

VI  
Twenty-Five Sages



## Twenty-Five Sages Speak of Enlightenment

Having received this instruction from the Buddha, Ānanda and the others in the great assembly gained such wisdom and such a thorough and complete understanding that they now had no doubts about what the Buddha had said. Ānanda placed his palms together and bowed to the ground before the Buddha, and then said, “Today our bodies and minds have been filled with light, and we are delighted that our understanding is unimpeded. However, although we have now understood the meaning of ‘when the six are untied, the one will vanish,’ we do not yet know which one of the sense-faculties can lead us to break through to enlightenment.

“World-Honored One, I have drifted from age to age, homeless and alone. How could I have known — how could I have imagined — that I would meet the Buddha as a member of his family? I am like an infant who has suddenly been reunited with its beloved mother. I have met the Buddha and have had the opportunity to become fully enlightened, and I have been given a hidden teaching. But if my basic mode of understanding nevertheless remains the same, then I might as well never have heard the Buddha’s teaching at all. I only hope that he will be greatly compassionate towards us and will out of kindness bestow upon us a secret and awe-inspiring Dharma that will be the Thus-Come One’s ultimate instruction.” Having spoken these words, he bowed to the ground and then returned to his place in the assembly. He withdrew into the hidden recesses of his mind, hoping that he would receive from the Buddha a secret and private transmission.

Then the World-Honored One said to the assembly of great Bodhisattvas and great Arhats, who were free of outflows, “I now ask all of you Bodhisattvas and Arhats: having made a resolve to become enlightened, which one of the eighteen constituent elements did you make use of in order to break through to enlightenment? By what expedient did you enter samādhi?”

[1] Ājñātakaundinya and the other four monks then stood up and bowed at the Buddha’s feet. Ājñātakaundinya said respectfully to the Buddha: “When we were in the Deer Park and the Pheasant Garden, we saw the Thus-Come One soon after he had become a Buddha, and upon hearing him speak, we understood the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha questioned us monks, and I was the first to truly understand. The Buddha thereupon verified my understanding and gave me the name Ājñāta. The wondrousness of sound, which had been hidden, was everywhere revealed to me. So it was that I became an Arhat by contemplating sound. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I believe that the contemplation of sound is the best method.”

[2] Upaniṣad stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “I also saw the Thus-Come One soon after he had become a Buddha. I learned to contemplate the attribute of impurity, and I developed a strong aversion to it. I came to understand that the nature of visible objects is that they arise from impurity. Whitened bones turn to dust, disperse into space, and vanish. I understood that neither space nor visible objects truly exist, and thus I needed no further instruction. The Thus-Come One verified my understanding and gave me the name Upaniṣad. Visible objects as I had perceived them no longer existed, but their wondrousness, which had been hidden, was everywhere revealed to me. So it was that I became an Arhat by contemplating visible objects. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I believe that the contemplation of visible objects is the best method.”

[3] The virgin youth Sublimity of Fragrance then stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “I heard the Thus-Come One teach how to contemplate attentively all attributes subject to conditions. I then took my leave of the Buddha and retreated to a pure and peaceful dwelling. I observed that when monks lit sandalwood incense, its fragrance silently entered my nostrils. In my contemplation I realized that the source of the fragrance was neither wood, nor space, nor smoke, nor fire; it came from no place and went to no place. As a result of this contemplation, my

distinction making consciousness disappeared, and I gained freedom from outflows. The Thus-Come One verified my understanding and gave me the name Sublimity of Fragrance. Fragrance as I had perceived it vanished, but its wondrousness, which had been hidden, was everywhere revealed to me. So it was that I became an Arhat through contemplating the sublimity within fragrance. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I believe that rectifying the mind by means of fragrance is the best method.”

[4] King of Healing and Master of Healing, two princes in the Dharma, then stood up in the assembly together with five hundred gods from the Heavens of Brahma. King of Healing and Master of Healing said respectfully to the Buddha: “For countless eons, we have served the world as skillful physicians. We have tasted one hundred and eight thousand kinds of medicinal substances — herbs, woods, metals, and minerals — that are to be found in the Sāha world. We know how each of them tastes — whether bitter, sour, salty, bland, sweet, or hot — and we know their inherent characteristics, the various ways they may be combined, and the changes that they effect — whether they are cooling or warming, toxic or benign. We understand them all.

“While reverently serving the Buddha, we came to understand that the nature of flavors is that they are neither empty nor existent. We understood that flavors do not arise from the body nor from the mind, nor are they independent of the body and mind. Thus by discerning the differences among flavors, we became enlightened. The Buddha, the Thus-Come One, verified our understanding, and he named us two brothers the Bodhisattva King of Healing and the Bodhisattva Master of Healing. Now in this assembly we are princes in the Dharma. So it was that through flavors we realized enlightenment and understood, and we ascended to the Bodhisattva level. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. We believe the contemplation of flavors to be the best method.”

[5] Bhadrapāla and his sixteen Bodhisattva companions stood up in the assembly and bowed at the Buddha’s feet. Bhadrapāla said respectfully to the Buddha: “In the past, when we heard the Buddha’s Awe Inspiring Royal Voice speak about the Dharma, we followed him into the monastic life. When it was time to bathe, I followed the custom and entered the bathhouse. Suddenly, upon contact with the water, I understood that the water was neither washing away the dirt nor washing my body. In the midst of this I became tranquil as I understood that there was nothing there.

“I have never forgotten that event from that lifetime until this one, and now I have followed the Buddha Śākyamuni into the monastic life and need no further instruction. The Buddha has named me Bhadrapāla. The wondrousness of tangible objects has been revealed to me, and I am now a child of the Buddha. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. Having considered what I have attained, I believe that the contemplation of tangible objects is the best method.”

[6] Mahākāśyapa stood up with Bhikṣuṇī Purple-Golden Radiance and others, and they bowed at the Buddha’s feet. Mahākāśyapa said respectfully to the Buddha: “When the Buddha Sun, Moon, and Lamplight appeared in this world during a previous eon, I had the opportunity to follow him, to hear the Dharma, and to study and practice it. After that Buddha entered nirvana, I made offerings to his relics, and I lit lamps in order to perpetuate his radiance. I gilded an image of that Buddha so that it shone with a purple-golden radiance. From that time onward, in life after life, my body has always been perfect and flawless and has shone with a purple-golden light. Bhikṣuṇī Purple-Golden Radiance and these others with me were my followers, and together we made a commitment to become enlightened.

“What I contemplated was the diminishing and perishing of the sixth kind of object — the objects of cognition. Simply by the practice of contemplating the emptiness and stillness of these mental objects, and thereby entering a samādhi of cessation, I am able, with both body and mind, to pass through a hundred thousand eons as if they lasted no longer than a snap of the fingers. So it was that I became an Arhat by contemplating the emptiness of objects of cognition. The World-Honored One has declared me foremost in the practice of beneficial asceticism. The wondrousness of objects of cognition was

revealed to me, and I put an end to all outflows. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. Considering what I have attained, I believe that the contemplation of the objects of cognition is the best method.”

