water when they build a new dwelling, since the city is far from the river. When they dig out the soil to the depth of one foot, space will be discernible in the well to the depth of one foot. When they dig out the soil to the depth of ten feet, space will be discernible in the well to the depth of ten feet. How much space is discerned depends on how much soil has been removed. Now, does the space in the well come into being out of the soil? Does it come into being because of the digging? Or does it come into being on its own?

“Ānanda, suppose the space in the well came into being on its own, without a cause. Why then in the place where the well is to be dug, is there no space before the soil is removed? Why can one see only solid land, which one cannot pass through?

“Suppose the space in the well comes into existence from the soil. Then when the soil is removed, space should be seen to enter the well. If no space enters in as the soil comes out, how could the space in the well be said to come into being from the soil? But if space does not come out of the soil to enter the well, then the soil and the space must be bound together with no distinction between them. Why then, when the soil is removed, doesn’t the space come out with it?

“Suppose the space in the well comes into existence because of the digging. Then the digging should bring space out of the well, along with the soil. But if the space does not come into existence from the digging, then only the soil would have been moved. Why then does the space appear?

“Carefully consider this further; consider it closely and carefully. The well digger chooses the appropriate place to dig. The soil comes out as the well is dug. But what of the space? How does it come into existence? The soil that is removed is solid matter, while the space is insubstantial, so they cannot function together. They cannot be aggregated or combined with each other. And yet it cannot be that space comes into existence on its own, without any cause.

“Given that the fundamental nature of space is all-pervasive and does not move, you should know that the real natures of earth, water, fire, and wind — which, together with space, we may consider as five primary elements — are completely inter-fused with one another. In their fundamental natures, all are one with the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, neither coming into being nor ceasing to be. When we discussed the first four primary elements, Ānanda, you did not understand that fundamentally they are

the Matrix of the Thus-Come One; therefore, you still need to ponder whether or not the primary element space can come out of a well that has been dug and whether or not space can enter into the well.

“You have altogether failed to realize that the primary element space is inherent in the Matrix of the Thus-Come One and is identical to the real nature of emptiness. The real nature of the primary element space is fundamentally pure and extends throughout the Dharma-Realm. The extent to which beings are aware of that real nature depends on the capacity of their understanding. Just as when one well is dug, space appears in it, Ānanda, so space will appear in any well that is dug anywhere in the ten directions. Since space is everywhere throughout the ten directions, how could it be limited to one particular place? In fact, the primary element space becomes apparent to beings in accord with their karma. In their ignorance, beings in this world mistakenly suppose that space comes into existence from causes and conditions or that it comes into being on its own. These are distinctions and constructs made by the conscious mind. They are mere words, devoid of meaning.

F. The Primary Element Awareness

“Ānanda, you do not become visually aware unless space and visible objects are present. For example, you are now in Prince Jetri’s Grove, where it is light in the morning and dark in the evening. It is bright at midnight when a full moon has risen but dark when there is no moon. At these times, you can discern light and darkness because of your visual awareness. Now, is your visual awareness identical to light and darkness and to space? Is it separate from them? Is it both identical to them and separate from them? Is it neither identical to them nor separate from them?

“Suppose, Ānanda, that your visual awareness is fundamentally identical to light, darkness, and space. But consider light and darkness: each disappears in the presence of the other. When it is dark, it is not light, and when it is light, it is not dark. Therefore, if your visual awareness were identical to darkness, it would disappear when it is light. If instead it were identical to light, it would cease to exist when it is dark. Once it had ceased to exist, how could it see either darkness or light? And how could it be identical to light and darkness, given that they are not present at the same time, whereas visual awareness neither comes into being nor ceases to be?

“Suppose that your visual awareness is not identical to light or to darkness. Then, in the absence of light, darkness, and space, can you determine what attributes your visual awareness might have, in and of itself? In the absence of light, darkness, and space, a visual awareness such as this would be no more possible than a turtle with fur or a rabbit with horns. Therefore, without these three — light, darkness, and space — how could your visual awareness come to exist? Since light and darkness are opposites, how could your visual awareness be identical to them? On the other hand, since your visual awareness cannot exist in and of itself and apart from these three, how could it be different from them? Further, no division can be discerned between your visual awareness and space; there is no boundary between them. How is it that they are not identical? Yet when you see light and then darkness, the nature of your visual awareness does not change. How is it that they are not different?

