

**THE NIRVANA SUTRA
(MAHĀPARINIRVĀṆA-SŪTRA)
VOLUME I**

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BDK English Tripiṭaka Series

**THE NIRVANA SUTRA
(MAHĀPARINIRVĀṆA-SŪTRA)
VOLUME I**

(Taishō Volume 12, Number 374)

Translated from the Chinese

by

Mark L. Blum

**BDK America, Inc.
2013**

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A Message on the Publication of the English Tripiṭaka

The Buddhist canon is said to contain eighty-four thousand different teachings. I believe that this is because the Buddha's basic approach was to prescribe a different treatment for every spiritual ailment, much as a doctor prescribes a different medicine for every medical ailment. Thus his teachings were always appropriate for the particular suffering individual and for the time at which the teaching was given, and over the ages not one of his prescriptions has failed to relieve the suffering to which it was addressed.

Ever since the Buddha's Great Demise over twenty-five hundred years ago, his message of wisdom and compassion has spread throughout the world. Yet no one has ever attempted to translate the entire Buddhist canon into English throughout the history of Japan. It is my greatest wish to see this done and to make the translations available to the many English-speaking people who have never had the opportunity to learn about the Buddha's teachings.

Of course, it would be impossible to translate all of the Buddha's eighty-four thousand teachings in a few years. I have, therefore, had one hundred thirty-nine of the scriptural texts in the prodigious Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon selected for inclusion in the First Series of this translation project.

It is in the nature of this undertaking that the results are bound to be criticized. Nonetheless, I am convinced that unless someone takes it upon himself or herself to initiate this project, it will never be done. At the same time, I hope that an improved, revised edition will appear in the future.

It is most gratifying that, thanks to the efforts of more than a hundred Buddhist scholars from the East and the West, this monumental project has finally gotten off the ground. May the rays of the Wisdom of the Compassionate One reach each and every person in the world.

NUMATA Yehan
Founder of the English
Tripiṭaka Project

August 7, 1991

Editorial Foreword

In January 1982, Dr. NUMATA Yehan, the founder of Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism), decided to begin the monumental task of translating the complete Taishō edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka (Buddhist canon) into the English language. Under his leadership, a special preparatory committee was organized in April 1982. By July of the same year, the Translation Committee of the English Tripiṭaka was officially convened.

The initial Committee consisted of the following members: (late) HANAYAMA Shōyū (Chairperson), (late) BANDŌ Shōjun, ISHIGAMI Zennō, (late) KAMATA Shigeo, (late) KANAOKA Shūyū, MAYEDA Sengaku, NARA Yasuaki, (late) SAYEKI Shinkō, (late) SHIOIRI Ryōtatsu, TAMARU Noriyoshi, (late) TAMURA Kwansei, URYŪZU Ryūshin, and YUYAMA Akira. Assistant members of the Committee were as follows: KANAZAWA Atsushi, WATANABE Shōgo, Rolf Giebel of New Zealand, and Rudy Smet of Belgium.

After holding planning meetings on a monthly basis, the Committee selected one hundred thirty-nine texts for the First Series of translations, an estimated one hundred printed volumes in all. The texts selected are not necessarily limited to those originally written in India but also include works written or composed in China and Japan. While the publication of the First Series proceeds, the texts for the Second Series will be selected from among the remaining works; this process will continue until all the texts, in Japanese as well as in Chinese, have been published.

Frankly speaking, it will take perhaps one hundred years or more to accomplish the English translation of the complete Chinese and Japanese texts, for they consist of thousands of works. Nevertheless, as Dr. NUMATA wished, it is the sincere hope of the Committee that this project will continue unto completion, even after all its present members have passed away.

Dr. NUMATA passed away on May 5, 1994, at the age of ninety-seven, entrusting his son, Mr. NUMATA Toshihide, with the continuation and completion of the Translation Project. The Committee also lost its able and devoted Chairperson,

Editorial Foreword

Professor HANAYAMA Shōyū, on June 16, 1995, at the age of sixty-three. After these severe blows, the Committee elected me, then Vice President of Musashino Women's College, to be the Chair in October 1995. The Committee has renewed its determination to carry out the noble intention of Dr. NUMATA, under the leadership of Mr. NUMATA Toshihide.

The present members of the Committee are MAYEDA Sengaku (Chairperson), ICHISHIMA Shōshin, ISHIGAMI Zennō, KATSURA Shōryū, NAMAI Chishō, NARA Yasuaki, SAITŌ Akira, SHIMODA Masahiro, Kenneth K. Tanaka, WATANABE Shōgo, and YONEZAWA Yoshiyasu.

The Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research was established in November 1984, in Berkeley, California, U.S.A., to assist in the publication of the BDK English Tripiṭaka First Series. The Publication Committee was organized at the Numata Center in December 1991. In 2010, the Numata Center's operations were merged into Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai America, Inc. (BDK America) and BDK America continues to oversee the English Tripiṭaka project in close cooperation with the Editorial Committee in Tokyo.

MAYEDA Sengaku
Chairperson
Editorial Committee of
the BDK English Tripiṭaka

Publisher's Foreword

On behalf of the members of the Publication Committee, I am happy to present this volume as the latest contribution to the BDK English Tripiṭaka Series. The Publication Committee members have worked to ensure that this volume, as all other volumes in the series, has gone through a rigorous process of editorial efforts.

The initial translation and editing of the Buddhist scriptures found in this and other BDK English Tripiṭaka volumes are performed under the direction of the Editorial Committee in Tokyo, Japan. Both the Editorial Committee in Tokyo and the Publication Committee, headquartered in Berkeley, California, are dedicated to the production of accurate and readable English translations of the Buddhist canon. In doing so, the members of both committees and associated staff work to honor the deep faith, spirit, and concern of the late Reverend Dr. Yehan Numata, who founded the BDK English Tripiṭaka Series in order to disseminate the Buddhist teachings throughout the world.

The long-term goal of our project is the translation and publication of the texts in the one hundred-volume Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon, along with a number of influential extracanonical Japanese Buddhist texts. The list of texts selected for the First Series of this translation project may be found at the end of each volume in the series.

As Chair of the Publication Committee, I am deeply honored to serve as the fifth person in a post previously held by leading figures in the field of Buddhist studies, most recently by my predecessor, John R. McRae.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the members of the Publication Committee for their dedicated and expert work undertaken in the course of preparing this volume for publication: Senior Editor Marianne Dresser, Dr. Hudaya Kandahjaya, Dr. Carl Bielefeldt, Dr. Robert Sharf, and Rev. Brian Kensho Nagata, President of BDK America.

A. Charles Muller
Chairperson
Publication Committee

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Translator's Introduction

Known in East Asia simply as the *Nirvana Sutra*, the *Mahāparnirvāṇa-sūtra* has been one of the most talked about scriptures in the Chinese Buddhist canon even before it was fully translated. Early in the fifth century, within ten years of each other, two translations based on two different Sanskrit texts were produced, one by Faxian and one by Dharmakṣema. A leading Chinese monk at the time, Daosheng, read the first translation by Faxian and was puzzled by the extremely negative description in the sutra of people called *icchantikas*, described as individuals who have no faith. Inspired by the universal message of hope embodied in the sutra's doctrine of buddha-nature as a potential for buddhahood existing in all living beings, Daosheng wondered how the sutra could also exclude those called *icchantikas* from this vision, who not only reject the Buddha's teaching but reject any need for karmically proper behavior, could be described as exceptions. Daosheng publically declared that Faxian must have it wrong, that the sutra would not extol buddha-nature for some but not others, and he was widely ridiculed for taking such a radical position. Dharmakṣema completed his translation a few years later, and while it echoed the rejection of *icchantikas* in part, it also clarified that *icchantika* status was a state of mind, not karmic destiny, and that buddha-nature is present in all living beings without exception; the earlier teaching was just an expedient means (*upāya*) to make a point in that context. As one might expect, Daosheng became a hero and his writings went on to have a major impact on Chinese and East Asian Buddhism as a whole.

This translation is of the Dharmakṣema version of the text. Whether the result of differences in their recensions or in their understandings of the sutra's language, the Faxian and Dharmakṣema translations consistently differ on this point. Not surprisingly, it was Dharmakṣema's translation that subsequently impacted East Asian Buddhism so fundamentally, completely overshadowing Faxian's work.

