

IX

Levels of Being

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The Coming into Being of the World of Illusion

Ānanda stood up, bowed at the Buddha's feet, and said to him respectfully, "I and those like me have been so unwise and dull witted as to prefer the mere pursuit of learning to the attempt to put an end to our outflows. But now that the Buddha has kindly given us this instruction, our practice has been corrected. We are thoroughly delighted with the great benefit we have gained.

"World-Honored One, suppose someone has cultivated the Buddha's samādhi in this way but has not yet reached nirvana. What is meant by the stage of 'arid wisdom'? What are the forty-four stages through which the mind must pass in order to reach the goal of spiritual practice? At what stage of mastery does one reach the Ten Grounds? What does it mean to be a Bodhisattva at the stage of 'Equivalent Enlightenment'?"

Having spoken these words, Ānanda bowed to the ground, and everyone in the great assembly gazed up unblinking with respectful admiration as they waited to hear the sound of the Buddha's compassionate voice.

The World-Honored One then praised Ānanda, saying, "Excellent! Excellent! On behalf of all in this great assembly and on behalf of all beings who practice samādhi in the time of the Dharma's ending as they seek to advance in accord with the Great Vehicle, you and others have asked me to point out the supreme right path of self cultivation that will lead them from their mundane state to the great nirvana. You should listen carefully to what I say to you."

Ānanda and the others in the great assembly placed their palms together and let their minds become empty as they waited in silence to receive the teaching.

The Buddha said, "You should know, Ānanda, that the wondrous enlightened nature is endowed with perfect understanding. It is apart from all names and attributes, and in it, at the fundamental level, there are no worlds and no beings. It is because of delusion that there is coming into being, and because there is coming into being, there is ceasing to be. Coming into being and ceasing to be are delusions. When delusion ceases, reality appears. This turning back from duality to reality is called the supreme awakening. It is also called the great nirvana of the Thus-Come Ones.

"Ānanda, you now wish to practice the true samādhi and to realize the great nirvana of the Thus-Come Ones. You should begin by understanding the causes for two distorted phenomena, that is, beings and the worlds in which beings exist. When these two phenomena do not come into being, the true samādhi of the Thus-Come One appears.

"What is the distorted phenomenon that we call beings, Ānanda? The enlightened nature of the true mind that understands is such that its understanding is perfect and complete. But, Ānanda, from this understanding, another understanding may be created as another entity, and from that other entity, a deluded awareness will come into being. Thus from within the original state which has no attributes whatever, that which has definite attributes comes into being.

"Neither what comes into being nor what it comes into being from are based on anything, nor are they a basis for anything. Beings and the worlds they dwell in have no foundation, and yet, despite their having no foundation, beings and the worlds come into being.

"Confusion about the original perfect understanding results in delusion, but this delusion has no essential nature of its own; it is based on nothing. One may wish to return to what is real, but to wish

for the real is already a falsification. The true nature of the suchness of reality is not a reality that one can seek to return to. If one were to try to return to it, one would merely experience something that does not have the attributes of reality.

“Through their mutual interaction, there comes into being what does not really come into being, as well as what does not really abide, what is not really the mind, and what are not really phenomena. From the force of their coming into being, an understanding is created, and its influence leads to activity subject to karma. Similar karma mutually attracts, and because of the karma of this mutual attraction, there is a coming into being and then a ceasing to be. This is the reason for the distorted phenomenon of beings.

“Ānanda, what is the distorted phenomenon of worlds? Because of the existence of the mind and of what the mind observes, there arises the unreal phenomenon of beings divided into individual bodies, and from this, boundaries are established. Yet these bodies and their bound arises are neither based on anything nor a basis for anything. There is no abiding nor any place of abiding; there is only a constant and unending flux. The three periods of time and the four directions of the worlds intersect and combine, and in this way, beings are transformed into any one of twelve classes.

“Thus in this world, because there is movement, there are sounds, and because there are sounds, there are visible objects. Because there are visible objects, there are odors. Because there are odors, there are objects of touch. Because there are objects of touch, there are flavors. Because there are flavors, there are objects of cognition. Because of the karma created by these six kinds of disordered mental activity, the twelve classes of beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth.

“Therefore, because of the visible objects, sounds, odors, flavors, objects of touch, and objects of cognition in this world, beings may be born in succession through the twelve classes, thus making a complete sequence. Beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth, and according to their various distorted attributes, they may be born into this world from an egg, or from a womb, or in the presence of moisture, or via metamorphosis. Some beings are born with bodies that they may or may not make visible, while others may be born without physical form. Some beings are born capable of cognition but lacking a physical body; others are born with their cognitive function inactive. Some beings have physical forms that are not self sufficient, and others sometimes lack and sometimes do not lack physical form. Still other beings have a deficient understanding, and others sometimes lack and sometimes do not lack a cognitive capacity.

Twelve Classes of Beings

[1] “Thus, Ānanda, beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world as a result of illusion, which arises from distorted mental activity. That mental activity combines with vital energies to create eighty-four thousand kinds of disordered predilections for flying or for being submerged. The result is the fetal stage of beings who are born from eggs. These become the fish, birds, turtles, and snakes. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[2] “Further, beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world as a result of impure mingling, which arises from distorted desires. Those desires combine with procreative substances to create eighty-four thousand kinds of disordered predilections for standing upright or on four legs. The result is the fetal stage of beings who are born from wombs. These become the humans, beasts, dragons, and ascetic masters. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[3] “Further, beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world as a result of attachments that arise from distorted inclinations. Those inclinations combine with warmth to create eighty-four thousand kinds of distorted predilections for fluttering motion. The result is the fetal stage of beings who will be born in the presence of moisture. These are the dull witted beings who creep or swim. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[4] “Further, beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world as a result of transformations, which arise from the distorted desire to assume another form. This desire to assume another form, upon contact with another being’s physical nature, combines to create eighty-four thousand kinds of distorted predilections for exchanging the old for the new. The result is the fetal stages of beings that are born by metamorphosis. These are the creatures that fly or crawl. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[5] “Further, beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world as a result of stagnation, which arises from distortions due to hindrance. This hindrance, combining with an attachment to display, produces eighty-four thousand kinds of distorted predilections for glittering and shining. The result is the development of beings who may or may not make their bodies visible. These are the bioluminescent beings of either an auspicious or an inauspicious nature. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[6] “Further, beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world as a result of dispersion, which arises from distortions due to doubt. That doubt combines with darkness to create eighty-four thousand kinds of distorted predilections to avoid visible form. The result is the development of beings who have no physical form. These are the beings who abide in boundless space, or in boundless consciousness, or in infinite nothingness, or at the highest point where cognition is and yet is not absent. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[7] “Further, beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world as a result of deceptive imaginings, which arise from distortions due to shadowy images. Those shadowy images combine with memories to produce eighty-four thousand kinds of predilections for attachment to seclusion and obscurity. The result is the development of beings who are capable of cognition but lack a physical body. These are spirits, ghosts, and phantoms. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[8] “Further, beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world as a result of dullness, which arises from distortions due to mental insufficiency. That insufficiency combines with obtuseness to produce eighty-four thousand kinds of predilections for the drying up of vitality. The result is the

development of beings whose cognitive function is inactive. Their vital spirits come to inhabit earth, wood, metal, or stone. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[9] “Further, beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world as a result of mutual dependency, which arises from distortions due to the assumption of false identities. These false identities combine with impure influences to produce eighty-four thousand kinds of predilection for symbiosis. The result is the development of beings whose physical forms are not self sufficient. These include various kinds of beings, such as sea anemones which rely on shrimp in order to see. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[10] “Further, beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world as a result of an interaction, which arises with the invoking of beings whose fundamental natures are distorted. These invocations combine with the utterance of mantras or spells to produce eighty-four thousand kinds of predilections for being summoned. The result is the development of beings who sometimes lack and sometimes do not lack a physical form. These are the beings who are commanded by mantras, spells, and curses. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[11] “Further, revolving in a cycle of death and rebirth in this world may come about from a false commonality, which arises from distortions due to deception. This deception combines with what is different to produce eighty-four thousand kinds of predilections for making substitutions. The result is the development of beings whose understanding has a deficiency. These are such beings as the potter wasps and other creatures whose bodies develop among those of a different species. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

[12] “Further, revolving in a cycle of death and rebirth in this world may come about from malice, which arises from distortions due to killing. This killing combines with monstrosity to produce eighty-four thousand kinds of thoughts of devouring one’s parents. The result is the development of beings which sometimes lack and sometimes do not lack a cognitive capacity. These are such beings as owls whose young are hatched on the ground and mirror smashing birds that lay their eggs in a toxic fruit. These offspring then feed upon their parents. In their multitudes, they have spread throughout the world.

“These are the twelve classes of beings.”

Three Gradual Steps

A. Avoiding the Plants of the Onion Group

“Ānanda, all twelve of these classes of beings are affected by all twelve of these distortions. Like the disordered and elaborate images that appear when pressure is exerted upon the eye, these distortions completely obscure the wondrous, perfect, pure, true, and understanding mind with deluded and disordered mental activity. Now, however, you wish to practice and to master the samādhi of the Buddhas. You should take three gradual steps in order to eradicate the fundamental factors that are the source of this disordered mental activity. Taking these steps will be like cleaning a pot that has held poisonous honey by scouring it with hot water mixed with the ashes of burnt incense. Once the pot has been cleaned in this way, it may be used to store even a celestial ambrosia.

“What are the three steps? The first is the practice that eliminates contributing factors. The second is the practice of truly ending any violation of the fundamental rules of behavior. The third is the practice of vigorously turning away from intentional engagement with perceived objects.