“You should examine this question in even greater detail. Examine it minutely; consider it most carefully. Light comes from the sun, and it is dark on a moonless night. We see through space but not through earth. But what causes our visual awareness, as we have just described it, to come into being? Its nature is to perceive, while space is insentient, so they cannot merge or become aggregated with one another. And yet our visual awareness cannot come to exist on its own, without any cause.

“Given that the fundamental natures of visual awareness, awareness of sounds, and cognitive awareness are all-pervasive and do not change, you should know that the real natures of what we may consider to be six primary elements — our visual awareness; infinite, motionless space; and earth, water, fire, and wind, which are in motion — are completely inter-fused with one another. In their fundamental natures, all are within the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, neither coming into being nor

ceasing to be.

“Ānanda, your basic disposition has become so murky that you do not realize that, fundamentally, your visual awareness, your awareness of sounds, your tactile awareness, and your cognitive awareness are the Matrix of the Thus-Come One. You should contemplate your visual awareness, your awareness of sounds and odors, your tactile awareness, and your cognitive awareness: do they come into being and cease to be? Are they identical to each other, or are they different? Or else, do they neither come into being nor cease to be? Are they neither identical to each other nor different?

“You still do not know that the real nature of your visual awareness is inherent in the Matrix of the Thus-Come One and identical to your enlightened understanding, and that the essence of enlightenment is your illuminating awareness. Fundamentally pure, it extends throughout the Dharma-Realm. The extent to which beings are aware of its real nature depends on the capacity of their understanding. Just as the awareness of one sense-faculty, the eye, extends throughout the Dharma-Realm, so also do the wondrous, resplendent powers of hearing, smelling, tasting, tactile awareness, and cognitive awareness extend throughout the Dharma-Realm. They fill up the entirety of space throughout the ten directions. How could they be limited to one particular place? In fact, the primary element visual awareness becomes apparent to beings in accord with their karma. In their ignorance, ordinary beings mistakenly suppose that visual awareness comes into existence from causes and conditions or that it comes into being on its own. These are all distinctions and constructs made by the conscious mind. They are mere words, devoid of real meaning.

G. The Primary Element Consciousness

“Ānanda, the nature of consciousness is that it has no real basis. Its coming into existence in response to the six faculties and their objects is an illusion. Look around now at the sages assembled here. As you glance from one to another, your eyes see them as if in a mirror, which does not make distinctions. But your consciousness will identify each of the sages in turn as Mañjuśrī, Pūrṇamaitrāyaṇīputra, Maudgalyāyana, Subhūti, and Śāriputra. Now, does this distinction-making faculty, this primary element consciousness, arise from your eye-faculty? Does it arise from perceived objects? Does it arise from space? Or does it arise abruptly, without a cause?

“Ānanda, suppose your primary element consciousness arose from your eye-faculty. Then in the absence of light, darkness, objects, and space — if none of these four were present — your eye-faculty would not function. If your eye-faculty were not functioning, what would cause your consciousness element to arise?

“Suppose your consciousness arose from perceived objects rather than from the eye-faculty. In that case, you would not be seeing either light or darkness, and if you were not aware of light or darkness, you would not be aware of objects and space either. If you could not see any of these, how could your consciousness element arise out of them?

“Suppose your consciousness element arose from space rather than from perceived objects or from the eye-faculty. But without the eye-faculty, nothing visible can be perceived, and so you would not be aware of light, darkness, perceived objects, or space. If no perceived objects were present before your eye-faculty, then the conditions for seeing would be absent, and there would be no place for seeing to occur. The same would apply to hearing, tactile awareness, and cognitive awareness.