There are basically three notions of nirvāṇa in Buddhism: 1) *Nirvāṇa* is a state of religious attainment in which the craving for future existence is extinguished; this is defined as a nontranscendental, "ethical state" in the Theravāda tradition

(according to the Pāli Text Society's *Pāli-English Dictionary*, pp. 362–363) but is generally seen in spiritual terms in Mahāyāna Buddhism. 2) *Parinirvāṇa*, “final extinction,” is emancipation defined as the final or complete extinction of the *kleśas* (defilements or afflictions) and release from the cycle of rebirth, *saṃsāra*. Most commonly this refers to the death of someone who has either already attained *nirvāṇa* or is seen as attaining it at death, and includes the meaning of a transcendental postmortem existence without rebirth. But *parinirvāṇa* can also be attained before death, and can be of two types, with the physical support of one's body while still living, and without the body, thus indicating death. 3) *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, “great final extinction,” refers to the death of a buddha, specifically the death of Śākyamuni in early Buddhist literature. Although, as the name indicates, this particular sutra is ostensibly focused on the last of these meanings, in fact all three are examined in the discourse. One of the characteristic features of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* is its highly critical stance toward Buddhism as a whole, exhibiting a surprising sense of responsibility to redefine a wide range of what appears to have become institutionalized interpretations, practices, and beliefs, the notion of *nirvāṇa* among them.

The history of the sutra is somewhat confusing because there are in fact two quite different scriptures with the identical Sanskrit name, *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. Based on the above standard usage, the first *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, known in the Pāli as *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta*, is about the circumstances under which Śākyamuni Buddha died, his last sermon, and how the community dealt with his remains.¹ This early, pre-Mahāyāna version of the sutra was translated repeatedly into Chinese, and six of those translations are extant in the Chinese Buddhist canon today. Although sculpted and painted depictions of the dramatic scene of the Buddha's final demise can be seen throughout the Buddhist world, outside the visual arts the influence seen in Theravāda countries of this original version of the sutra is largely absent in East Asia.

In contrast, the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* quickly became one of the most influential Buddhist scriptures in the Chinese canon after its introduction in the early fifth century. Compared with the first sutra of the same name, the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* is a relatively long, fully realized Mahāyāna text, full of typical Mahāyāna elements such as mythic imagery, miracles (though there is a description in the earlier version of the Buddha miraculously moving a huge boulder), a fully transcendent notion of “buddha,” metaphysics, and the

rich philosophical language of emptiness. It begins with the setting of the Buddha's imminent disappearance from this world in the town of Kuśinagara, as in the earlier version, but it is immediately apparent that this is a very different sort of sermon. After a long, dramatic discussion of all the many beings that bring their last offerings to the Buddha, followed by the appearance of the blacksmith Cunda, there is a series of impassioned pleas for the Buddha not to die. In response, however, the Buddha launches into a long discussion on the nature of buddhas in general, and himself in particular. He makes it clear that while he will disappear from their sight he is not going to die, because in fact he was never born in the first place. In other words, buddhas are not created phenomena and therefore have no beginning and no end.

This leads into the core theme of the sutra—*tathāgatagarbha*. The *Nirvana Sutra*—note that the name *Nirvana Sutra* only refers to the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*²—expresses the term *tathāgatagarbha* in a unique way, calling it “buddha-nature,” “tathāgata-nature,” or “hidden treasury,” and expounds the doctrine that this quality is not only common to buddhas but to all living beings as well. Moreover, it is eternal, blissful, characterized by a personal self, and pure. Thus everyone has the potential for liberation, for realizing nirvāṇa and buddhahood. The sutra expresses this idea in a variety of ways, but one of the most striking is its use of the idea of nonemptiness standing alongside emptiness as an expression of absolute truth. Thus, though we have essentially the same circumstances of the Buddha's demise as the setting for the sutra in both the early and later versions, the Mahāyāna version raises such questions as “What is the nature of buddha?” “What is the nature of nirvāṇa?” “How is it possible that an unenlightened individual could actually become a buddha?” “What does the teaching of nonself really mean?” “How can those who commit crimes turn themselves around so a proper life becomes possible again?”, and so forth, all of them topics not raised in the original version of the sutra.

Once the listener (now the reader!) has some sense of what buddha-nature is and how it functions, the perspective of the entire sutra becomes clear. Buddha-nature is discussed often, in different contexts with different analogies, showing not only how central this teaching is but how difficult it is to grasp as well. Is it a tiny quantity of “buddha”-ness existing within every living being, or is it the inherent potential for becoming a buddha, or is it the full presence of “buddha” within the makeup of all living beings, regardless of their relative degree of

spiritual awakening or confusion? Essentially the Buddha asks his audience to accept the existence of buddha-nature on faith, and since everyone there manifestly knows they are not yet buddhas, the importance of faith in the teachings of the *Nirvana Sutra* as a whole must not be overlooked.