[7] Aniruddha then stood up, bowed at the Buddha's feet, and said to him respectfully: “When I first entered the monastic life, I was too fond of sleep. The Thus-Come One admonished me, saying that I was no better than an animal. After the Buddha scolded me, I rebuked myself and wept. For seven days I did not sleep, and as a result I went blind in both eyes.

“The World-Honored One taught me a vajra samādhi of taking delight in illuminative vision. As a result, without using my eyes I could see everything in all ten directions with penetrating accuracy and clarity, just as one might see a piece of fruit in the palm of one's hand. The Thus-Come One verified my understanding. So it was that I became an Arhat. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I believe that to turn the faculty of seeing around and trace it back to its source is the best method.”

[8] Kṣudrapanthaka stood up, bowed at the Buddha's feet, and said to him respectfully: “I have a poor memory and have little learning. When I first encountered the Buddha, heard the Dharma, and entered the monastic life, I tried for a hundred days to memorize a single line of one of the Thus-Come One's verses. But when I had learned the second part of the line, I could no longer remember the first part, and when I had learned the first part of the line again, I could no longer remember the second part.

“The Buddha took pity on me for being so slow, and he instructed me to find a quiet place where I could regulate my breathing. I contemplated my breath in the most minute detail until I could discern in every instant its arising, continuing, diminishing, and ceasing. All of a sudden my mind was freed from every impediment such that my outflows were ended. So it was that I became an Arhat. I took my place at the Buddha's feet, and he verified that I needed no further instruction. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I believe that contemplating the emptiness of the breath is the best method.”

[9] Gavāṃpatī stood up, bowed at the Buddha's feet, and said to him respectfully: “I committed an offense in the karma of speech. Once, during an eon in the past, I insulted an elder monk, and as a result, in life after life I have suffered from an illness which causes me to chew like a cow. The Thus-Come One showed me how, by practicing a Dharma of the mind-ground, I could make all flavors become one and so be purified. By this practice my distinction-making mind ceased, and I entered samādhi. Then my contemplation was that the knowledge of flavors does not come from the tongue-faculty and does not come from any object of taste. By means of this contemplation, I transcended all worldly outflows. Within, I let go of my mind and body, and without, I took my leave of this world. I left the three realms of existence far behind; I was like a bird escaping from its cage. I departed from all impurity and put an end to my defilements, and my Dharma-eye became clear. So it was that I became an Arhat. The Thus-Come One himself verified that I need no further instruction. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I believe that redirecting the awareness of flavor away from the flavors and back to itself is the best method.”

[10] Pilindavatsa stood up, bowed at the Buddha's feet, and said to him respectfully: “After I had first committed myself to following the Buddha on the Path, I heard the Thus-Come One say many times that nothing in this world can bring true joy. One day, as I was reflecting upon this teaching during my alms round in the city, I failed to notice a poisonous thorn lying in the road. I stepped on it, and pain suffused my entire body. I reflected on the sensation: I was aware of a deep pain, but I was also aware of my awareness of the pain, and I realized that in the pure mind there is neither pain nor awareness of pain. I had this further thought: how can it be that one body has two awarenesses? I held fast to this thought, and before long my body and mind became suddenly empty. During the next twenty-one days my outflows gradually ceased. So it was that I became an Arhat. The Buddha himself verified that I need no further instruction. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I believe that to purify one's tactile awareness until the body is forgotten is the best

method.”

[11] Subhūti stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “Ever since a time during the eons of the remote past, my mind has been without impediment, and I have been able to remember as many of my past lives as there are sand-grains in the River Ganges. Even in my mother’s womb, I have been aware of the stillness of emptiness. I have understood that everything throughout the ten directions is empty, and I have also led other beings to understand that all is empty. The Thus-Come One revealed to me that the essential nature of our awareness is true emptiness and that the essential nature of emptiness is perfect understanding. So it was that I became an Arhat, and I immediately entered the sea of the magnificent, luminous emptiness of the Thus-Come Ones. My wisdom and my vision were then the same as the Buddha’s. He verified that I needed no further instruction and that I had no equal in my achievement of liberation through understanding that all is empty. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I understood that all is empty and also that what understands emptiness and the emptiness that is understood are empty as well. To return the cognitive faculty to purity so that all phenomena are understood to be empty: that is the best method.”

[12] Śāriputra stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “Ever since a time during the eons of the remote past, my eye-consciousness has been pure. Thus for as many lifetimes as there are sand-grains in the River Ganges, I have been able in a single glance to understand without impediment the various changing phenomena, both worldly and world-transcending. I once met the Kāśyapa brothers walking together along a road. I joined them, and they explained to me the doctrine of causes and conditions. I thereupon woke up to the boundlessness of the mind. I followed the Buddha into the monastic life. The clarity of my visual awareness was perfected, and I became utterly fearless. So it was that I became an Arhat and the Buddha’s senior disciple. I was reborn from the Buddha’s mouth — reborn by being transformed by the Dharma. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I myself was able to verify that my eye-consciousness had become radiant with light, and when that light reached its ultimate intensity, it illuminated the wisdom and vision of the Buddhas. I believe that this is the best method.”

[13] The Bodhisattva Universal Goodness<sup>24</sup> stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “I have been a prince in the Dharma in the assemblies of as many Thus-Come Ones as there are sand-grains in the River Ganges. Throughout all ten directions, the Thus-Come Ones teach their disciples who have an innate propensity for the path of the Bodhisattva to undertake the practice of universal goodness — the practice for which I am named.

“World-Honored One, with my ear-consciousness I am aware of the thoughts and viewpoints of every individual being, including the beings in worlds that are beyond still other worlds as many as the sand-grains in the River Ganges. Whenever any of these beings even considers undertaking the practices of Universal Goodness, I generate hundreds of thousands of distinct bodies, and mounted on my six-tusked elephant, I go separately to the places where these beings are. Even if a being is heavily impeded and is not able to see me, I circle my hand on the crown of that being’s head to lend support and give comfort in order to help him succeed in his practice. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I have described the basis of my practice: my mind listens with the complete understanding that results from free and unattached discernment. That is the best method.”

[14] Sundarananda stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “When I first entered the monastic life to follow the Buddha on the Path, I kept the precepts perfectly, but in trying to enter samādhi, my mind was always too scattered and too easily distracted so that I could not put an end to my outflows. The World-Honored One taught Mahā-Kauṣṭhila and me to focus our attention on the whiteness visible at the tip of the nose. After three weeks of focusing my attention in this way, my breath looked like smoke as it entered and left my nostrils. My body and mind shone with an inner light that illuminated the entire world. Everything became as clear and as pure as crystal. The smokiness of the breath in my nostrils was gradually refined until it became white. My true mind was

revealed and my outflows were ended. My in-breath and out-breath were transformed into light that shone upon worlds throughout all ten directions. So it was that I became an Arhat. The World-Honored One predicted that in the future I would realize perfect enlightenment. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I refined my breath until at length it shone with light, and when the light shone everywhere, my outflows were ended. This is the best method.”