“What are the contributing factors, Ānanda? Consider it this way: the twelve classes of beings of this world cannot sustain themselves without some kind of nourishment, which may be taken in one of four ways: by mouth, by touch, by thought, or by consciousness. That is why the Buddha says that all beings take nourishment in order to sustain themselves.

“All beings must take nourishing food to live, Ānanda, and if they consume a toxic substance, they may die. Beings who seek to enter samādhi must refrain from eating the five plants of the onion group. When eaten cooked, these plants arouse sexual desire; when eaten raw, they increase anger.

“Gods and ascetic masters of the ten directions keep their distance from anyone who eats these plants, because the plants cause people to stink, including even people who can expound upon the twelve types of discourse spoken by the Buddha. Hungry ghosts, meanwhile, will come to lick and kiss the lips of people who have eaten these plants. Such people will always be accompanied by ghosts, and their blessings will lessen day by day. They will experience no lasting benefit.

“When people who eat the plants of the onion group practice samādhi, the Bodhisattvas, gods, ascetic masters, and wholesome spirits of the ten directions will not come to protect them. Demon-kings of great power, however, will seize the opportunity to appear before these people in the form of a Buddha and will pretend to speak Dharma to them. These demons will denounce the precepts and will praise sexual desire, anger, and delusion. Such people, at the end of their lives, will inevitably join the retinues of demon kings. Once they have exhausted the blessings that they may enjoy as demons, they will fall into the Unrelenting Hell.

“Ānanda, those who practice in pursuit of full awakening must forever refrain from eating the five plants of the onion group. This is the first step they should take in their practice in order to make progress on the Path.

B. Ending Any Violation of the Fundamental Rules of Behavior

“What is meant by the ‘fundamental rules of behavior’? Ānanda, beings who wish to enter samādhi must strictly observe the pure precepts. They must rid themselves of sexual desire once and for all. They must not consume alcohol or meat. They may eat raw food only when it has been made allowable after it has been exposed to fire, to ensure the plant’s vital energies are not consumed for nourishment. Ānanda, if people who practice do not put an end to their sexual desire and do not refrain from taking life, it will be impossible for them to transcend the three realms.

“They should look upon sexual desire as upon a venomous snake or a vengeful thief. They should gain control of their bodies by observing the four prohibitions or the eight prohibitions, and they should follow the Bodhisattvas’ regulations concerning purity so that thoughts of desire will not arise in their minds.

“People of this world who are accomplished in following the precepts will be free forever of the mutual karma that arises when one kills in this life and so is killed in turn in a subsequent life. Further, people of this world who do not steal from one another will never become indebted to one another; they will incur no debts from the past.

“When such pure people practice samādhi, they will very naturally be able to see the worlds of the ten directions while remaining in their bodies born of their parents and without needing the celestial eye. They will see the Buddhas and hear the Dharma, and they will respectfully receive the sages’ instructions in person. They will gain great spiritual powers, they will be able to roam playfully throughout the ten directions, and they will have clear knowledge of past lives. They will never encounter danger or difficulty.

“That is the second step they should take in their practice, in order to make progress on the Path.

C. Avoiding Intentional Engagement with Perceived Objects

“What is meant by ‘intentional engagement with perceived objects,’ Ānanda? People who practice in this way — who observe the prohibitory precepts with purity and who have no sexual desire — allow themselves few outflows in response to the six kinds of perceived objects. Because their outflows are few, these people are able to redirect the attention of their faculties inward to the faculties’ source. Since their faculties are no longer paying attention to objects of perception, the faculties and objects are no longer paired. Once the attention has been redirected inward, the faculties become one and cease to function in six separate ways. Then the lands throughout the ten directions will be as pure and as transparent as a bright moon appearing within a crystal. In their bodies and minds they will experience bliss, wondrous perfection, and their essential equality with all beings and all things. They will know peace and great tranquility. In their midst all the Thus-Come Ones will appear — mysterious, perfect, pure, and wondrous. These people will soon develop patience with the state of mind in which no mental objects arise. Because they take these steps in their practice, they will, as a result of their practice, abide peace-fully in the succession of stages on the path to become sages.

“That is the third step one should take in one’s practice in order to make progress on the Path.”

The Fifty-Seven Stages of the Bodhisattva's Path

A. Arid Wisdom

“Ānanda, when in good people emotional love and desire have dried up and their sense-faculties are no longer paired with sense objects, their remaining habitual tendencies no longer arise. Their attachments are emptied out, and their minds are clear. What is left is pure wisdom, whose brilliant and perfect nature shines throughout the worlds of the ten directions. This pure wisdom exists because their desires have dried up, and so this stage is called ‘Arid Wisdom.’ Although their habits of desire have now dried up, they have not yet entered the stream of the Thus-Come Ones’ Dharma.

B. Ten Stages of Stabilizing the Mind

[1] “When these people have reached the very essence of that stage, they enter the stream of the Middle Way, where a wondrous perfection opens out before them. From this true and wondrous perfection, yet another true and wondrous perfection appears, and they experience a wondrous and unshakable confidence. All their deluded acts of mind are ended, and the Middle Way remains as the only truth. This stage of stabilizing the mind is called ‘Confidence.’

[2] “This true confidence brings about complete clarity so that all is fully understood, and the aggregates, the sites, and the constituent elements can no longer be a hindrance. These people are now able to see before them all the habits they cherished during their successive lives throughout countless eons in the past; they can even tell what habits they should expect to have in the future. These good people, then, can remember all their habits, forgetting none. This stage of stabilizing the mind is called ‘Recollection.’

[3] “When only the true and wondrous perfection remains, the essence of this true perfection begins to transform these people’s habits, which have accumulated over time without beginning, into a single essential clarity. By means of this essential clarity, these people advance into a true state of purity. This stage of stabilizing the mind is called ‘Advancement by Means of Essential Clarity.’

[4] “As this essential clarity becomes more and more present to them, their minds function by means of wisdom alone. This stage of stabilizing the mind is called ‘The Mind Residing in Functioning with Wisdom.’

[5] “As they become steadfast in this wisdom and its light, their minds extend everywhere in clarity and stillness — a stillness that is wondrously constant and unchanging. This stage of stabilizing the mind is called ‘Abiding in Samādhi.’

[6] “As this samādhi becomes more luminous, their wisdom grows, and with this wisdom they enter yet more deeply into samādhi so that they only advance; they never retreat. This stage of stabilizing the mind is called ‘Resolve.’

[7] “As they advance in this state of mind, they are ever more tranquil. They cherish this state and do not let go of it, and they become connected with the energy of the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions. This stage of stabilizing the mind is called ‘Protecting the Dharma.’

[8] “As they successfully protect their enlightened understanding, they use its wondrous power to become able to redirect the light of the Buddhas’ compassion inward to the Buddhas’ tranquil abode. It is as if light were being reflected between two mirrors and as if wondrous images of light were appearing in the mirrors in an infinite regress. This stage of stabilizing the mind is called ‘Redirecting One’s Light Inward.’

[9] “As the light of their minds is thus mysteriously reflecting, they attain the steadfastness and the unsurpassed wondrous purity of the Buddhas. They abide in the unconditioned and will no longer lose ground. This stage of stabilizing the mind is called ‘Steadfastness in Precepts.’

[10] “Having mastered this steadfastness in precepts, they are able to roam playfully throughout the ten directions, going wherever they wish. This stage of stabilizing the mind is called ‘Accomplishing What One Wishes.’

C. Ten Abodes

[1] “Ānanda, these good people have entered these ten states of mind with true skill-in-means, and their minds’ essence is radiant. The functions of these ten states of mind are now completely integrated. This stage is called ‘The Abode of the Resolved Mind.’

[2] “From within that state of mind, light shines forth like pure gold appearing from within a flawless crystal, and these good people rely upon that wondrous state of mind just described to discipline themselves as if they were leveling a piece of ground. This stage is called ‘The Abode of Leveled Ground.’

[3] “On this level ground of the mind, their wisdom is integrated so that they attain a luminous understanding. Their travels throughout the ten directions are now without hindrance or obstruction. This stage is called ‘The Abode of Practice on the Path.’

[4] “They walk the Buddhas’ Path and share in the Buddhas’ energy, and so — just as beings who seek new parents while in the passage between death and rebirth connect with their new parents without the parents’ being aware of it — so these good people, as if at the moment of conception, enter into the Thus-Come One’s family. This stage is called ‘The Abode of Noble Birth.’

[5] “They have now entered the Thus-Come One’s family, so they inherit the attributes of the Awakened Ones, just as every human feature is already fully evident in the unborn child. This stage is called ‘The Abode of Full Development of Expedient Attributes.’

[6] “Their outward appearance is like a Buddha’s outward appearance, and their minds share the attributes of the Buddha’s mind. This stage is called ‘The Abode of the Right State of Mind.’

[7] “Mentally and physically resembling the Buddha, they grow day by day. This stage is called ‘The Abode of Irreversible Development.’

[8] “Their ability to have their bodies appear in ten forms — each form endowed with spiritually efficacious attributes — comes to fullness at the same time. This stage is called ‘The Abode of Childlike Purity.’

[9] “Once they are fully formed, they come forth from the womb as the Buddha’s children. This stage is called ‘The Abode of the Dharma-Prince.’

[10] “Having grown to adulthood, they are like a crown prince who has come of age. To him the king entrusts the affairs of state, and he is anointed as the Kṣatriya lord’s royal heir. This stage is called ‘The Abode of Anointment.’