The flip side of the universality of the buddha-nature teaching is the notion of the *icchantika*, mentioned above, a category of people who have little or no chance of liberation. Just who are the *icchantikas* and what is their fate? This is a highly complex issue within the *Nirvana Sutra* itself, and the issue is discussed numerous times in different ways, but the common factor of all such discussions is that such an individual does not believe one or more of the core values represented by the sutra: standards of morality, the interdependence of life, the doctrines of karma and buddha-nature, and the superiority of the Mahāyāna sutras. Because the sutra comments on the problem of the *icchantika* so frequently, it does seem ambivalent on whether or not *icchantikas* can attain buddhahood. This problem has led some scholars to speculate that the sutra was written over a long period of time by different people, perhaps even in different places. There is only fragmentary evidence of the sutra in Sanskrit, and the translations from Sanskrit in the two Chinese works and one in Tibetan all clearly represent different Sanskrit recensions or exemplars, so we will probably never know the answer to this question. But it is worth noting that other Buddhist scriptures in which the *icchantika* problem is discussed, such as the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra* and the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra*, expound somewhat different notions of *icchantikas*.

One of the most radical teachings of the sutra grows out of the buddha-nature idea, namely, a seeming reversal of what had become the sacrosanct Buddhist doctrine of nonself. For the *Nirvana Sutra*, nonself is treated like another negative expression of truth, emptiness. That is, nonself is a very important doctrine to be expounded when the listener is attached to his or her notion of selfhood or personality, because it deconstructs that object of attachment, revealing its nature as a fantasy. Emptiness likewise performs the function of deconstructing attachments to notions of identity in things or ideas. But both are merely tools, or *upāya* (skillful means), and not final truths in and of themselves. Regarding emptiness, we find a strong assertion of the sacred nature of nonemptiness, meaning the world as it is. Emptiness, therefore, must be studied alongside nonemptiness, or the student will end up with a skewed view of things. In a similar vein, the sutra's stance toward nonself and self expresses the complaint that many

Buddhists have lost their way precisely because they have simply traded one attachment for another: proudly renouncing self, they are now attached to nonself, clinging to the concept as if it can liberate them. Although the discursive, evaluating self is fiction, there does exist a genuine self and that, according to the sutra, is precisely the buddha-nature. This of course raises a paradox: if this is the only true self, how can it help me, since I am unable to perceive my own buddha-nature? To this the sutra responds that this is precisely what the study of the Buddha's dharma should be about—"seeing" the buddha-nature within oneself.

Another important theme is the nature of the Tathāgata, the Buddha himself. The *Nirvana Sutra* offers a much more unambiguous statement of the eternal, unchanging nature of "buddha" than what was presented in, for example, the *Lotus Sutra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*). In fact, we know that the *Nirvana Sutra* was written after the *Lotus Sutra* because it quotes the latter scripture by name, and also because it echoes many *Lotus* themes. One area of commonality is the nature of the Buddha as something much more than the earthly existence "portrayed" by Śākyamuni for the eighty years of his life. The *Lotus* intimates that all buddhas are eternal but in fact only states that their lives are very, very long. In the *Nirvana Sutra* the buddha is and always has been eternal and unchanging. He appears on earth as he did, going through the motions of being born as prince and renouncing the household life, only to "correspond to the ways of the world" (Skt. *lokānuvartana*; Ch. *suishun shijian* 隨順世間). In other words, if he had not taken these elaborate steps, the people of Jambudvīpa (i.e., India) would not have trusted him as a genuine saint. He took on this human form so that people would pay attention to his message.

This change in the nature of "buddha" reflects a change representative of this stratum of Mahāyāna Buddhist sutras. The *Nirvana Sutra* represents what is probably a middle period of Mahāyāna development in that it betrays a conscious knowledge of the contents of the early Mahāyāna sutras and is often reacting to that content by commenting on it. These comments are generally expansions and clarifications rather than critiques. Criticism is reserved for non-Buddhists and those Buddhists who refuse to recognize the validity of the Mahāyāna sutras and their teachings, especially the *Nirvana Sutra* itself. In fact, in many ways the *Nirvana Sutra* appears as a kind of higher critique, a meta-discourse, on how the religion had developed in the probably five to six hundred years since the

passing of the founder Śākyamuni. This is seen most clearly in critiques of some of the doctrinal developments in the Abhidharma (specifically the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma) and the monasticism practiced under interpretations of Vinaya literature.