[15] Then Pūrṇamaitrāyaṇīputra stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “Ever since a time during the eons of the remote past, I have been able to speak with unimpeded eloquence. When I have explained suffering and emptiness, I have penetrated deeply into ultimate reality. Indeed I have been able to give subtle and wondrous instruction to the assembly in the hidden gateways to the Dharma taught by as many Thus-Come Ones as there are sand-grains in the River Ganges. In doing so, I have become completely fearless.

“Knowing that I was endowed with great eloquence, the World-Honored One instructed me to use the sound of my voice to propagate the Dharma. I followed the Buddha as his assistant in turning the Wheel, and so it was that by means of the Lion’s Roar, I became an Arhat. The World-Honored One verified that my skill in speaking the Dharma was without peer. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. With the sound of Dharma I overcame adversaries and subdued demons, and I put an end to my outflows. This then is the best method.”

[16] Upāli then stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “I was the one who accompanied the Buddha when he escaped the city and left his household. I was there to watch the Thus-Come One as he diligently practiced austerities for six years. I myself saw the Thus-Come One subdue demons, bring under his influence the followers of wrong paths, and free himself from the outflows of worldly greed and desire. The Buddha instructed me in the precepts that I had received, and I gradually mastered the three thousand kinds of awe-inspiring deportment with their eighty thousand subtle aspects of demeanor. I purified my conduct by following the fundamental precepts and the precautionary regulations. My body became still and my mind vanished. So it was that I became an Arhat. Now I am the precept master in the Thus-Come One’s assembly. He himself verified that I follow the precepts with my mind and with my conduct. Everyone in the assembly sees me as a leader. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I learned to govern my conduct until my body was at ease in being governed, and next I gradually learned to govern my mind until my thoughts accorded naturally with what is right. Only then did both my body and my mind gain unobstructed understanding. This is the best method.”

[17] Great Maudgalyāyana then stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “Once when I was on the road seeking alms, I met the three Kāśyapa brothers — Uruvilvā, Gayā, and Nadī — and they proclaimed the Thus-Come One’s explanation of the profound principles of causation. Immediately I resolved to become enlightened, and my mind was entirely free of impediment. The Thus-Come One kindly accepted me, and then the precept robe suddenly appeared on my body while my hair and beard all at once fell from me. Now I travel throughout all ten directions with nothing to impede me. My spiritual powers were revealed and are now esteemed as unsurpassed. So it was that I became an Arhat. Not only the World-Honored One, but Thus-Come Ones throughout the ten directions praise me for the perfect clarity, purity, ease, and fearlessness with which I exercise my spiritual powers. The Buddha has asked how we broke through to enlightenment. I used the method of returning the mind-consciousness to its pure source so that the light of my mind shone forth and revealed the turbid flux within. That flux gradually subsided until it became brilliantly clear. That is the best method.”

[18] Then Fire-Head approached the Buddha, put his palms together, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “I often recall that many long eons ago, I was afflicted with an excess of sexual desire. At that time there was in the world a Buddha named King of Emptiness, who said that a blazing fire grows in people with too much sexual desire. He taught me to observe the flow of hot and cold energies along the bones all through my body. A spiritual light became focused within me and

transformed my excessive desire into the fire of wisdom. Since then, all the Buddhas I have served have given me the name ‘Fire-Head.’ So it was that I became an Arhat on the strength of the Blazing Fire Samādhi. I made a great vow: that whenever someone is about to become a Buddha, I will serve as a spiritual warrior and will come to subdue that person’s demons and adversaries. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I closely observed the places of warmth in my body until they became unobstructed and there could be free movement through them. A magnificent light blazed forth in my mind and lit the way to supreme enlightenment. This then is the best method.”

[19] Then the Bodhisattva Ground-Leveler stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “I can recall being a monk during the time that the Thus-Come One Universal Illumination was present in the world. It was my constant labor then to carry in sand or dirt to level roadways or to build bridges wherever highways or fords were so narrow or so dangerous as to obstruct cart traffic or to cause injury to horses. Moreover, during the time that countless Buddhas appeared in the world, I applied myself with diligence to the laborious task of carrying goods for people. I would go to the gates of towns, take up the goods, set them down at their destination, and then walk away without seeking any payment. And when there was a widespread famine during the time that the Buddha Viśvabhū was in the world, I would carry both goods and people on my back, and whether I carried them for a short or long distance, I would accept only a small coin. If an ox cart was mired in mud, I would free it by applying my spiritual powers to push the cart until its wheels could turn freely.

“At one time, the king of that country invited the Buddha Viśvabhū to partake of a vegetarian feast. I leveled the road that the Buddha Viśvabhū was to take and then waited there for him by the roadside. That Thus-Come One circled his hand on the crown of my head and told me, ‘You should level the ground of your mind. Then the ground throughout the entire world will become level as well.’ Immediately my mind opened, and I saw that my body was in part composed of particles of the primary element earth and that these particles were not different from the particles of which the world is made. I saw that the inherent nature of these particles was such that they could never actually come into contact with each other. Even the particles of which clashing swords are composed do not collide. In this way I learned how to be patient when no mental objects arise. So it was that I became an Arhat. I then resolved to advance through the Bodhisattva’s stages. I listened to the Thus-Come Ones proclaim this wondrous lotus flower which was the basis for my attaining the Buddha’s wisdom and vision. My understanding was verified, and I now serve as a leader in this assembly.

“The Buddha has asked how we broke through to enlightenment. By attentive contemplation I realized that the particles of the primary element earth of which my body is composed are no different from the particles of the primary element earth of which the world is partly composed. Fundamentally, they are all the Matrix of the Thus-Come One; their manifestation as particles is an illusion. When they disappeared, my understanding was complete, and I entered upon the path to enlightenment. This then is the best method.”

[20] The Pure Youth Moonlight stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “I can remember when a Buddha named Water and Sky was in the world, as many eons ago as there are sand grains in the River Ganges. He taught Bodhisattvas to enter samādhi through the contemplative practice of insight into the fundamental nature of water. My contemplation was that all the fluids in my body share the same fundamental nature. I began by contemplating saliva and mucus, and then phlegm, stomach acid, marrow, blood, urine, excrement, and so forth. In all the fluids that circulate through my body, my contemplation was that the fundamental nature of water is the same. I saw too that the water inside my body is not different from the water outside my body. Even as far away as the Fragrant Seas of the Royal Floating-Banner Lands, the fundamental nature of water is one and the same.

“At this stage, when I was first striving to perfect this contemplation, I was aware of only the water in my body, although I still understood that I had a body. I was a monk at the time, and once when I was sitting quietly in my room, a young disciple of mine peeked in to the room through a window.

Seeing nothing but water in the room, the boy in his ignorance took up a small piece of tile and tossed it into the water. It hit the water with a splash. He skipped away, looking back over his shoulder. As I emerged from samādhi, I felt a sharp pain in my heart. It was like the pain Śāriputra felt upon encountering a hostile ghost. I thought to myself, ‘I am already an Arhat, and for a long time I have not created any conditions that would lead to illness. How is it then that this pain has arisen in my heart? Does this mean that I have retreated?’