D. Ten Practices

[1] “Ānanda, these good people, having become children of the Buddha, are fully endowed with the immeasurable and wondrous virtues of the Thus-Come Ones. They respond to the needs of all beings throughout the ten directions. They are at the stage called ‘The Practice of Happiness.’

[2] “They become skillful in doing good deeds for all beings. This stage is called ‘The Practice of Beneficial Deeds.’

[3] “In the process of awakening themselves and awakening others, they become skillful in not opposing and not resisting. This stage is called ‘The Practice of Freedom from Resentment.’

[4] “Unto the farthest reaches of the future, they undergo rebirth freely and equally among the various

kinds of beings in the three periods of time throughout the ten directions. This stage is called ‘The Practice of Inexhaustibility.’

[5] “For them the various ways of practice merge into a single practice, and in these practices they are beyond error. This stage is called ‘The Practice of Departing from Ignorance and Delusion.’

[6] “Within what is identical, many different attributes appear, and these good people perceive the identity that exists among all these different attributes. This stage is called ‘The Practice of Skill with Regard to What Manifests.’

[7] “In the same way, these good people perceive that all the worlds in the ten directions appear in each and every mote of dust throughout space in the ten directions without any mutual interference. This stage is called ‘The Practice of Non-attachment.’

[8] “They look upon each of these states of mind as the foremost among the perfections. This stage is called ‘The Practice That Is Worthy of Veneration.’

[9] “When these good people perceive that all is perfectly inter-fused in this way, they are able to conform perfectly to the rules and regulations of all the Buddhas throughout all ten directions. This stage is called ‘The Practice of Skill in the Dharma.’

[10] “Each and every one of these practices, in its fundamental nature, is pure and without outflows, such that all are a single unconditioned truth. This stage is called ‘The Practice of Truth.’

E. Ten Dedications

[1] “Ānanda, now that these good people have gained full spiritual powers and have gained proficiency in doing the work of the Buddhas, they are entirely pure and true, and they are far from all hindrance and misfortune. They will now be able to rescue beings, and yet they have relinquished all attachment to their rescuing of beings. In rescuing them, they turn from the mental state that is apart from conditions towards the path that leads to nirvana. This is the stage called ‘Dedicating the Rescue of Beings while Remaining Unattached.’

[2] “They abandon what should be abandoned and leave behind what should be left behind. This stage is called ‘Dedicating What One Has Not Abandoned.’

[3] “Their inherent enlightenment, deep and clear, is equivalent to the enlightenment of the Buddhas. This stage is called ‘Dedicating One’s Identity with All Buddhas.’

[4] “When the essential truth is fully revealed, these good people stand on the same ground as the Buddhas. This stage is called ‘Dedicating One’s Ability to Reach All Places.’

[5] “Having entered worlds and having become identical with the Thus-Come Ones, they now experience both of these as merged together without a hindrance. This stage is called ‘Dedicating One’s Inexhaustible Treasury of Merit.’

[6] “These good people have the same grounding in reality as the Buddhas have, and so at every stage along the path, they generate pure intentions. By means of these pure intentions, they radiate light, and they do not stray from the path to nirvana. This stage is called ‘Dedicating One’s Roots of Goodness That Are Grounded in the Same Reality as the Buddhas.’

[7] “Since their roots of goodness have now been grounded in reality, they each make this contemplation: ‘All beings in the ten directions have the same fundamental nature that I have, and now that my nature is fully realized, I know that no being is excluded from it.’ This stage is called ‘Dedicating the Contemplation of One’s Identity with All Beings.’

[8] “While experiencing oneness with all phenomena, they are nevertheless apart from the attributes of phenomena. Further, they are without attachment either to oneness with phenomena or to separateness from them. This stage is called ‘Dedicating the Suchness of Reality within All Phenomena.’

[9] “When they have truly reached the suchness of reality, they meet no obstacles anywhere throughout the ten directions. This stage is called ‘Dedicating on Behalf of Liberation from All

Bonds.’

[10] “When they have fully realized the virtue of their true nature, all limits to the Dharma-Realm are eradicated. This stage is called ‘Dedicating the Boundlessness of the Dharma-Realm.’

F. Four Additional Practices

“Ānanda, when in each of these forty-one stages these good people have completely purified their minds, they next master four wondrous and perfect additional practices.

[1] “First, they are on the brink of being able to model their minds on the Buddha’s enlightenment. They are like a piece of wood smoldering when it is drilled. This is called ‘The Stage of Heating Up.’

[2] “Next, in that their minds are about to complete the journey that the Buddhas have made, they are as if on the point of no longer being bound by the earth. They are like a person standing on a mountain summit, with his body in the air and hardly any solid ground beneath his feet. This is called ‘The Stage of Standing at the Peak.’

[3] “Their minds and the minds of the Buddhas had been separate, but now they have become one. They gain true understanding of the Middle Way. They are like someone who endures something that cannot be repressed and yet cannot be expressed. This is called ‘The Stage of Patience.’

[4] “When all delineations have melted away, these good people no longer distinguish between confusion and enlightenment and the Middle Way. This is called ‘The Stage of Preeminence in the World.’

G. Ten Grounds

[1] “Ānanda, these good people have fully understood the Great Enlightenment, and their awakening is much the same as the Thus-Come Ones’. They have fathomed the state of the Buddha’s mind. This stage is called ‘The Ground of Happiness.’

[2] “The different natures become identical, and that identity itself disappears. This stage is called ‘The Ground of Freedom from Defilement.’

[3] “At the point of ultimate purity, bright light appears. This stage is called ‘The Ground of Shining Light.’

[4] “At the point of ultimate luminosity, there is full awakening. This stage is called ‘The Ground of Wisdom Blazing Forth.’

[5] “All the previous grounds of identity and difference are now surpassed. This stage is called ‘The Ground of Being Hard to Surpass.’

[6] “The pure nature of the unconditioned suchness of reality now becomes clearly manifest. This stage is called ‘The Ground of Manifestation.’

[7] “They reach the very boundaries of the suchness of reality. This stage is called ‘The Ground of Traveling Far.’

[8] “Everything is the true mind, the suchness of reality. This stage is called ‘The Ground of No Movement.’

[9] “They now skillfully reveal the functioning of the suchness of reality. This stage is called ‘The Ground of Using Wisdom Skillfully.’ At this point, Ānanda, these Bodhisattvas’ practices and merit have already been perfected. Therefore this ground may also be called ‘The Stage at Which Practice is Perfected.’

[10] “The wondrous cloud of compassion covers the sea of nirvana with its shade. This stage is called ‘The Ground of the Dharma-Cloud.’

H. Two Final Stages

“When Thus-Come Ones reverse their direction and the Bodhisattvas advance towards them along the path of practice, they meet at the threshold of the Buddha’s enlightenment. This stage is called the ‘Equivalent Enlightenment.’ Thus, Ānanda, they have progressed from the stage of Arid Wisdom to the stage of Equivalent Enlightenment. Their ground of awakening is the wisdom that results from the drying up of ignorance within the Vajra-mind.

“Thus, having passed through these various stages — twelve stages in all, some counted singly, some in groups — they reach at last the stage of Wondrous Awakening, which is the unsurpassed enlightenment.

“At each of these stages, with their Vajra-mind, they have used ten profound analogies to make the contemplation that all is an illusion. They have stopped the flow of deluded thoughts in their minds, and by means of the Thus-Come Ones’ contemplative insight, they have advanced step by step as they bring their pure practice to fulfillment.

“Because they have taken the three gradual steps, Ānanda, these people are fully capable of reaching each of the fifty-five stages along the true path to full awakening. The contemplations that have been described here are the right contemplations; all other contemplations are mistaken.”

Then the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, Prince of Dharma, stood up in the assembly and bowed at the Buddha's feet. He said to the Buddha respectfully, "What shall this discourse be called? How shall we and other beings hold it in respect and rely on it in our practice?"

The Buddha said to Mañjuśrī, "This discourse may be called 'The Sutra of the Supreme and Magnificent Dharma-Imprint of the Mantra of the White Canopy, Which Is Spoken above the Crown of the Great Buddha's Head, and Which Is the Serene and Pure Oceanic Eye of the Thus-Come Ones of the Ten Directions.' It may also be called 'The Sutra Concerning the Rescue of the Buddha's Cousin Ānanda, the Teachings for Liberating Him, the Awakening of the Nun Named Nature in this Assembly, and Her Entry into the Sea of All-Knowing.'

"It may also be called 'The Hidden Basis of the Thus-Come Ones' Practices and the Basis of their Verification of Ultimate Truth.' It may also be called 'The Sutra of the Wondrous Royal Lotus Flower of the Expanded Teachings and of the Dhāraṇī-Mantra That Is the Mother of All Buddhas Throughout the Ten Directions.' It may also be called 'The Sutra of the Consecrating Mantra Phrases and the Myriad Śūraṅgama Practices of the Bodhisattvas.'

"In this way you may hold it in respect and rely on it in your practice."

When the Buddha had spoken these words, Ānanda and the others in the assembly — having heard the Thus-Come One's instruction concerning the meaning of the hidden Dharma-imprint of the Mantra of the White Canopy and the profoundly significant titles for this discourse — immediately understood the practices of meditation in stillness that lead to advancement through the stages of sagehood. They progressed in their mastery of the wondrous truth. Their minds became empty of all deliberation. They broke free of the six kinds of subtle affliction that, in the three realms, affect the practitioner's mind.

6 The Hells

A. Ānanda Requests Instruction

Ānanda stood up and bowed at the Buddha's feet. Placing his palms together reverently, he said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, your great virtue inspires awe, and your compassionate voice reaches everywhere unhindered. You skillfully help beings break free of subtle and deeply buried delusions. Today you have brought me delight in body and mind. It has been of great benefit to me.