In addition to the fact that three Chinese versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* were produced within forty years, the sutra has a rather unusual provenance in the Chinese canon. These are all collected in volume twelve of the Taishō canon: Taishō no. 376, translated by Faxian in six fascicles and dated 416–418 C.E.; Taishō no. 374, translated by Dharmakṣema in forty fascicles and dated 420–431,³ which is the source text of this translation; and Taishō no. 375, a version of the Dharmakṣema translation re-edited to make it more accessible, dated sometime between 433 and 452. The Chinese Buddhist communities—and the Korean and Japanese as well—for the most part ignored the Faxian version in favor of the Dharmakṣema translation, which is generally richer in imagery, more explicit or at least more elaborate when it comes to difficult philosophical points, and presumed to be complete (in contrast to Faxian's work, which is only one-quarter of its length). Testimony of the immediate impact of the sutra when it appeared is that although it was well read, many found Dharmakṣema's sentences hard to follow either because of odd syntax or obscure vocabulary. In addition, the chapter divisions were not well thought out, either too long or too short, and therefore not of much use. For this reason, the traditional way of citing the Dharmakṣema translation in commentaries throughout East Asia was to reference the fascicle number, which total forty, rather than by chapter. By contrast, Faxian's chapters are of similar length and reflect a more rational and useful organizing framework.

The structural problems in the Dharmakṣema translation coupled with the high interest in the sutra led to a group of scholars re-editing the Dharmakṣema translation into a more accessible text, refashioning some of the sentences into more readable language and using Faxian's chapter divisions. This is Taishō no. 375. In content, this text is very close to the original Dharmakṣema translation, but there were some revisions that have no basis in an Indic text, and there is no evidence that the editors worked with any source material other than the two Chinese translations. This edition is different enough to warrant its own place in the canon, and many medieval scholars cite both editions, though Taishō no. 375 circulated more widely, with its use of a more standard Classical Chinese

syntax and more commonly known characters. Because this text was not a new translation but merely a new edition of the existing Dharmakṣema translation, the two texts were traditionally distinguished in East Asian literature as the northern, or *beiben* 北本, edition (original Dharmakṣema translation, or Taishō no. 374); and the southern, *nanben* 南本, (reworked) edition, or Taishō no. 375. Among these three Chinese editions the Dharmakṣema translation has the greatest historical significance due to its comprehensive length and the presumption that it was based on one or more Indic texts.

It would be difficult to overstate the impact of *Nirvana Sutra* in East Asian Buddhism. Not only did it inspire numerous commentaries on the sutra itself in China, Korea, and Japan, it is cited extensively in the works of untold numbers of Buddhist writers and frequently appears in “secular” literature as well. In terms of its influence on Buddhist schools, it played a large if indirect role in the formation of the Chan school and also in the Pure Land tradition. Although Chan writers do not often cite it, the very idea of Chan without the concept of buddha-nature is unthinkable. Chan writers were much more comfortable with the *Awakening of Faith (Qixinlun)*, another *tathāgatagarbha* text that was probably written in China under influence of the *Nirvana Sutra*. On the Pure Land side, the biographies of its early systematizers, Tanluan, Daochuo, and Shandao, reveal that all were students of the *Nirvana Sutra*. And in Japan, the impact of this sutra on Shinran and Nichiren was substantial.

Zhiyi (538–598), founder of the Tiantai sect, was perhaps the most influential person to study and quote the *Nirvana Sutra*. It is often overlooked that the identification of the Tiantai tradition with the *Lotus Sutra* was the product of Zhanran (711–782), the sixth Tiantai patriarch. By contrast, it can be argued that Zhiyi regarded both sutras as of equal authority. This is reflected in his historical classification of sutras and teachings, which asserts that the Buddha taught his sutras in a particular order so as to prepare his audience for deeper and more difficult teachings in a gradual manner, an idea no doubt taken from the *Nirvana Sutra* itself. In Zhiyi's interpretation, the Buddha's career culminated in his final dispensations before he passed into *parinirvāṇa*: the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Nirvana Sutra*.

In principle I have included in the Glossary technical terms that recur in the sutra. Note that the term *fannaο*, generally presumed to translate *kleśa* or some form of that term, is nearly always rendered in this translation as “the defilements,” taking advantage of the slight awkwardness of this expression as English