“At that moment the boy ran up to me and told me what he had done. I instructed him: ‘When you see the water again, open the door immediately, wade into the water, pick up the piece of tile, and go out again.’

“The boy listened respectfully to my instructions, and after I had again entered samādhi, he saw the piece of tile in the water exactly as before. He opened the door, removed the tile, and went out. I emerged from samādhi, and my body was again free of pain.

“During the time that I was making my contemplations, I met countless Buddhas. At length, when the Thus-Come One Royal Self-Mastery and Spiritual Powers Vast as Mountains and Seas was in the world, my body vanished. Then the fundamental nature of the water in my body and of all the waters of the Fragrant Seas in worlds throughout the ten directions merged into true emptiness so that they were one and the same, without the slightest difference. Now the Thus-Come One has given me the title ‘Pure Youth,’ and I have joined the assembly of Bodhisattvas.

“The Buddha asked how we broke through to enlightenment. I understood that water, as it flows and circulates, in its fundamental nature is everywhere the same, and so I understood how to be patient when no mental objects arise. My enlightenment was perfected. This is the best method.”

[21] The Dharma-Prince Brilliance of Lapis Lazuli stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “I can remember when a Buddha named Infinite Voice was in the world, as many eons ago as there are sand-grains in the River Ganges. He taught Bodhisattvas that the wondrous understanding which is our original enlightenment may be attained by making this contemplation: the world and beings’ bodies are unreal phenomena that are made to move by the power of the primary element wind.

“Accordingly, I contemplated how the world is established; I contemplated how time moves through it; I contemplated how my body moves and then is still, and how thoughts move in my mind. I understood that all these movements are fundamentally identical. None of them is different from the others. I came to understand that it is the nature of all movement to arise from nowhere and to go nowhere. The countless numbers of deluded beings throughout the ten directions are equally unreal. In the billion worlds that make up this great system of worlds, beings are indeed like a swarm of mosquitoes trapped in a jar, droning in their confusion, buzzing madly in their confinement. After meeting the Buddha Infinite Voice, I was able to be patient when no mental objects arose. My mind opened, and in the east I saw the Land of the Unmoving Buddha. There I became a Dharma-Prince in the service of Buddhas throughout the ten directions. My body and mind gave forth light that shone through all things without obstruction.

“The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I awakened to my enlightened mind through the contemplative insight that the primary element wind has no essential attributes of its own. I entered samādhi, and together with Buddhas throughout the ten directions, I transmitted the teaching of the wondrous One Mind. This is the best method.”

[22] The Bodhisattva Matrix of Space stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “When the Thus-Come One and I were with the Buddha Light of Samādhi, my body became infinite. Then four great and precious pearls that I held in my hands illuminated countless Buddha-lands throughout the ten directions, and I saw that all these lands were as empty as space. Then my mind was like a great flawless mirror in which there shone ten kinds of subtle, wondrous, magnificent lights that illuminated all ten directions to the ends of space. All the Royal Banner Lands were reflected in this mirror and thereupon were drawn into my body without conflicting with it, since

my body was the same as space. I became skilled in entering an infinite number of lands, in which I did the great work of the Buddhas and developed a great power to respond to beings in accord with what they require.

“This great spiritual power arose through my attentive contemplation that the first four primary elements have no essential attributes of their own; that they come into being and cease to be as a result of deluded acts of mind; and that space and the lands of the Buddhas are one and the same — no different at all. It was through this contemplation that I understood, and I learned to be patient when no mental objects arise. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I contemplated the boundlessness of space and entered samādhi. In this way my wondrous powers reached a luminous perfection. This is the best method.”

[23] The Bodhisattva Maitreya stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “I can recall the time when a Buddha named Brilliance of Sun, Moon, and Lamp was in the world; it was as many eons ago as there are motes of dust. I entered the monastic life as a disciple of that Buddha. At that time I was deeply preoccupied with a wish to be well known. I enjoyed cultivating friendships with eminent families of the nobility. That World-Honored One then taught me to enter samādhi by focusing on a contemplation that all things exist only in consciousness. While in this samādhi, I have throughout many eons served as many Buddhas as there are sand grains in the River Ganges. My yearning for fame vanished without a trace. Eventually, during the time when the Buddha Blazing Lamp was in the world, I brought to an unsurpassed wondrous perfection this samādhi of consciousness-only. I then understood that all the lands of the Buddhas throughout all space — both lands which are partly pure and partly impure and lands which are entirely pure — exist only within consciousness. World-Honored One, because I understood in this way that all things exist only in consciousness, I understood that it is from the true nature of consciousness that all Buddhas come forth. Thus, in accordance with predictions, I have taken my place as the one who will be the next Buddha.

“The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. I focused on a practice of contemplating that everything in the ten directions exists only in consciousness. My mind gained perfect understanding, and I understood the true nature of reality. I left far behind any dependence on what is external and freed myself forever from incessant categorizing. I learned to be patient with the state of mind in which no mental objects arise. This then is the best method.”

[24] Then the Dharma-Prince Great Strength stood up with fifty-two Bodhisattva companions. They bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and the Bodhisattva Great in Strength said respectfully to the Buddha: “I can recall the time when a Buddha named Infinite Light was in the world, as many eons ago as there are sand-grains in the River Ganges. During that eon, twelve Thus-Come Ones appeared in succession, and the last of these, the Buddha Light Surpassing the Sun and Moon, taught me the samādhi of mindfulness of the Buddha.

“Consider someone who is always thinking of another person. This second person, though, has completely forgotten about the first person. Even if these two people were to meet, they might as well not have met, and even if they were to catch sight of one another, they might as well not have seen each other. But consider two other people who always have each other in mind so much so that they will be, in lifetime after lifetime, as inseparable as a man and his shadow. Similarly, the Thus-Come Ones in all ten directions think of all beings with compassion, just as a mother always thinks of her child. If the child were to run away from home, the mother’s thinking of him will be of no use. But if the child is mindful of the mother, just as she is of him, the two will be inseparable in lifetime after lifetime. In the same way, beings who are always mindful of the Buddha, always thinking of the Buddha, are certain to see the Buddha now or in the future. They will never be far from Buddhas, and their minds will awaken by themselves without any special effort. Such people may be said to be adorned with fragrance and light, just as people who have been in the presence of incense will naturally smell sweet.

“The basis of my practice was mindfulness of the Buddha. I became patient with the state of mind in which no mental objects arise. Now when people of this world are mindful of the Buddha, I act as

their guide to lead them to the Pure Land. The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. In order to enter samādhi, I chose no other method than to gather in the six faculties while continuously maintaining a pure mindfulness of the Buddha. This is the best method.”