"World-Honored One, granted that, at the fundamental level, this true, pure mind, with its wondrous understanding, fully pervades all things. Granted that all things, from the entire planet, with its forests and plains, to the most minute forms of wriggling life, have as their foundation and source the suchness of reality, which is identical to the true essence of the Buddhahood realized by all Thus-Come Ones. Given all that, why are there still the destinies of hells, ghosts, animals, asuras, humans, and gods, since the essential nature of all Buddhas is the true reality? World-Honored One, do these destinies exist of their own accord, or do they come into being based on the deluded habits of living beings?

"World-Honored One, there was the case of the Bhikṣuṇī Precious Lotus Fragrance, who had been following the Bodhisattva Precepts but then indulged her lust in secret and afterward made the false claim that sexual acts involve no retribution because they do not involve killing or stealing. Immediately after she said this, her reproductive organs burst into flame, and the fire spread through all her joints as she fell into the Unrelenting Hell.

"There were also King Virūdhaka and Bhikṣu Sunakṣatra. King Virūdhaka exterminated the Gautama clan, and Sunakṣatra persisted in making false statements about the emptiness of phenomena. These two also fell alive into the Unrelenting Hell.

"Do hells have a fixed location? Or do they come into being naturally, such that each being creates karma and each undergoes privately the appropriate retribution? We younger disciples are uninformed about this matter, and we only hope that the Buddha, out of his great kindness, will explain it so that beings who are following the precepts will hear precisely what the teaching is, will joyfully and reverently accept it, and will take care to avoid error in order to maintain purity."

B. The Roles of Emotion and Thought

The Buddha said to Ānanda, "An excellent question! It will keep people from adopting wrong views about this matter. Listen carefully now; I will explain this matter to you.

"The fundamental nature of all beings is truly pure, Ānanda, but because of their wrong views, they develop deluded habit patterns, which are of two kinds: those that are internal and those that are directed outward.

"Habit patterns that are internal involve beings' internal autonomic processes. When they are influenced by emotional desire, Ānanda, and their feelings accumulate steadily, they generate fluids associated with emotion. Thus when beings think of delicious foods, their mouths water. When they think of others who are no longer alive, whom they may have cherished or may have hated, their eyes fill with tears. When they are seeking wealth, they experience intense craving, and when they encounter someone whose body is sleek and glowing, lust takes hold of their thoughts. When they think about sexual acts, their procreative organs, whether male or female, will secrete fluid in response.

"Emotions differ, Ānanda, but all are alike in that they are associated with secretions, which may be exuded or may remain within the body. Moisture does not rise; its nature is to flow downward. Such is the situation with internal habit patterns, whereas habit patterns that are directed outward, Ānanda, concern beings' aspirations. When they yearn for something higher, beings have uplifting thoughts,

and when these thoughts accumulate steadily, they can generate a superior energy. Thus those who follow the precepts feel that their bodies are serene, and beings who hold mantras in their minds develop an heroic and fearless air about them. If they aspire to birth in the heavens, they will dream of floating or flying. If they are mindful of the Buddha-lands, sacred visions will appear to them privately. If they serve a wise and skillful teacher, they will consider their bodies and their lives to be of little importance.

“Ānanda, these aspirations differ, but all are alike in that they lead beings to soar upward by conferring either lightness or upward motion. It is their nature not to sink but to take flight and to transcend. Such is the situation with habit-patterns which are directed outward.

“Ānanda, all beings in all worlds are caught up in an endless succession of births and deaths. While beings are alive, they follow their natural inclinations, and upon their deaths, they follow the various currents of their karma. At the moment of death, while some warmth remains in their bodies, all the good and all the evil that they have done during their lifetimes suddenly appear before them. Their inclinations are to shun death and to embrace life — two habitual emotions that complement each other and are felt at the same time.

“If pure mental activity alone is present in their minds, they will soar upward and will be certain to be born in the heavens. While in this soaring state of mind, if they have both blessings and wisdom, and if they have vowed to be reborn in a pure land, their minds will naturally open, and they will see the Buddhas of the ten directions. They will be reborn in any one of the pure lands in accordance with their wish.

“If pure mental activity is dominant in their minds but some emotion is also present, they will still soar upward, but not as far. They may become flying ascetic masters or ghost-kings of great power, or flying yakṣas, or rākṣasas that travel along the ground. Such beings roam unhindered in the Heaven of Four Celestial Kings. Further, beings may have made wholesome vows, or simply have a wholesome intent, to be protective of the Dharmas I have been teaching. They may have vowed to defend the precepts and to be protective of precept holders. Or they may have vowed to be protective of mantras and to guard beings who recite mantras. Or they may have vowed to defend the practice of meditation in stillness and to be protective of beings whose practice is to meditate in stillness, and who are likely to encounter aspects of the Dharma that are new to them. Such beings will become close disciples who will sit at the feet of the Thus-Come Ones.

“If their pure mental activity and their emotions are equal in strength, beings will neither soar nor fall. They will be born in the human realm. The brighter their thoughts, the greater their intelligence will be; the darker their emotions, the duller their wits will be.

“If beings have more emotion than pure mental activity, they will be reborn in the realm of animals. If their emotions are of greater weight, they will become fur bearing beasts, and if their emotions are of lesser weight, they will become winged creatures.

“If emotion is seventy percent of their mental activity and pure thoughts are thirty percent, they will fall beneath the disk of water and will be reborn as hungry ghosts along the rim of the disk of fire. They will be buffeted by the raging fire, and they will be constantly burned by the blaze and scalded by the steam. For hundreds of eons they will have nothing to eat or to drink.

“If emotion is ninety percent of their mental activity and pure thoughts are ten percent, they will fall through the disk of fire and will be reborn between the disk of fire and the disk of wind. If their emotions are less weighty, they will enter a hell where suffering is intermittent. If their emotions are of greater weight, they will enter either the Unrelenting Hell.

“When they are ruled entirely by emotion, they sink into the Unrelenting Hell. If, in this submerged state of mind, they have spoken ill of the Mahāyāna teachings or of the Buddhas’ precepts; if they have recklessly propounded false doctrines which they present as being in accord with Dharma; if they have greedily sought the offerings of the faithful under false pretenses; if they have shamelessly accepted undeserved reverence from others; or if they have committed the five unnatural crimes or the ten major

offenses, then they will be reborn in the Unrelenting Hell in one world after another throughout the ten directions.

“Beings undergo these retributions exactly in accord with the evil karma that they create. But though they have brought their retributions upon themselves, they will share the same fate in the same place with other beings who have created the same karma.

C. Ten Causes and Six Retributions

“Ānanda, these retributions are the consequences of individual beings’ intentional acts. For this karma there are ten causes based on beings’ habits, and beings undergo in turn six kinds of retribution.

[1] “What are these ten causes, Ānanda? The first cause is the habit of sexual desire, which, when joined to physical contact, leads to intercourse. When the friction of contact is sufficiently prolonged, there is an inner feeling of a great raging fire erupting from within. It is like the warmth that arises when the hands are rubbed together.

“When the latent habitual energies of sexual desire erupt into the fires of habitual sexual activity, the consequence in the hells will be the experience of the iron bed and the copper pillar. Therefore, when the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions see evidence of sexual desire and the activity that results from it, they call these things the ‘fires that arise from craving.’ Bodhisattvas view sexual desire as something to be avoided, as one would avoid a fiery pit.

[2] “The second cause is the habit of craving, which, when one is attracted to something, leads to plotting and planning. When the attraction and the grasping are incessant, there is an inner feeling of freezing cold and solid ice. It is like the experience of the air being cold when one inhales sharply through the mouth.

“When latent habitual energies of craving are compounded with habitual acts of craving, the consequence in the hells will be the experience of freezing, which causes babbling, chattering, and whimpering, and which cracks ice into shapes of blue and red and white lotuses, and other such effects. Therefore, when the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions see evidence of excessive greed, they call them ‘the water of craving.’ Bodhisattvas view craving as something to be avoided, as one would avoid a sea of pestilent poisons.

[3] “The third cause is the habit of arrogance, which, when compounded with haughty feelings of self-superiority, leads to competitiveness. When that arrogance continues unchecked, there is an inner feeling of a rushing torrent of leaping waves of water. It is like the mouth watering when a person tries to taste his own tongue.

“When the latent habitual energies of arrogance are expanded to include habitual arrogant acts, the consequence in the hells will be the experience of rivers of blood, rivers of ashes, burning sands, or seas of poison, or the experience of molten copper being poured over one’s body or of being forced to swallow the copper. Therefore, when the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions see instances of arrogance and arrogant acts, they call them ‘taking a drink of stupidity.’ Bodhisattvas see arrogance as something to be avoided, as one would wish to avoid drowning at sea.

[4] “The fourth cause is the habit of hatred, which, when joined to a predilection for defiance, leads to confrontations. When one’s entanglement in habits of defiance is unrelenting, there is an inner feeling of the heart becoming so hot that it burns, and its fiery energy becomes like metal. Then this person will feel as if he is being exposed to mountains of knives, of iron clubs, of swords standing like forests or arrayed like spokes of a wheel, and of axes, spears, and saws. It is like a harbored grievance intensifying until it explodes into an urge to kill.

“When the latent habitual energies of hatred recklessly incite habitual acts of hatred, the consequence in the hells will be the experience of being castrated, dismembered, beheaded, abraded, pierced, flogged, clubbed, and so forth. Therefore, when the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions see instances of hatred and hateful acts, they call them ‘sharp swords.’ Bodhisattvas view hatred as

something to be avoided, as one would wish to avoid being executed.