in order to indicate the meaning of this term to the reader. I have consulted and considered the Sanskrit fragments, the Faxian translation, and occasionally the much later ninth-century Tibetan translation from Sanskrit by Jinamitra, Jñānagarbha, and Devacandra (Peking No. 788, Derge No. 120) throughout, but also wish to make clear that this translation makes no attempt to create a critical edition of the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*. This work should be regarded, therefore, only as an English translation of Dharmakṣema's rendering of the text in Chinese, but one that is informed by these other relevant materials. I have prepared notes pertaining to comparisons between these different recensions but by and large they are not included here, for they are numerous and detailed, and await a separate publication. Most of the notes retained are explanatory by nature, although there are cases when a note will document a reading from another recension that has played a role in deciphering a difficult passages in Dharmakṣema's text. Because of the scattered nature of the Indic materials, I follow the numbering system for Sanskrit fragments established by Habata Hiromi in her enormously helpful *Die zentralasiatischen Sanskrit-Fragmente des Mahāparinirvāna-Mahāsūtra* (2007), the most comprehensive work to date on this subject. In interpreting the Chinese text according to Sanskrit and, when needed, Tibetan sources, this translation contains a bit more than what the usual reader of Buddhist sutras in the Chinese canon would have seen. On the other hand, the vast majority of people trying to make sense of this sutra today do not have the benefit of the oral interpretive traditions that greatly aided students in medieval China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam who read and still read this sutra in Chinese.

As one of the most influential *tathāgatagarbha* texts in East Asia, the particular way in which this concept is expressed in the Chinese translation of the *Nirvana Sutra* is noteworthy. Although the *garbha* in *tathāgatagarbha* means fetus, embryo, womb, or the inside of something, Dharmakṣema typically renders *tathāgatagarbha* as *rulai mizang* 如來祕藏 or simply *mizang*, translated here as the *tathāgata*'s "hidden treasury." We never see a word that specifically means embryo or womb used for *garbha* in either Chinese translation of this sutra. Although the term *mizang* can be found throughout the Chinese canon, unless the text is linked to the *Nirvana Sutra*, it rarely stands for *garbha*. In chapter four of Kumārajīva's translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*, for example, the phrase "the *mizang* of all the buddhas" appears but there *mizang* translates

guhyasthāna and suggests secret matters relating to buddhas, but not *tathāgata-garbha*.⁴

What we are in fact seeing in the *Nirvana Sutra* with *mizang* is not a translation but a gloss: specifically, a gloss of the notion of *tathāgata-garbha* itself as wondrous, somewhat mysterious, liberating truth about buddhas that is hidden from normal view but nonetheless knowable. At the root of this “hidden treasury” is the notion of allusiveness as expressed in the term *saṃdhāvacana*, which occurs at least three times in the Sanskrit fragments. Rendered by Dharmakṣema as *mi jiao* 密教, *mi yu* 密語, or *wei mi zhi jiao* 微密之教, I have translated these forms as “recondite teachings/language.” That is, the Buddha’s language often alludes to things he does not mention at that moment. As explained in the opening section of fascicle five, what may appear to the listener to be a certain opaqueness is not the result of any intention on the Buddha’s part to conceal anything. Despite the similarity in terms, these teachings are not esoteric in the sense that they are only available to a limited group of cognoscenti, they simply appear to be abstruse because they require a more demanding sensitivity.

This meta-hermeneutic is expressed in the context of *tathāgata-garbha* but the way that other topics are broached or analyzed suggests it may be applicable to the sutra as a whole. An example of this approach is the manner in which the sutra redefines the meanings of a number of verses quoted from earlier texts, in essence advancing its own paradigm by means of re-contextualizing them. In this way the audience of the *Nirvana Sutra* learns that (a) the occasion when the Buddha said something matters, and should be taken into consideration in interpreting it, and (b) the Buddha taught his doctrines in stages as a means to gradually lift up his students to higher and higher reaches of liberation. Both these points explain why the Mahāyāna teachings were initially held back from his immediate voice-hearing disciples, the śrāvakas, who would be unable to grasp the more profound teachings and might react with scorn. This was itself a relatively new doctrine, and though not necessarily unique to this sutra, the popularity of using the *Nirvana Sutra*’s simile of the five stages of milk preparation shows how influential its presentation was. The *Nirvana Sutra* often mentions the principle of *lokānuvartana*, mentioned above in reference to Śākyamuni’s worldly life, but in this context underlying the very structure of the Buddhist teachings as taking the shape they do in response to how people understand them. This temporal paradigm became the seed for what developed into

the many *panjiao* systems developed among Chinese exegetes that organized the most salient sutras and teachings into a rational progression over the course of the Buddha's preaching career. Indeed it was no accident that the first *panjiao* was developed by Daosheng himself.

Finally, note that this volume covers the first ten fascicles of the Dharmakṣema text as presented in the Taishō canon, which comprises one-fourth of the entire sutra. Volume I will be followed by three more volumes to be published as the translation work proceeds.