2

The Bodhisattva Who Hears  
the Cries of the World

[25] Then the Bodhisattva Who Hears the Cries of the World stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and said to him respectfully: “World-Honored One, I can recall the time when a Buddha named He Who Hears the Cries of the World was in this world, as many eons ago as there are sand grains in the River Ganges. Before this Buddha I made the resolution to become fully awakened, and he instructed me to enter samādhi through a practice of hearing and contemplating.

“I began with a practice based on the enlightened nature of hearing. First I redirected my hearing inward in order to enter the current of the sages. Then external sounds disappeared. With the direction of my hearing reversed and with sounds stilled, both sounds and silence ceased to arise. So it was that, as I gradually progressed, what I heard and my awareness of what I heard came to an end. Even when that state of mind in which everything had come to an end disappeared, I did not rest. My awareness and the objects of my awareness were emptied, and when that process of emptying my awareness was wholly complete, then even that emptying and what had been emptied vanished. Coming into being and ceasing to be themselves ceased to be. Then the ultimate stillness was revealed.

“All of a sudden I transcended the worlds of ordinary beings, and I also transcended the worlds of beings who have transcended the ordinary worlds. Everything in the ten directions was fully illuminated, and I gained two remarkable powers. First, my mind ascended to unite with the fundamental, wondrous, enlightened mind of all Buddhas in all ten directions, and my power of compassion became the same as theirs. Second, my mind descended to unite with all beings of the six destinies in all ten directions such that I felt their sorrows and their prayerful yearnings as my own. World-Honored One, because I had made offerings to the Thus-Come One Who Hears the Cries of the World, I received from that Thus-Come One a hidden transmission of a vajra-like samādhi such that my power of compassion became the same as the Buddhas’. I was then able to go to all lands and appear in thirty-two forms that respond to what beings require.

[1] “World Honored One, suppose there are Bodhisattvas who have entered samādhi and have advanced in their practice such that they are free from outflows. If these Bodhisattvas wish to reach a more sublime understanding, I will appear to them as a Buddha, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to liberation.

[2] “Suppose there are sages who still need instruction but who have quieted their minds and have gained wondrous insight. If they wish to attain a more sublime and wondrous understanding, I will appear to them as a Solitary Sage who has reached enlightenment on his own, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to liberation.

[3] “Suppose there are sages who still need instruction but who have broken free of the links in the chain of dependent co-arising. Because they have broken free, their transcendent nature appears. If they wish to attain a more sublime and wondrous understanding, I will appear to them as a Solitary Sage who has become enlightened through the contemplation of the conditioned world, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to liberation.

[4] “Suppose there are sages who still need instruction but whose minds dwell in emptiness, in accordance with the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, as they practice on the Path that leads to nirvana. If they wish to attain a more sublime understanding, I will appear to them as a Hearer of the Teaching, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to liberation.

[5] “Suppose, further, that there are beings who clearly understand the desires of the mind, do not engage in the activities of desire, and wish to have bodies that are pure. I will appear to them as a Brahma King, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to liberation.

[6] “To beings who desire to be celestial lords and to govern the heavens, I will appear as Lord Śakra, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[7] “To beings who wish for a body that has the freedom and ease to roam throughout the ten directions, I will appear as the lord of the Heaven of Delight in Creating, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[8] “To beings who wish for a body that has the freedom and ease to fly through space, I will appear as the lord of the Heaven of Pleasure Derived from What Others Create. I will instruct these gods in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[9] “To beings who would like to govern ghosts and spirits in order to protect their countries, I will appear as a great celestial general. I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[10] “To beings who would like to rule a world in order to protect its inhabitants, I will appear as one of the Four Celestial Kings. I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[11] “To beings who would like to be born into a celestial palace and to command ghosts and spirits, I will appear as a prince of one of the Four Celestial Kingdoms. I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[12] “To beings who would like to be kings among people, I will appear as a human king. I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[13] “To beings who would like to be heads of clans and would like to command everyone’s respect and deference, I will appear as an elder, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[14] “To beings who would like to be able to discuss celebrated writings and to live a pure life, I will appear as a layperson and will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[15] “To beings who would like to govern a country or to decide the affairs of a province or a district, I will appear as a minister of state, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[16] “To beings who would like to employ numerology and other esoteric disciplines out of a wish to protect and nurture themselves, I will appear as a Brahmin, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[17] “To men who would like to learn about becoming a monk and about observing the monastic precepts and regulations, I will appear as a monk, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[18] “To women who would like to learn about becoming a nun and about observing the monastic precepts and regulations, I will appear as a nun, and I will instruct them in Dharmas that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[19] “To men who would like to observe the five precepts of the laity, I will appear as a precepted layman, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[20] “To women who would like to ground themselves on the five precepts of the laity, I will appear as a precepted laywoman, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[21] “To virtuous women of high standing who would like to manage the affairs of a household or of a country, I will appear as a queen, or as the wife of a lord, or else as some other noblewoman, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[22] “To young men who wish to remain celibate, I will appear as a pure young man, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[23] “To young women who wish to remain celibate, never to be violated, I will appear as a pure young woman, and I will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[24] “To celestial beings who no longer wish to be celestial beings, I will appear in celestial form and will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[25] “To dragons who no longer wish to be dragons, I will appear as a dragon and will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[26] “To yakṣas who wish to be free of being yakṣas, I will appear as a yakṣa and will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[27] “To gandharvas who wish to be free of being gandharvas, I will appear as a gandharva and will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[28] “To asuras who wish to be free of being asuras, I will appear as an asura and will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[29] “To kinnaras who wish to be free of being kinnaras, I will appear as a kinnara and will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[30] “To mahoragas who wish to be free of being mahoragas, I will appear as a mahoraga and will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[31] “To beings who enjoy being human and who wish to continue as humans, I will appear in human form and will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

[32] “To nonhuman beings who wish to be free of being nonhuman— whether they have bodies or are bodiless, whether they are capable of cognition or are not capable of cognition — I will appear to them as they are and will instruct them in the Dharma that will lead them to fulfillment of their wish.

“These are the thirty-two pure and wondrous forms in which I appear in all lands in order to respond to what beings require. I accomplish this in samādhi, which I enter by redirecting my faculty of hearing inward to merge with the enlightened nature of hearing within, until the wondrous power of my self-mastery becomes effortless.

“World-Honored One, through the effortless, wondrous power of my vajra-solid samādhi, which I enter by redirecting my faculty of hearing inward to merge with the enlightened nature of hearing, I feel, as if they were my own, the sorrows and yearnings of all beings in the six destinies in all ten directions and in the three periods of time. Therefore, by using both body and mind, I can cause all beings to develop such perfect merit that they will have nothing to fear in fourteen kinds of dangerous situations.

“First, because I did not listen to sounds and instead contemplated the listener within, I can now hear the cries of suffering beings throughout the ten directions, and I can bring about their liberation.

“Second, I was able to turn my awareness around and restore it, and therefore, should beings be caught in a conflagration, I can make sure that they are not burned.

“Third, since I was able to turn my awareness around and restore it, I can make sure that beings who are adrift in a flood will not be drowned.