[5] “The fifth cause is the habit of enticing others, which, when joined to a fondness for conniving, leads beings to the practice of entrapment. When the setting of traps becomes too much, this person will feel as if he is being bound by ropes and immobilized in wooden stocks. It is inevitable, just as it is inevitable that trees and grasses in a field will shoot up when the field is saturated.

“When the latent habitual energies of enticing others become prolonged, leading to acts of entrapment, the consequence in the hells will be the experience of handcuffs and fetters, along with cangues and chains attached to cangues, whips and canes, clubs and cudgels, and so forth. Therefore, when the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions see enticement and entrapment, they call them ‘cunning thieves.’ Bodhisattvas view defrauding others as something worthy of fear, as one would fear a pack of jackals.

[6] “The sixth cause is the habit of falsehood, which, when joined to deviousness, leads to insinuations and insults. When these insinuations rise to the level of treachery, such a person will feel as if he is being covered with dust and dirt and with excrement and urine and all manner of filth. It is like the dust that, when stirred up by the wind, obscures people’s vision.

“When the latent habitual energies of lying are added to acts of deceit, the consequence in the hells will be the experience of sinking and drowning, first being hurled upward, then flying through the air, then falling, floating, and finally perishing. Therefore, when the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions see instances of falsehood and insinuation, they call them ‘robbery and murder.’ Bodhisattvas view lying as something to avoid, as one would avoid stepping on a venomous snake.

[7] “The seventh cause is the habit of festering resentment, which, when joined to a propensity to nurse hatreds, leads to acts of vengeance. Such a person will come to feel as if he is being stoned, or being imprisoned in cells or in cages mounted on carts, or being confined in urns or in sacks that are then beaten. It is like the evil designs harbored and nurtured by venomous and secretive people.

“When the latent habitual energies of making false accusations merge with acts of making such accusations, the consequence in the hells will be such experiences as being hurled, seized, stabbed, and stoned. Therefore, when the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions see instances of resentment and vengeance, they call them ‘unscrupulous and harmful ghosts.’ Bodhisattvas view making false accusations as equivalent to drinking liquor laced with a fatal poison.

[8] “The eighth cause is the habit of holding wrong views, which, when joined to a temperament that automatically rejects the opinions of others, leads to such mistaken understandings as the wrong view that the self is real, wrong views concerning prohibitions, and wrong views concerning karma. Such a person will come to feel as if he has been brought before officials of the royal court to determine what views he has held. Such scrutiny will be unavoidable, just as one cannot escape being scrutinized by people whom one meets when walking in the opposite direction on a road.

“When the latent habitual energies of holding wrong views are joined to acts that result from holding wrong views, the consequence in the hells will be the experience of being interrogated while subjected to devious tricks and to high-pressure questioning, so that all is eventually brought out into the open. The youths who keep track of good and evil deeds consult the evidence to counter the offenders’ arguments and ex-cuses. Therefore, when the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions see instances of wrong views, they call them ‘pit-traps.’ Bodhisattvas consider attachment to wrong and biased views as equivalent to standing on the edge of a ditch full of pestilent water.

[9] “The ninth cause is the habit of blaming, which, when joined to a predilection for defamation, leads to making false accusations. Such a person comes to feel that he is being crushed between mountains or between boulders, or that he is being broken on stone wheels, or being ripped by plows, or being ground up by millstones. These are like the injuries visited on good people by a slanderous villain.

“When the latent habitual energies of blaming lead to habitual unjust acts, the consequence in the hells will be the experience of being pressed, pummeled, bagged, squeezed, and strained, then weighed

and measured, and so forth. Therefore, when the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions see false accusations being made, they call them ‘vicious tigers.’ Bodhisattvas view unjust acts as equivalent to claps of thunder.

[10] “The tenth cause is the habit of disputatiousness, which, when joined to a predilection for obfuscation and concealment, leads to vociferous court proceedings. Such a person will feel that in the end, every-thing will be revealed, as if reflected in a mirror by the light of a candle — just as no shadows can hide people when they are in full sunlight.

“When the latent habitual energies of disputatiousness are joined to engagement in disputes, the consequence in the hells will be the truth about one’s acts being confirmed by evil companions, as if one’s karma were illumined in a mirror. Therefore, when the Thus-Come Ones of the ten directions see instances of obfuscation and concealment, they call them ‘shadowy villains.’ Bodhisattvas view obfuscation to be as burdensome as the task of carrying a high mountain on one’s head while walking in the ocean.

“Ānanda, these retributions are the consequences of individual beings’ intentional acts. For this karma there are these ten causes based on beings’ habits, and beings undergo in turn six kinds of retribution.

“How is it that there are six kinds of retribution, Ānanda? All beings create karma through their six consciousnesses, and they experience retribution through their six faculties. How is it that the various retributions are experienced through the six faculties?

[1] “First, there are the retributions that are the negative consequence of intentional acts of seeing. This karma of seeing affects the other five consciousnesses as well. When a being is about to die, he may first see fire raging throughout the worlds of the ten directions. Upon his death, his spiritual awareness will ascend and then fall, riding downward on a wisp of smoke directly into the Unrelenting Hell. Then one of two things may happen. If there is light for the being to see by, he may perceive all manner of ferocious creatures, which cause him to experience the extremes of fear. Or there may only be darkness, and all will be silent; nothing can be seen. The being then feels a boundless terror.

“Next, that raging fire that he saw may overload his ear-consciousness so that he is overwhelmed by the sounds of liquids and molten copper boiling in cauldrons. His nose-consciousness may also be overloaded so that he is overwhelmed by the smells of black smoke and purplish fumes. His tongue-consciousness may also be overloaded so that he is overwhelmed by the scorching taste of a gruel of hot iron pellets. His body-consciousness may be overloaded so that he is overwhelmed by the sensation of hot ashes and blazing embers burning his body. His mind-consciousness may be overloaded so that he experiences the processes of cognition as overwhelming spurts of flame and showers of sparks flickering and bursting in the air.

[2] “Second are the retributions that are the negative consequence of intentional acts of hearing. This karma of hearing affects the other five consciousnesses as well. First, when a being is about to die, he may hear the roar of gigantic waves as they inundate earth and sky. Upon his death, the being’s spiritual awareness will sink downward, riding the waves directly into the Unrelenting Hell. Then one of two things may happen. If the being can hear, he may perceive a crashing din that causes him to become dull and deranged. Or, the being may be unable to hear, and the utter absence of sound causes him to sink into mental darkness.

“That roar of the gigantic waves that he heard may now overload his ear-consciousness so that he hears voices accusing and interrogating him. Next, his eye-consciousness may be overloaded also so that he is overwhelmed by a vision of thunderclouds composed of noxious vapors. His nose-consciousness may also be overloaded so that he is overwhelmed by the stench of marsh water infested with venomous bugs that swarm over his body as the water drenches him. His tongue-consciousness may be overloaded so that he is overwhelmed by the tastes of pus, blood, and all kinds of filth. His body-consciousness may be overloaded so that he is overwhelmed by the feeling that his body is covered with the feces and urine of beasts and ghosts. His mind-consciousness may be overloaded so

that he experiences the processes of cognition as overwhelming lightning strikes and pounding hail.

[3] “Third are the retributions that are the negative consequence of intentional acts of smelling. This karma of the nose-consciousness affects the other five consciousnesses as well. First, when a being is about to die, he may perceive toxic vapors thickly filling the air far and near. Upon his death, his spiritual awareness will try to rise above the vapors, but instead he will fall into the Unrelenting Hell. Then one of two things may happen. If the being’s nasal passages are open, he will inhale so much of the noxious vapors that his mind becomes deranged. Or, if his nasal passages are blocked, he will suffocate, lose consciousness, and fall to the ground.

“The vapors that he smelled may overload his nose-consciousness, and he will feel that he is being subjected to interrogations concerning his character and past behavior. Next, the vapors may overload his eye-consciousness so that he is overwhelmed by visions of flames and torches. The vapors may also overload his ear-consciousness so that he is overwhelmed by the cries of beings drowning in cauldrons filled with boiling liquids. The vapors may also overload his tongue-consciousness so that he is overwhelmed by the taste of rotten fish and rancid stews. The vapors may overload his body-consciousness so that he is overwhelmed by an experience of being split open and of putrefying into a great mountain of flesh with a hundred thousand open wounds like so many open eyes, and these wounds are fed upon by countless maggots. His mind-consciousness may also become overloaded so that he experiences the processes of cognition as ashes and fumes and as sand and gravel flying though the air to pound and shatter his body.

[4] “Fourth are the retributions that are the negative consequence of intentional acts of tasting. This karma of the tongue-consciousness affects the other sense-consciousnesses as well. First, when a being is about to die, he may perceive a net of red hot iron that covers the whole world with intense heat. Upon his death, the being’s spiritual awareness will fall into the net and be suspended there, hanging upside down until he falls into the Unrelenting Hell. Then one or two things may happen. He may breathe a vapor in through his mouth, and this vapor may cause his tongue and his whole body to freeze solid and crack. Or, if he tries to spit the vapor out, he will be engulfed by a raging fire which burns him to the marrow of his bones.

“As his tongue-consciousness undergoes these experiences, he will feel that he is being forced to make confessions and to suffer punishments. Next, his eye-consciousness may have the experience of overwhelming visions of being burned by hot metal and hot stones. His ear-consciousness may undergo an overwhelming experience of sounds seeming to stab him with sharp blades. His nose-consciousness may undergo an overwhelming experience of his nose becoming a gigantic cage of iron that encompasses everything around him. His body-consciousness may undergo an overwhelming experience of being pierced by arrows and darts. His mind-consciousness may be overwhelmed by the experience of the contents of his mind seeming like flying bits of hot iron raining down on him from the sky.