THE NIRVANA SUTRA
VOLUME I

Fascicle I

Chapter One

Longevity: Part 1

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was between a pair of sal trees by the banks of the Ajiravatī River in Kuśinagara, the native land of the Malla people.⁵ At that time the World-Honored One was together with monks numbering what seemed like eight trillion and surrounding him on all sides. It was the fifteenth day of the second month, and he was about to pass into nirvāṇa. Using his supernatural powers, the Buddha spoke out in a great voice so loud that it filled the world, reaching even to the highest heaven in the triple world.⁶ Projecting a variety of sounds, he spoke to living beings in every quarter, saying:

Today, the Tathāgata, the One Worthy of Offerings, the Perfectly Enlightened One, is filled with compassion toward living beings, protects living beings, and looks equally upon [all] living beings as if he were looking upon his own son Rāhula. He creates rooms and houses of refuge for them.

The World-Honored One of the great enlightenment is about to enter nirvāṇa. If there is anyone among you with doubts [regarding the teachings], you should ask your questions now, as this will be your last opportunity for questions.

At that time, in the early morning, the World-Honored One emitted from his mouth a variety of rays of light. This light was multicolored: blue, yellow, red, white, crystal, and emerald, and it shone throughout the three thousand–great thousand buddha worlds, reaching similarly into all ten directions. Living beings in all six realms that encountered it had their transgressions, impurities, and defilements eliminated entirely.

Those who saw and heard these things felt great sorrow. Simultaneously they raised their voices in a doleful cry, “O compassionate father! How distressing, how awful this is!” Some raised their hands in the air, slapped their foreheads, pounded their chests, and screamed. Others felt their bodies tremble, some cried, and others were choked with tears.

At that time the earth, mountains, and great oceans all began shaking. The people said to each other:

For the time being, let us restrain ourselves and not grieve so. Rather, we should go quickly to Kuśinagara, the land of the Mallas, and upon reaching the Tathāgata, bow our heads in respect and beseech him, saying, “O Tathāgata! Please do not pass over into *parinirvāṇa*! Stay in the world for one more *kalpa*, at least something close to a *kalpa*.”

They joined hands and exclaimed:

The world will become empty, living beings will find their blessings depleted and impure karma will only increase. Everyone, let us go quickly, quickly! The Tathāgata will surely enter *nirvāṇa* before long. . . .

They said this as well:

The world is empty, the world is empty! From now on we will have no one to rescue us, no one to honor. We will be destitute and defenseless. Once the peerless World-Honored One is gone, to whom will we direct our questions should doubts arise?

366a At that time there were innumerable great disciples [of the Buddha] present, including Venerable Mahākātyāna, Venerable Vakkula, and Venerable Upananda. When they encountered the radiance of the Buddha, the bodies of these great *bhikṣus* began to quiver until they were seized by an uncontrollable shaking. Their minds grew turbid, they became disoriented, and they raised their voices in a loud cry. They were stricken with a variety of troubles like this.

At the time eight million monks were also assembled, and all were arhats. Their minds were freed, their tasks were accomplished, they were free of the defilements, and they had tamed their cognitive senses. Like the great dragon kings, they possessed great spiritual power. Accomplished in the wisdom of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), what they had gained personally was akin

to a sandalwood grove with rows of sandalwood trees in every direction; they were like lion kings surrounded by prides of lions. Thus it can be said that these monks had achieved an incalculable amount of merit and virtue, and every one of them was a true child of the Buddha.

As the sun began to rise in the early morning sky, the monks emerged from their lodgings and were cleaning their teeth when they came upon the Buddha's light. They said to each other, "Quickly, rinse your mouths and wash your hands!" After this exchange, their hair stood on end all over their bodies, and their blood flowed so strongly that they looked like the [scarlet] *palāśa* flower.⁷ Tears filled their eyes and they felt great discomfort. Wanting to give blessings and peace of mind to living beings, to accomplish the primary Mahāyāna practice of emptiness, to reveal the recondite teaching (*saṃdhāvacana*) that is the Tathāgata's skillful means, to prevent the extinction of his sermons, and to provide causes and conditions for living beings to discipline themselves, the monks rushed to where the Buddha was and bowed down at his feet. Circumambulating him one hundred thousand times, they then placed their palms together in reverence, withdrew, and sat at one side.