“Fourth, because I have put an end to deluded acts of mind, and so have no thoughts of harming or killing, I can make sure that any being who enters the realms of ghosts will not be harmed by them.

“Fifth, when I had succeeded in merging my faculty of hearing with the enlightened nature of hearing, my six faculties dissolved into each other to become one with my faculty of hearing. Therefore, if beings are about to be attacked, I can cause the attackers’ blades to shatter so that these beings will suffer no hurt, any more than water will be hurt by a knife that is plunged into it, or any more than light will be affected by a puff of wind.

“Sixth, my hearing was infused with an essential brilliance that illuminated the entire Dharma-Realm and dispelled the darkness of all hidden places. Therefore, I can ensure that beings will be invisible to any yakṣas, rākṣasas, kumbhāṇḍas, piśācas, pūtanās, or other such ghosts that might approach them.

“Seventh, sound itself completely dissolved as I reversed the direction of my hearing and became free of distorted perceptions of sense-objects. Therefore, if a being is confined by a cage, I can make that cage disappear.

“Eighth, when sound was extinguished once and for all and my hearing was perfected, my kindness gained an all-pervading power. Therefore, should beings be traveling on dangerous roads, I can make sure that they will not be robbed by highwaymen.

“Ninth, once my faculty of hearing had become merged with the enlightened nature of hearing and so had gained independence from perceived objects, then no object, no matter how enticing, could affect me. Therefore, I can cause beings who have a great deal of desire to break free of their desire.

“Tenth, once sounds were so purified that they ceased being objects of perception, then the ear-faculty and its objects became completely inter-fused so that there was nothing that perceived and nothing that was perceived. Therefore, I can cause beings burdened by anger and hatred to be free of their enmity.

“Eleventh, once perceived objects had disappeared from my mind as I turned the light of my understanding inward, my body and mind and the entire Dharma-Realm were as bright and translucent as crystal. Therefore I can bring freedom from stupidity to beings whose natures have been so darkened by their dullness that they have had no intention of ever becoming enlightened.

“Twelfth, once perceived objects became inter-fused and returned to the enlightened nature of hearing, I could travel to distant lands without leaving the place for awakening, and all at the same time, without any disruption, I could travel among the worlds. There I can make offerings to an infinite number of Buddhas throughout all ten directions and serve each of these Buddhas as a Dharma-Prince. For that reason, should childless beings anywhere in the ten directions wish for sons, I can cause them

to have sons who will be virtuous, blessed, and wise.

Thirteenth, once my six faculties perfected an interconnected functioning and became united in their capacity to clearly perceive everything in all the worlds throughout the ten directions, my mind became like a great flawless mirror that reflected the emptiness of the Matrix of the Thus-Come One. I reverently served an infinite number of Thus-Come Ones and thoroughly mastered esoteric aspects of the Dharma. Therefore, should childless beings anywhere in the ten directions wish for daughters, I can cause them to have daughters who are upright, blessed, virtuous, compliant, wholesome in appearance, and liked and respected by all.

“Fourteenth, sixty-two times as many Dharma-Princes as there are sand grains in the River Ganges appear in each of the worlds of this system of a billion worlds, with its hundreds of billions of suns and moons, to practice the Dharma and to act as exemplars in order to teach beings how to transform themselves. With skill and wisdom, these Dharma-Princes respond in various ways to what various beings require. I have broken through to the fundamental source of my ear-faculty, thus revealing the ear as a gateway to the wondrous. My body and mind, in a subtle and wondrous way, have encompassed and pervaded the Dharma-Realm. Therefore, I can cause someone who recites my name to gain as many blessings and as much merit as someone else would gain from reciting the names of all those multitudes of Dharma-Princes — sixty-two times as many of them as there are sand grains in the River Ganges. The blessings and merit that those two reciters will gain will be the same. World-Honored One, because, by means of my spiritual practice, I have completely broken through to enlightenment, the power of my name alone is equal to the power of all those many other names.

“In this way I cause beings to develop such merit that they will have nothing to fear in fourteen kinds of dangerous situations.

“Further, World-Honored One, because I have broken through to enlightenment and have reached the final destination of the Supreme Path, I have also mastered four immeasurably efficacious and wondrous powers.

“First, once I had realized the wondrousness within the wonder at the heart of my hearing, and once my hearing had disappeared into the essence of my mind, my hearing became indistinguishable from seeing, smelling, tasting, tactile awareness, and cognition. All six were completely inter-fused into a single pure and magnificent awareness. Therefore, I can assume many different and wondrous forms and can proclaim numberless esoteric and efficacious mantras. I may appear with one head, three heads, five heads, seven heads, nine heads, eleven heads, as many as one hundred and eight heads, or a thousand heads or ten thousand heads and more, even as many as eighty-four thousand indestructible heads. I may appear with two arms, four arms, six arms, eight arms, ten arms, twelve arms, or with fourteen, sixteen, eighteen, twenty, or twenty-four arms, or with as many as one hundred and eight arms, or with a thousand arms, or ten thousand arms and more, even as many as eighty-four thousand arms, with each hand forming a mudra. My hands may have two eyes, three eyes, four eyes, nine eyes, as many as one hundred and eight eyes, or a thousand eyes or ten thousand eyes and more, even as many as eighty-four thousand pure and magnificent eyes. In these forms, by displaying kindness, by inspiring awe, and by manifesting samādhi and wisdom, I can rescue and shelter beings, allowing them to attain great mastery and ease.

“Second, due to my practice of listening and contemplating, I broke free of the six kinds of sense-object such that I was no more obstructed by them than a sound is obstructed by a low wall. Therefore I have the wondrous power to appear in various forms, each of them reciting various mantras. Because these forms and these mantras have the power to deliver beings from danger, I am known in countless lands throughout the ten directions as one who causes beings to have nothing to fear.

“Third, by means of the fundamental, wondrous practice that led me to break through to enlightenment, I reached the pure source of the ear-faculty, and therefore, in whatever worlds I travel to, I can cause beings to disregard their bodies and their valuable possessions in their quest for my compassionate aid.

“Fourth, I have realized the ultimate, which is the Buddha-mind. Therefore, in all lands I can make offerings of precious valuables not only to the Thus-Come Ones throughout all ten directions but also to beings in the six destinies throughout the Dharma-Realm. As a result, those who seek a spouse shall obtain a spouse, those who seek a child shall have a child, those who wish for samādhi shall gain samādhi, those who wish for a long life shall live long, and those who seek the Great Nirvana shall attain it.

“The Buddha has asked us how we broke through to enlightenment. By the means that I have described, I entered through the gateway of the ear-faculty and perfected the inner illumination of samādhi. My mind that had once been dependent on perceived objects developed self mastery and ease. By entering the current of the awakened ones and entering samādhi, I became fully awake. This then is the best method.

“World-Honored One, that other Buddha — that Thus-Come One who is called ‘He Who Hears the Cries of the World’ — praised my mastery of this method for breaking through to enlightenment. Before his great assembly, he bestowed on me his own name, He Who Hears the Cries of the World. Because I hear throughout all ten directions with perfect clarity, my name ‘He Who Hears the Cries of the World’ is known in all the worlds throughout the ten directions.”