[5] “Fifth are the retributions that are the negative consequence of intentional acts of touching. This karma of the body-consciousness affects the five other consciousnesses as well. First, when a being is about to die, he may perceive great mountains closing in on him on all sides so that he cannot escape. Upon his death, the being’s spiritual awareness will perceive a great iron city teeming with fire dogs and fire snakes and with tigers, wolves, and lions. Ox headed guards of the hells and horse headed rākṣasas, armed with spears, drive the being through the city gates and into the Unrelenting Hell. Then one of two things may happen. If the being’s body is still capable of sensation, he will feel his body being crushed between mountains so that his blood spurts forth from his squashed flesh and bones. Or, if the being’s body is no longer capable of sensation, swords will pierce his body and slice up his heart and liver.

“As his body-consciousness undergoes these experiences, it will seem to him that he is being clubbed, caned, stabbed, or pierced with arrows. Next, his eye-consciousness may have an overwhelming vision of being engulfed in flames. His ear-consciousness may undergo an

overwhelming experience of hearing cries of distress on the road to the hells or in the holding cells, courtrooms, or prisoners' docks. His nose-consciousness may undergo the overwhelming experience of suffocation due to being confined to a sack, or else by the experience of restricted breathing when he is tied up and beaten. His tongue-consciousness may undergo the overwhelming experience of his tongue being plowed up, or clamped and pulled out, or chopped up, or cut out. His mind-consciousness may undergo the overwhelming experience of the contents of his mind falling or flying, or frying or roasting.

[6] "Sixth are the retributions that are the negative consequence of intentional acts of cognition. This karma of mind-consciousness affects the five other consciousnesses as well. First, when the being is about to die, he may encounter a violent wind that lays waste to the lands. Upon his death, the being's spiritual awareness may be conscious of being swept high up into the air and then of plummeting down along the winds straight into the Unrelenting Hell. Then one of two things may happen. If the being lacks clear awareness, his extreme confusion may lead to panic, and he will run about ceaselessly. Or, if he is conscious and not confused, he will be fully aware of his suffering as he feels that he is being endlessly fried and burned. The excruciating pain will be beyond bearing.

"These perversities in his mind-consciousness may now become so overwhelming that it will seem to him that he is being confined. Next, his eye-consciousness may experience overwhelming visions of people interrogating him and confronting him with testimony. His ear-consciousness may undergo an overwhelming experience of what seems to him to be the din of great rocks clashing together or else of what seem to be storms of ice or of dust that cloud his hearing. His nose-consciousness may undergo an overwhelming experience of what seems to him to be a great burning, whether of a chariot or a ship or a prison. His tongue-consciousness may undergo an overwhelming experience of sensations that are felt by the tongue when it is uttering great shouts, cries, groans of regret, and sobs. His body-consciousness may undergo an overwhelming experience of being expanded or shrunk, or of lying face down while he undergoes ten thousand deaths and rebirths within a single day.

"Ānanda, these are the ten causes and six negative consequences of being reborn in the hells. All these experiences are created by beings' confusion and delusion.

"If a being's six consciousnesses all create evil karma at the same time, he will enter the Unrelenting Hell, where he will undergo an immeasurable amount of suffering for uncountable eons. However, if the negative consequences arise from intentional acts that were committed at separate times by the faculties' engagement with their objects, the being will enter one of the Eight Cold Hells. If a being commits acts of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct with body, speech, and mind — all three — then he will enter one of the Eighteen Hells.

"However, if a being has committed only two of the three major offenses — for example, if he has killed and has stolen — then he will enter one of the Thirty-Six Hells. And if he has committed only one of the three major offenses with only one of the three creators of karma, then he will enter one of the One Hundred and Eight Hells.

"Therefore, individual beings create their own karma by their own acts, but if their karma is the same as other beings' karma, they will all fall into the same hells in this world. These hells are created by their deluded acts of mind. Apart from those acts, the hells have no independent existence."

The Destiny of Ghosts

“Next, Ānanda, after these beings have passed through eons of fire to pay the debts they incurred for committing these offenses — such offenses as violating and vilifying the precepts and the rules for deportment, violating the Bodhisattva Precepts, slandering the Buddha’s teachings about nirvana, and all the other various offenses — then these beings will become ghosts.

“If it was a craving for possessions that led a being to commit offenses, then once the debt incurred for committing those offenses is paid, the being will encounter some object, assume its form, and become a bizarre shape shifting ghost.

“If it was craving for the opposite sex that led a being to commit offenses, then once the debt incurred for those offenses is paid, the being will encounter a wind, assume its attributes, and become a drought ghost.

“If it was a craving to mislead people that led a being to commit offenses, then once that debt is paid, the being will encounter an animal, assume its form, and become an animal possessing ghost.

“If it was the cravings and emotions of hatred that led a being to commit offenses, then once that debt is paid, the being will encounter a venomous creature, assume its form, and become a hex-poison ghost.

“If it was the cravings and emotions of long cherished enmity that led a being to commit offenses, then once that debt is paid, the being will encounter some enfeebled creature, assume its attributes, and become a plague ghost.

“If it was the cravings and emotions of arrogance that led a being to commit offenses, then once that debt is paid, the being will encounter some source of vital energy, assume its attributes, and become a hungry ghost.

“If it was a craving to indulge in slander that led a being to commit offenses, then once that debt is paid, the being will encounter some source of dark energy, assume its attributes, and become a nightmare ghost.

“If it was a craving to indulge in perverse uses of intelligence that led a being to commit offenses, then once that is paid, the being will encounter some source of intense vital energy, assume its attributes, and become a malicious shape-shifting ghost.

“If it was a craving for selfish advancement that led a being to commit offenses, then once that debt is paid, the being will encounter someone who has light and will assume the attributes appropriate for becoming an attendant ghost.

“If it was a craving to form factions that led a being to commit offenses, then once that debt is paid, the being will encounter some human, assume that person’s attributes, and become an oracle ghost.

“Ānanda, their cravings are the sole reasons for these beings’ having previously fallen into the hells. Once they have burned away their debts in the hells, they ascend to be reborn as ghosts. This too is a consequence of their own delusion. If they were to become fully awakened, then with their wondrous and perfect understanding, they would know that, fundamentally, these retributions are not real at all.”

The Destiny of Animals

“Ānanda, once a being has made full payment on that part of his karmic debt which he was due to pay

as a ghost, his mind will empty itself of the emotions and thoughts that brought him to the ghostly destiny. Now he must come to this world to face the enmity of his original creditors and in person repay what he owes them. Thus he is born in the body of an animal to repay his debts from his previous lives.

“Suppose a being has been a bizarre shape shifting ghost and has assumed the attributes of an object. When the object disintegrates, then the being, having undergone its retribution as a ghost, is reborn into this world, usually as an owl.

“Suppose a being has been a drought ghost and has assumed the attributes of a southeast wind. When the wind dies down, then the being, having undergone its retribution as a ghost, is reborn into this world, usually among the various kinds of animals that are considered to be ill omens.

“Suppose a being has been an animal possessing ghost and has assumed the attributes of an animal. When the animal dies, then the being, having undergone its retribution as a ghost, is reborn into this world, usually as a kind of fox.

“Suppose a being has been a hex-poison ghost and has assumed the attributes of a venomous creature. When that venomous creature dies, then the being, having undergone its retribution as a ghost, is reborn into this world, usually as an animal that is venomous itself.

“Suppose a being has been a plague ghost and has assumed the attributes of an enfeebled creature. When that creature dies, then the being, having undergone its retribution as a ghost, will be reborn into this world, usually as a kind of parasitic worm.

“Suppose a being has been a hungry ghost and has assumed the attributes of some vital energy. When that energy disperses, then the being, having undergone its retribution as a ghost, is reborn into this world, usually among the kinds of animals that are eaten by people.

“Suppose a being has been a nightmare ghost and has assumed the attributes of some dark energy. When that energy disperses, then the being, having undergone its retribution as a ghost, is reborn into this world, usually among the animals that serve people or that are a source of people’s clothing.

“Suppose a being has been a malicious shape shifting ghost and has assumed the attributes of some intense vital energy. When that energy is exhausted, then the being, having undergone its retribution as a ghost, is reborn into this world, usually as a migratory bird.

”Suppose a being has been an attendant ghost and has assumed the attributes of someone who has light. When that person’s light is extinguished, then the being, having undergone its retribution as a ghost, is reborn into this world, usually among one of the many kinds of animals that are considered to be good omens.

“Suppose a being has been an oracle ghost and has assumed the attributes of a human. When that human dies, then the being, having undergone its retribution as a ghost, is reborn in the world, usually among animals who serve people as companions or as messengers.

“In this way, Ānanda, when the fires of their karma have caused their lives as ghosts to wither away, these beings are reborn as animals in further repayment of the debts they incurred during their previous lives. This too is the consequence of their own delusion. If they experience a full awakening, then with their wondrous and perfect understanding, they will know that, fundamentally, these retributions are not real at all.

“You spoke earlier of Bhikṣuṇi Lotus Fragrance, King Virūdhaka and Bhikṣu Sunakṣatra. They themselves created their evil karma. It did not descend upon them from the heavens, nor did it emerge from the earth. No other human being imposed it on them. Their own delusion brought their karma about, and they themselves must undergo the retribution for it. Yet all this consists merely of illusions and delusions that manifest within the fully awakened mind.”