But suppose it is based on space rather than on the perceiving faculties or on their perceived objects. However, space is identical to nothingness. And even if space were something, it is not the same as an actual perceived object. If space nevertheless caused your consciousness to arise, how would you be able to make distinctions about anything?

“Suppose your consciousness appears abruptly, without any cause. Why then doesn’t the moon suddenly start shining in broad daylight?

“You should examine this question even more closely and in more detail. Seeing is a function of

your eye-faculty. The perceived objects that appear in your environment have form, while space lacks form. Which of them could be the cause of consciousness? Consciousness is active, while the eye-faculty is still, and so they cannot combine or be aggregated with each other. The same is true of consciousness and the ear-faculty, the nose-faculty, the body-faculty, and the cognitive faculty. Yet the primary element consciousness cannot come to exist on its own, without a cause.

“Given that the primary element consciousness is not caused by any of these factors, you should know that your distinction making eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness do not come from anywhere; all are complete and pure and do not come into being from anything. The real natures of what we may call the seven primary elements — these last two, together with space, earth, water, fire, and wind — are completely inter-fused with one another. In their fundamental natures, all are within the Matrix of the Thus-Come One and are one with the Matrix of the Thus-Come One, neither coming into being nor ceasing to be.

“Ānanda, your mind is coarse and shallow. You have not realized that, fundamentally, your eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, and your discerning, distinction making mind-consciousness are all inherent in the Matrix of the Thus-Come One. You should contemplate all of your six consciousnesses: are they identical to each other, or are they different? Do they exist, or are they empty? Are they neither identical to each other nor different? Are they neither existent nor empty?

“You simply do not know that the primary element consciousness is inherent in the Matrix of the Thus-Come One and is the enlightened understanding, and that the illumination of enlightenment is the true consciousness. It is the wondrous and pure enlightenment that extends throughout the Dharma-Realm. It contains all space throughout the ten directions. How could it be limited to one particular place? In fact, it becomes apparent to beings in accord with their karma. In their ignorance, ordinary beings mistakenly suppose that consciousness comes into existence from causes and conditions or that it comes into being on its own. These are distinctions and constructs made by the conscious mind. They are mere words, devoid of real meaning.”

6 Ānanda's Vow

At that time, Ānanda and the rest of the great assembly, having received the subtle and wondrous instruction given by the Buddha, the Thus-Come One, felt that their bodies and minds were emptied and hardly seemed to exist. They were free of all concerns and impediments. All in the assembly

became aware that their minds pervaded the ten directions and that they could see everything throughout space in all ten directions as clearly as one might see an object such as a leaf in the palm of one's hand. They saw that all things in all worlds are the wondrous, fundamental, enlightened, luminous mind that understands, and that this mind, pure, all-pervading, and perfect, contains the entire universe. They looked back upon their own bodies born of their parents and saw them to be like minute particles of dust drifting about everywhere in the air, arising and perishing, or like solitary bubbles floating on vast, calm seas, appearing and then vanishing without a trace. They fully understood that the fundamental, wondrous mind is everlasting and does not perish.

Then Ānanda, having understood what he had not understood before, bowed to the Buddha, and placing his palms together, spoke these verses in the Buddha's praise:

“The deep and wondrous honored one, all-knowing, pure, and still,
Śūraṅgama, the King of Mantras, rarest in the world,
Extinguishes distorted thoughts from countless eons past —
No need to wait forever to attain the Dharma-body.
“I vow to reach enlightenment, and as a Dharma-King,
Return to rescue beings countless as the Ganges' sands.
This deep resolve I offer in the myriad Buddha-lands.
By this may I repay the kindness shown me by the Buddha.
“I ask the Buddha to be witness as I take this vow
To enter first the murky realms of five turbidities,
If even just one being still has not become a Buddha,
Then I will wait before I seek the leisure of nirvana.
“Greatest in valor and in power! Great Compassionate One!
I pray you'll now eradicate the subtlest of my doubts
And lead me quickly to attain supreme enlightenment,
And sit within the places for awakening everywhere.

If emptiness should vanish, even that
Will never shake this vajra-solid vow.”