Then the World-Honored One, seated on his Lion’s Seat, sent forth a magnificent light from his hands, his feet, and his forehead. The light traveled far to pour down upon the crowns of the heads of as many Thus-Come Ones and Dharma-Prince Bodhisattvas as there are motes of dust throughout the ten directions. And all those Thus-Come Ones, from as many places as there are motes of dust, sent forth from their hands, their feet, and their foreheads magnificent beams of light that poured down upon the crown of the Buddha Śākyamuni’s head and poured down as well upon the great Bodhisattvas and Arhats in the assembly. As the sound of Dharma reverberated from groves and ponds, those beams of light interlaced with each other like the strands of a magnificent net — something no one in the assembly had ever seen before. All gained the ability to enter the vajra-solid samādhi. Then lotus-flowers — some blue, some yellow, some red, some white, each adorned with a hundred gems — floated down together from the heavens, and space throughout the ten directions took on the colors of the seven precious things. The mountains, the rivers, and everything else in this Sāha world all vanished at the same time. Throughout the ten directions, Buddha-lands as many as motes of dust were seen to merge into a single world, while there rang forth everywhere the sounds of chant and song.

### 3

#### The Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī’s Recommendation

Then the Thus-Come One said to the Dharma-Prince Mañjuśrī, “Consider now what has been said by these twenty-five sages — these great Bodhisattvas and these Arhats who need no further instruction — about the methods they used in order to take their first step toward awakening. They all said that theirs was the best method for breaking through to enlightenment. In fact, none of the methods employed by these sages can be ranked as superior or inferior to the others. But now it is Ānanda whom I wish to teach how to become enlightened. Which then of these twenty-five methods of practice is most suitable for beings at Ānanda’s level? And which one, after my nirvana, will lead beings of this world to practice in accord with the Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas and to follow the path to supreme enlightenment? Which of these methods will lead them most easily to success?”

Having respectfully received the Buddha’s instruction, Mañjuśrī stood up, bowed at the Buddha’s feet, and infused with the Buddha’s majestic spirit, responded to his request by speaking these verses:

“Clear is the oceanic nature of enlightenment;  
Flawlessly clear it is, and wondrous at its origin.

But from within that fundamental mind that understands,  
Objects appear, and with creation of these objects then  
The fundamental understanding vanishes.

“Then from confusion and delusion, empty space appears;  
And all the worlds come into being clinging to that space;  
Due to delusion, clarity will turn to solid land;  
Due to false awareness, beings then come forth as well.

“And thus does space arise within the great enlightenment,  
Appearing like a solitary bubble on the sea,  
And thus do beings with outflows and the worlds uncountable  
Arise within that empty space, and when space disappears —  
And when that bubble bursts —  
could the three realms not vanish also?

“Single is the fundamental nature we return to;  
Many are the Dharma-gateways that will bring us there.  
Not one among these sages failed in gaining perfect insight.  
Their methods — some of them directed outward and some inward —  
All will succeed, some rapidly, and some more slowly,  
Once they’ve made their resolution to attain samādhi.

“Objects of sight, entangled with cognition, will become Defiled.  
Essentially, such objects lack transparency,  
And how could objects that one cannot see through clearly  
Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Language and speech require a mix of various sounds  
In order to form words and sentences expressing meanings.  
But words and phrases can’t express all meanings;  
how could sounds Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Odors must be in contact with the nose for us to smell them;  
If nose and odors aren’t in touch, no smelling can occur.  
And since the act of smelling is inconstant;  
how could odors Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Experience of flavors is not part of our true nature;  
For tasting to occur, there must be contact with a flavor.  
Tasting is discontinuous;  
how then could flavors Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Objects of touch are sensed upon their contact with the body;  
Without that contact, no perception of them can take place.  
But contact will be intermittent;  
how could tangibles Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Those inner objects of the mind are what we call defilements;

Since these are objects, each of them must have precise location.  
Observer and observed cannot be everywhere;  
then how Could mental objects guide all beings to enlightenment?

“Although the faculty of seeing does indeed see clearly,  
Still it perceives what lies before it, not what lies behind.  
Of four directions it can see but two at once;  
how could it Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Breath enters in the nostrils, then goes out again;  
however Between each in-breath and each out-breath, there must be a pause.  
The breath is discontinuous;  
how could the nose Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“The tongue, with nothing placed on it, can have no tasting function;  
It senses flavors only when they’re present.  
When dispersed, Awareness of them ceases;  
how then could the tongue Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“What’s true of taste is true of tactile objects and the body:  
They’re not the best for contemplation toward awakening.  
Body and objects, being finite, do not always meet;  
How could the body guide all beings to enlightenment?

“The borders of cognition with the faculty of mind  
Aren’t clear enough for beings to tell which one of them is which.  
Beginners cannot free themselves from thinking, nor from thoughts;  
How could this faculty guide beings toward enlightenment?

“Observe that the eye-consciousness involves a threefold joining;  
It is dependent; basically it has no attributes.  
No independent essence of its own; how could it then  
Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Ear-consciousness, if it’s aware throughout the ten directions,  
Is drawing power from great practice in past lives.  
Beginners’ minds cannot advance into this practice;  
how then Could it guide beings to a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“The contemplation of the nose is an expedient  
That merely focuses the mind upon a single spot.  
But such a focus is confined to just one place;  
how could it Guide all beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Wielding the sounds of words to speak about the Dharma  
Wakens the speaker, based on past accomplishment.  
But words and sentences do not lack outflows;  
thus could speech Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Avoiding violation of the precepts regulates  
The body only; such restraints do not apply to beings Who have no body.  
How could what does not apply to all guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Spiritual powers are based on practice in past lives;  
such powers Are not related to cognition’s making of distinctions.  
There has to be an object for cognition to occur;  
How could cognition then guide beings to enlightenment?

“Consider contemplating earth:  
it’s solid and opaque;  
One can’t move through it.  
What’s conditional must lack The nature of a sage.  
How could this contemplation, then, Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Consider contemplating water:  
contemplating thus Involves cognition,  
which is neither true nor real.  
Contemplation by itself won’t reach the state that’s thus;  
Then how could water guide all beings toward enlightenment?

“Consider contemplating fire:  
disdaining one’s desire,  
Is not the same as ending it.  
This contemplation, then,  
Is not a method suited to beginners.  
How could fire Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Consider contemplating wind:  
movement and stillness Must be opposites,  
and opposition cannot be a basis for awakening.  
Thus how could wind Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Consider contemplating space:  
space lacks awareness,  
Beginning from primordial darkness.  
Being unaware is not the same as full awakening.  
How then could space Guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“Consider contemplating consciousness:  
this consciousness Is intermittent.  
Its existence in the mind, as well,  
Is only an illusion.  
How then could this consciousness guide beings toward a breakthrough to enlightenment?