The Destiny of Humans

"Moreover, Ānanda, suppose these beings, having been born as animals to pay the debts they incurred

in previous lives, live longer as animals than their debts have required. On that basis, these beings can now return to their original status as humans, and provided that their strength, their blessings, and their merit are sufficient, they can retain their human bodies as compensation for their over payment of their karmic debt. But if their blessings are not sufficient, they will fall back into the realm of animals in order to make a direct payment of any other debts they owe.

“Ānanda, beings should realize that they should settle their debts, whether with money, goods, or labor, so that their indebtedness can naturally come to an end. But if, during this process, beings take each other’s lives or eat each other’s flesh, then they may well continue through countless eons killing each other and eating each other as if they were turning ceaselessly on a wheel, now on top, now beneath. The wheel may never stop unless they undertake the practice of calming the mind or unless a Buddha appears in the world.

“Now you should understand that when beings who have been owls have paid their debts, they will regain their human form and will be born among people who are pig headed and stubborn.

“When beings who have been animals that are considered to be ill omens have paid back their debts, they will regain their human form and be reborn among people who are deformed.

“When beings who have been foxes have paid back their debts, they will regain their human form and will be reborn among people who are of lowly status and low intelligence.

“When beings who have been venomous animals have paid back their debts, they will regain their human form and will be reborn among people who are vicious.

“When beings who have been parasitic worms have paid back their debts, they will regain their human form and will be reborn among people who are menial workers.

“When beings who have been animals of the kind that are eaten by people have paid back their debts, they will regain their human form and will be reborn among people who are weak willed and dependent.

“When beings who have been animals of the kind that serve people or of the kind that are a source of people’s clothing, have paid back their debts, they will regain their human form and will be reborn among manual laborers.

“When beings who have been migratory birds have paid back their debts, they will regain their human form and will be reborn among people of refinement.

“When beings who have been animals serving as good omens have paid back their debts, they will regain their human form and will be reborn among people who are intelligent.

“When beings who have been domesticated animals have paid back their debts, they will regain their human form and will be reborn among people who are accomplished.

“Ānanda, all these people have paid their debts from previous lives and have regained their human form. Since time without beginning, they had been creating the karma that results from deluded scheming, and they had been taking turns killing and being killed. If they do not encounter a Thus-Come One or if they do not hear the true Dharma, then in the midst of the stress of entanglement with perceived objects, they will repeat this cycle of karma indefinitely, as the Dharma explains. These people are to be deeply pitied.”

“Ānanda, there are also people who practice kinds of samādhi that do not follow the path that leads to true awakening. Instead, their practices are based on a mistaken intent to fortify the physical body.

They seclude themselves in mountain forests beyond the reach of people. These are the ascetic masters, of which there are ten kinds.

“Some of these beings, Ānanda, in their effort to fortify themselves, tirelessly devote themselves to a diet of medicinal potions. When they have perfected this dietary practice, they become ascetic masters who are earthbound.

“Some of them, in order to fortify themselves, tirelessly devote themselves to a diet of medicinal herbs. When they have perfected this practice, they become ascetic masters who can fly.

“Some of them, in order to fortify themselves, tirelessly devote themselves to ingesting precious metals and minerals. When they have perfected their alchemical practice, they become ascetic masters who are adept at roaming freely.

“Some of them, in order to fortify themselves, tirelessly devote themselves, whether they are moving or still, to bringing their spirit and their vital energies to perfection. When they have perfected this practice, they become ascetic masters who are adept at astral travel.

“Some of them, in order to fortify themselves, tirelessly devote themselves to transforming their saliva. When they have perfected this practice, they become ascetic masters who can travel to the heavens.

“Some of them, in order to fortify themselves, tirelessly devote themselves to absorbing the essences of celestial bodies. When they have perfected this practice, they become ascetic masters who can travel everywhere freely.

“Some of them, in order to fortify themselves, tirelessly devote themselves to reciting mantras and observing prohibitions. When they have perfected their skill in these practices, they become ascetic masters who adhere to a specific path.

“Some of them, in order to fortify themselves, tirelessly devote themselves to mental control of their vital energies. When they have perfected this practice so that they can bring it to mind at will, they become ascetic masters who practice by means of contemplative illumination.

“Some of them, in order to fortify themselves, tirelessly devote themselves to an internal union of energies. When they have perfected this practice, they become ascetic masters who are adept at a practice that is based on their inner essences.

“Some of them, in order to fortify themselves, tirelessly devote themselves to following the principles of internal change. When they have perfected their understanding of this practice, they become ascetic masters who are without peer.

“Ānanda, all these are people who, in training their minds, do not follow a path that leads to a correct awakening. Instead, they seek to know the secrets of living a long life, and they may live for thousands of years. They retire deep into the mountains or onto an island in the ocean, cutting themselves off from human contact. However, because of their deluded thinking, they too are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth. They do not practice the correct samādhi, and therefore, although they have lived long lives as a result of their practices, they too must die and enter one of the various destinies.”

[1] “Ānanda, some people in this world do not seek what is everlasting and cannot yet renounce their love and affection for their spouses. But if their minds do not turn to thoughts of sexual misconduct, they will develop a certain purity and radiance. After their lives have ended, they will ascend to the vicinity of the sun and moon. Such people become gods in the Heaven of the Four Kings.

[2] “Some others have only a small amount of desire for their spouses, but they do not manage to live in complete purity. After their lives have ended, they will ascend beyond the sun and moon to dwell at the summit of Mount Sumeru. Such people become gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three.

[3] “Some others will succumb to desire when an occasion arises, but after an indulgence they give the matter no further thought. While they are in the human realm, their desire is quiescent more than it is active. After their lives have ended, they abide peacefully, shining with their own radiance, in a realm of space that is so far above the sun and the moon as to be beyond the reach of sunlight and moonlight. Such people become gods in the Heaven of Self Restraint.

[4] “Some others are always still, except when they are unable to resist the stimulus of contact. After their lives have ended, they ascend to a refined place that is isolated from the lower heavens and from the human realm. Here they are untouched even by the three great disasters that come at the end of an eon. Such people become gods of the Heaven of Joyous Contentment.

[5] “Some others have no desire themselves but will respond to the actions of their spouses. For them the act itself has no more flavor than wax. After their lives are ended, they ascend still higher to a realm of creativity. Such people become gods in the Heaven of Delight in Creating.

[6] “Yet others have no mundane thoughts. Although their actions seem no different than the actions of ordinary people, their minds transcend the acts that they engage in. After their lives are ended, they ascend beyond all the lower heavens, including the Heaven of Delight in Creating. Such people are born in the Heaven of Pleasure Derived from What Others Create.

“Ānanda, these six kinds of gods have transcended the physical act of mating, but their minds are not free of it. Because of this, they have had to return to these heavens, which belong to the realm of desire.

B. The Gods of the Eighteen Heavens of Form: The First Dhyāna

[1] “Ānanda, some people in this world, in refining their minds, do not avail themselves of the practice of meditation in stillness, and so they do not develop wisdom. Nevertheless, if they can refrain from sexual activity and if their minds are free at all times of any thought of sexual desire such that they are undefiled by sexual passion, they will not remain in the realm of desire. These people, if they wish, may be reborn as one of the companions of Brahma in the Heaven of Brahma’s Retinue.

[2] “These people have cast out their habits of desire, and with their minds free of desire, they delight in following the precepts and the rules of deportment. At all times, they are able to practice the virtue of purity, and so they become gods in the Heaven of the Ministers of Brahma.

[3] “When in body and mind these people have attained a wondrous perfection such that their flawless deportment inspires awe, they will not only follow the prohibitory precepts in complete purity but will gain a clarity of understanding as well. They become great Brahman kings in the Heaven of the Great Brahma, and at all times they are able to govern their retinues of gods.

“Ānanda, the gods at these three levels are free of the burdens of suffering and affliction. Although their samādhi is not the genuine samādhi that results from correct practice, their minds are nevertheless pure, and their outflows are not active. These are the gods of the heavens of the first dhyāna.

C. The Gods of the Eighteen Heavens of Form: The Second Dhyāna

[4] “Next, Ānanda, above the gods of the Brahma Heavens are gods who govern them and who have

perfected the practice of purity. The minds of these higher gods are lucid and still. From their deep tranquility, light comes forth. They abide in the Heaven of Lesser Light.

[5] “Next are gods who emit light and who — as they shine upon one another with an inexhaustible brilliance — illumine their realm throughout the ten directions, turning it all to crystal. They abide in the Heaven of All Permeating Light.

[6] “Next are gods who take full control of their light, having mastered the essence of the teaching about it. They are able to emit and to respond to many kinds of pure light, and they use this light to convey countless meanings. They abide in the Heaven of Speech by Means of Light.

“The gods of these three heavens, which are higher than the heavens of the first dhyāna, are freed from the burdens of worry and anxiety. Although their samādhi is not the genuine samādhi that results from correct practice, their minds are nevertheless pure, and their coarse outflows have been subdued. They are the gods of the heavens of the second dhyāna.

D. The Gods of the Eighteen Heavens of Form: The Third Dhyāna

[7] “Ānanda, to the gods who have perfected light as a medium of communication, the wondrous secrets of this medium are now revealed. They refine their practice until they succeed in opening their minds to the bliss of stillness. These are the gods of the Heaven of Lesser Purity.

[8] “Next they experience a state of purity and emptiness which expands until it becomes boundless. Their bodies and minds are serene and are filled with tranquil bliss. These are the gods of the Heaven of All Permeating Purity.

[9] “After their bodies and minds have become completely pure, the world itself is purified due to the virtue of their perfected purity. This purified state becomes a superior place of refuge in which they can rest in the bliss of tranquility. These are the gods of the Heaven of Universal Purity.

“Ānanda, in these three heavens, which are above the heavens of the second dhyāna, the gods experience perfect harmony, and their bodies and minds are peaceful and secure. They enjoy all permeating bliss. Their samādhi is not the genuine samādhi that results from correct practice, but because their minds are peaceful and secure, they are filled with bliss. These are the gods of the Heavens of the third dhyāna.

E. The Gods of the Eighteen Heavens of Form: The Fourth Dhyāna

[10] “Moreover, Ānanda, there are gods whose bodies and minds are no longer creating the causes for future suffering. They realize that the bliss of the heavens is impermanent and must eventually decay, and they thereupon renounce both suffering and bliss. Because they have put an end to all coarse and burdensome mental attributes, the essence of pure blessing is created. These are the gods of the Heaven of the Creation of Blessings.

[11] “Once they have wholly renounced those mental states, they gain a superior understanding and purity. In their state of unlimited merit, they experience a wondrous harmony that is everlasting. These are the gods of the Heaven of Cherished Blessings.

[12] “From that heaven, Ānanda, the path divides. On one path, some gods of the Heaven of Cherished Blessings are able to shine with a pure and infinite radiance such that the light of their blessings and their merit is perfected. They will be secure in the results of their practice and will become gods of the Heaven of Great Fruition.

[13] “On the other path are gods who, while dwelling in the Heaven of Cherished Blessings, reject both suffering and bliss and intensely and unrelentingly investigate the practice of renunciation. When they have thoroughly understood that practice and have completely mastered it, their bodies disintegrate, and for five hundred eons their minds are utterly still, like cold and compacted ashes. But because they have based their practice on the mind that comes into being and ceases to be, they are

unable to discover the true nature that neither comes into being nor ceases to be. Their cognitive processes cease but then revive during the last half of the final eon. These are the gods of the Heaven of the Cessation of Cognition.

“Ānanda, the gods of these four heavens, which are above the heavens of the third dhyāna, can no longer be influenced by any worldly states of suffering or bliss. However, they do not base their practice on the unmoving and unconditioned mind, and they still harbor intentions to attain something. Yet their spiritual skill is pure and perfected. These are the gods of the heavens of the fourth dhyāna.

F. The Gods of the Eighteen Heavens of Form: The Pure Abodes

“Also within this dhyāna, Ānanda, are the five Heavens of Pure Abode. The gods in these heavens have by this time completely eliminated the nine stages of habitual delusion. Here both suffering and bliss have been forgotten. These gods will never again live at any lesser celestial level. They dwell together in a place of peace, each of them at an equal level of renunciation.

[14] “First, Ānanda, are gods for whom both suffering and bliss have ended so that they no longer have to struggle with contrasting experiences. These beings are the gods of the Heaven Beyond Affliction.

[15] “Next are the gods who, having focused their practice exclusively on renunciation, no longer harbor any basis for even the thought of suffering and bliss. These are the gods of the Heaven Beyond Heat.

[16] “Next, throughout the worlds in the ten directions, their wondrous vision becomes so flawlessly clear that no perceived object can defile it. These are the gods of the Heaven of Refined Vision.

[17] “Next, their skill in envisioning becomes yet more refined, like the skills of a master potter. These are the gods of the Heaven of Clear Envisioning.

[18] “When their contemplation of the myriad subtleties of the nature of form and the nature of space reaches its ultimate point, they enter a state of boundlessness and become gods of the Highest Heaven of Form.

“Ānanda, the gods of the lower heavens of the fourth dhāyana — and even their kings — cannot see the gods of these five higher heavens. They only hear about them with admiration, just as ordinary dull witted people in the world cannot see Arhats dwelling in the wilderness or deep in the mountains, where they keep up their practices in their sacred places for awakening.

“Ānanda, the gods of these eighteen heavens practice in solitude, free of entanglements. But they have not yet set down the burden of their bodies. Thus all these heavens comprise the Realm of Form.

G. The Gods on the Four Planes of Formlessness

“Moreover, Ānanda, at the very summit of the Realm of Form, the path again divides. On one path are those who in their practice of renunciation develop to perfection the full light of their wisdom. These gods will transcend all three realms and will become Arhats who will board the Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas.

[1] “On the second path are gods who, having been successful in their practice of renunciation, realize that their bodies are an obstacle to further progress. They cause their bodies to vanish and to become like space. Then they become gods on the Plane of Boundless Space.

[2] “Next are gods who, having caused the obstacle of their bodies to vanish, now find that there are no further obstacles of form for them to put an end to. Only their storehouse consciousness and half of the subtle functions of the individuating consciousness remain. These are the gods on the Plane of Boundless Consciousness.

[3] “When both form and space have come to an end for these gods, and when their conscious minds have disappeared entirely, then there is stillness throughout the ten directions. Nothing remains, and

there is no place to go. These are the gods on the Plane on Which One Has Nothing.

[4] “When their storehouse consciousness is completely inactive, these gods can make use of this cessation of activity to contemplate deeply, so that within the endlessness of that consciousness, the nature that lies at its ending nevertheless becomes known to them. That consciousness now seems to exist and yet not to exist; it seems to have disappeared and yet has not. These are the gods on the Plane on Which Cognition Is Absent Yet Not Absent.

“The gods in these heavens have deeply contemplated their emptied consciousness and yet have failed to understand its true nature. This is the end of the sages’ path that led from the Heavens of Pure Abode. These gods now become Arhats of inferior ability who turn away from the Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas.

“Other gods, who have come from the Heaven of Cessation of Cognition and from other heavens that are not on the right path, never return from their deep contemplation of their emptied consciousnesses. Because they lack the knowledge they need, they become lost in these heavens. As gods who have outflows, they eventually will fall back into the cycle of death and rebirth.

“Ānanda, the gods of these heavens are not enlightened. Having enjoyed the rewards that were the results of their good karma, they must again be bound to the cycle of death and rebirth. But the kings of these heavens are Bodhisattvas. They play this role while in samādhi, and thereby they gradually progress in their practice towards the level of the Sages.

“With regard to the gods on these four planes of formlessness, Ānanda, the activities of their bodies disappear and their mental activities cease so that they abide in samādhi. They are no longer burdened by any form that is the result of karma. These four heavens comprise the realm of formlessness.

“None of the gods of these heavens fully comprehend the wondrous enlightened mind that understands. Such accumulated delusions as theirs bring about the illusory existence of the three realms. In the midst of these realms, each individual in his delusion sinks into the seven destinies to join other beings whose karmas are similar.”

“Moreover, Ānanda, in the Three Realms there are also the asuras, who are of four kinds.

[1] “Asuras who take the path of ghosts, devoting their strength to protecting the Dharma, have the spiritual power to live in the air. These asuras are born from eggs, and are included in the destiny of ghosts.

[2] “Some asuras, because their merit is insufficient, fall from the heavens and are fated to dwell beneath the sun and the moon. These asuras are born from wombs and are included in the destiny of people.

[3] “Some asuras are world commanding kings, both powerful and fearless. They contend for mastery with King Brahma, with Śakra, Lord of the Heavens, and with the Four Celestial Kings. These asuras are born by metamorphosis and are included in the destiny of gods.

[4] “Some asuras — a baser kind, Ānanda — are born in deep water caves in the middle of the ocean. By day they emerge to fly about in the air, and at night they return to their watery abodes. These asuras are born in the presence of moisture and are included in the destiny of animals.”

animals, humans, ascetic masters, gods, and asuras. In their confusion, all are submerged in the attributes of the conditioned world. Their deluded mental activity leads them into rebirth in accordance with their karma. Within the wondrous perfect understanding that is the fundamental unconditioned mind, these destinies are like mirages of flowers seen in the sky. These destinies do not actually occupy any location; they are simply illusions. Even less do they signify anything real.

“These various beings fail to recognize the fundamental mind, Ānanda, and so they are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth. They pass through countless eons without ever attaining genuine purity, all because they indulge in killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. If they break the precepts against these three, they will be born into the destiny of the ghosts and the other inauspicious destinies. If they avoid these offenses, they will enter the destinies of the gods and the other auspicious places of rebirth. Because these beings are constantly torn between their tendency to commit offenses and their tendency to refrain from committing offenses, they continue to be bound to the cycle of death and rebirth.

“When beings are able to enter this wondrous samādhi, they abide in a wondrous and everlasting stillness. That stillness is beyond the duality of existence and nonexistence, and that negating of duality is also ended. Since they have gone beyond the state in which there is killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, how could they possibly commit those offenses?

“Ānanda, each being who has not put an end to these three intentional acts creates his own individual karma. Although each being’s retribution is his own, beings may undergo a common retribution together in a definite place. Their intentional acts arise from delusion, which itself has no cause. No matter how exhaustively you search for a cause, you will not find one.

“You should advise practitioners that if they wish to realize full awakening through their spiritual practice, they must no longer engage in these three deluded acts. If they do not cease engaging in them, then even if they should develop spiritual powers, their skills will be limited to the circumstances of the conditioned world. If they cannot put an end to their habits of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, they will take the path that leads to existence as a demon.

“Even if they want to cease committing these offenses, they will end up engaging in falsehood and making the offenses worse. The Thus-Come One says that such beings are pathetic and greatly to be pitied. You all should understand that you are responsible for your own deluded actions. Your true nature that is capable of full awakening is not to blame.

“What has been spoken here is the right teaching. To teach otherwise is the work of the demon king.”