“No practice is entirely continuous,  
So even mindfulness perforce arises and must halt.  
An intermittent practice’s results are intermittent.  
How could awareness guide all beings to enlightenment?

“I now respectfully say this to the World-Honored One —  
The One who came to be a Buddha in this Sahā world  
In order to transmit to us the true, essential teaching meant for this place —  
I say that purity is found through hearing.  
All those who wish to gain samādhi’s mastery  
will surely find that hearing is the way to enter.

“For leaving suffering behind and gaining liberation,  
How excellent the method  
that the One Who Hears the Cries of the World has just proclaimed!  
Throughout the ages many as the River Ganges’ sands,  
He enters countless Buddha-lands.  
He has the ease of mastery And he bestows his fearlessness on beings in danger.

“Most wondrous is the voice of the One Who Hears the Cries!  
Its sound is pure and like the ocean-tide!  
Throughout the worlds He rescues worldly beings,  
brings them peace, and if they wish,  
He helps them leave the world and reach nirvana everlasting!

“I now can recommend respectfully the practice  
Taught by the One Who Hears the Cries of the World.  
A being whose mind is tranquil hears the sound  
Of drumbeats coming from all ten directions,  
And yet he’ll hear each of the drums distinctly.  
And so our hearing faculty must be the perfect one,  
The one that’s genuine and true.

“The eyes can’t see through objects that are solid;  
The tongue and nose are likewise limited.  
For bodily awareness, contact’s needed,  
And, too, the mind’s chaotic, lacking order.

“But sounds are heard close by and from afar;  
And even walls may fail in blocking them.  
No other faculty’s the equal of our hearing;  
Both true and genuine, it is the one for breaking through.

“We’re capable of hearing sounds and silence both;  
They may be present to the ear or not.  
Though people say that when no sound is present,  
Our hearing must be absent too, in fact  
Our hearing does not lapse.  
It does not cease with silence; neither is it born of sound.  
Our hearing, then, is genuine and true.  
It is the everlasting one.

“And when cognition ceases in a dream,

That does not mean that hearing is suspended.  
The ear's awareness goes beyond mere thought.  
No other faculty, of mind or body,  
Can ever be the equal of our hearing.

“And now, for beings of this Sahā world,  
I have explained the method based on hearing.

“Confused about the nature of our hearing,  
Beings, by permitting their attention to go out pursuing sounds,  
have bound themselves to birth and death's unending cycle.

“Ānanda's erudition just could not prevent  
His falling prey to an improper scheme.  
By heeding sounds, how could he not have fallen?  
But had his striving been against the current,  
Would he not have then avoided error?

“Ānanda, listen closely!  
Aided by the awe-inspiring Power of the Buddha,  
I have now explained to you This regal, genuine, and marvelous samādhi.  
Indestructible, beyond the reach of mundane thought,  
It is the mother of all Buddhas.

“Though you may hear of all the secret Dharma-gateways  
That Buddhas numberless as motes of dust may teach,  
Just learning them is useless  
if you first do not get rid of all your outflows,  
which are based upon desire.  
You've heard and practiced all these Buddhas' Buddha-Dharmas;  
Why haven't you been hearing your own hearing?

“People say that hearing comes about because of sounds,  
Not on its own.  
If that's what you call 'hearing,' though,  
Then when you turn your hearing round and set it free from sounds,  
What name are you to give to that which is set free?

“Return just one of the perceiving faculties  
Back to its source, and all six faculties will then be free.  
For what we hear is mere illusion, like the objects of our vision —  
Like what is seen by one whose eyes are covered by a film.  
The Threefold Realm is like those flowers in an empty sky,  
But turn the hearing inward, and the faculties are cured.  
Their objects vanish, and awareness is completely pure.

“In perfect purity, the brilliance of awareness shines  
Unhindered and in still illumination of all space,  
In contemplating worldly things as the events of dreams.

The young Mātāṅga woman was a figure in a dream.  
Just who was really there with power to entice you?

“Consider this analogy from ordinary life:  
A puppet-master can present illusions — men and women  
Made to move by pulling on a string;  
but if he chooses not to pull upon the string,  
the scene returns to stillness  
and all is shown to be illusion.

“Just so are our six faculties.  
Originally a pure and single understanding, they divide;  
And once divided, each of them makes contact with its objects.  
But then if one of them is redirected inward,  
All six as a result will cease to function separately,  
And their defiling objects vanish instantly.  
Thus our understanding is perfected in a wondrous purity.

“Those who still have remnants of their basic ignorance need more instruction.  
Those whose understanding is perfected,  
Their illumination ultimate —  
these are the Thus-Come Ones.

“Great Assembly! Ānanda!  
Halt the puppet show of your distorted hearing!  
Merely turn your hearing round to listen to your genuine true nature,  
Which is the destination of the Path that is supreme.  
This is the genuine way to break through to enlightenment.

“It is the way that the innumerable Buddhas followed  
Straight to nirvana’s gate.  
All Thus-Come Ones of eons past Succeeded by this method.  
Through this method, Bodhisattvas,  
Too, right now are gaining perfect understanding.

“Among the people of the future,  
Those who undertake a spiritual practice should rely upon this teaching.  
I myself became enlightened by this very method.  
He Who Hears the Cries is not the only one.

“The Buddha, the World-Honored One,  
Made a request that I consider methods  
That will rescue beings who in the Dharma’s ending-time  
Resolve their minds upon attainment of transcendence and nirvana.  
The best of all the methods is the practice  
Taught by the One Who Hears the Cries of the World.

“The sages who attained enlightenment by other means  
Were aided by the Buddha’s awe-inspiring spiritual power,

And each was specially taught how to abandon all affliction.  
Some of these paths are shallow, some go deep;  
these teachings vary.

“I bow now in respect to all the Buddhas,  
And I bow to all their Dharma-treasures  
and to the marvelous ones who have put an end to outflows.  
And may beings of the future  
Be empowered so that they will have no doubts  
That this one method is the most accessible.

“It is the easiest way to reach enlightenment.  
It is the teaching most appropriate For Ānanda  
And for the beings drowning In the Dharma’s ending-time.  
They only need  
This practice of the faculty of hearing  
For them to break through to enlightenment,  
For it surpasses all the other methods.  
It is the genuine path to the true mind.

Then Ānanda and all the others in the great assembly, having received such profound instruction, gained a clear understanding of their faculties and the corresponding consciousnesses. As they contemplated the Buddha’s full awakening and great nirvana, Ānanda and the others were like someone who has traveled far from home on matters of business: although the traveler has not yet been able to return, he knows the road that will lead him home. The entire assembly of beings, ten times as many as the sand-grains of the River Ganges — gods, dragons, and other celestial beings; sages of the Lesser Vehicle who still needed instruction; and others who only recently had made the resolve to become Bodhisattvas — all now discovered their inherent true mind so that they would forever be free of affliction. All opened their pure Dharma-eye. The nun named Nature, upon hearing these verses, became an Arhat. These numberless beings all made the resolution to seek the unsurpassed, correct, and perfect enlightenment.