At that time from among the *Kuṇḍala women, Subhadrā, Upanandā, Sāgaramatī, and six billion other nuns were present. All of them were also great arhats: their contaminants were exhausted, their minds were freed, their tasks were accomplished, they were free of the defilements, and they had tamed their cognitive senses. They were like huge dragons in possessing great spiritual power, and were accomplished in the wisdom of emptiness. Just like [the monks], when the sun began to rise in the early morning, the hair of these nuns stood on end all over their bodies and their blood flowed so strongly that they looked like the *palāśa* flower. Tears filled their eyes and they felt great discomfort. Wanting to give blessings and peace of mind to living beings, to accomplish the primary Mahāyāna practice of emptiness, to reveal the hidden teaching that is the Tathāgata's skillful means, to prevent the extinction of his sermons, and to provide causes and conditions for living beings to discipline themselves, they rushed to where the Buddha was and bowed down at his feet. Circumambulating him one hundred thousand times, they then placed their palms together in reverence, withdrew, and sat at one side. In this gathering of nuns, they were all bodhisattvas, dragons among the people, for in rank they were firmly settled within the ten stages (*daśabhūmi*)

366b from which they could not be moved. Having taken on female bodies in order to spiritually transform living beings, they were constantly cultivating the four immeasurable minds⁸ and had attained positions where they were freely able to attain buddhahood.

Also at that time there were bodhisattva-mahāsattvas as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. They, too, were dragons among the people, and in rank they were firmly settled within the ten stages from which they could not be moved. Through their power of using expedient means, they manifested themselves in their present bodies with names such as the bodhisattva Oceanlike Virtue (*Samudradatta) and the bodhisattva Imperishable Resolve (Akṣayamati). Such bodhisattva-mahāsattvas as these led this group. Their thoughts were filled with reverence for the Mahāyāna: they were firmly settled in the Mahāyāna, they deeply appreciated the Mahāyāna, they longed for the Mahāyāna, and they were unwaveringly devoted to the Mahāyāna. In skillfully adapting to the ways of the whole world, each made the following pledge:

I will enable all those who have not yet reached the other shore to do so. Throughout innumerable past *kalpas*, I have upheld the pure precepts, maintained well the practices, and liberated those who had not yet been liberated, [thereby] binding together the Three Jewels to prevent their dissolution. In the future I shall turn the wheel of the dharma, enhance it myself with great adornments, achieving innumerable merits. I will look upon all living beings equally, regarding them all as if they were my only child.

When the sun began to rise early in the morning on that day, they likewise encountered the Buddha's radiance. Their hair stood on end all over their bodies, and their blood flowed so strongly that they looked like the *palāśa* flower. Tears filled their eyes and they felt great discomfort. Wanting to give benefits and peace of mind to living beings, to accomplish the primary Mahāyāna practice of emptiness, to reveal the recondite teaching that is the Tathāgata's skillful means, to prevent the extinction of his sermons, and to provide causes and conditions for living beings to discipline themselves, they rushed to where the Buddha was and bowed down at his feet. Circumambulating him one hundred thousand times, they then placed their palms together in reverence, withdrew, and sat at one side.

At that time male lay followers (*upāsakas*) as numerous as the sands of two Ganges Rivers were also present. They upheld the five precepts (*pañcaśīla*) and their conduct was impeccable. Among them were the *upāsaka* King *Tejovimalakīrti and the *upāsaka* *Pradānaśūra, who served as leaders. They came with keen anticipation to observe methods that would serve to resolve problems for them. That is, they were concerned about pleasure and pain, permanence and impermanence, purity and impurity, self and nonself, real and unreal, taking refuge and not taking refuge, living beings and nonliving beings, eternal and noneternal, calmed and not calmed, created and uncreated, relinquished and not relinquished, *nirvāṇa* and *nonnirvāṇa*, and superlative and nonsuperlative. They constantly sought to observe the gate containing the curative effect of dharmas like these, and they wanted to partake in hearing the unsurpassed Mahāyāna and to be able to explain what they had heard to others.

They skillfully kept the pure precepts and were exhilarated by the Mahāyāna. Having achieved satisfaction themselves, they sought to satisfy the aspirations of others in this way as well. They were proficient in encompassing the unsurpassed spiritual wisdom of *prajñā*. They longed for the Mahāyāna, were unwaveringly devoted to the Mahāyāna, and skillfully adapted to the ways of the whole world in ferrying over those who had not yet reached the other shore, liberating those who had not yet been liberated, and binding together the Three Jewels to prevent their dissolution. In the future they will turn the wheel of the dharma and enhance it themselves with great adornments. They will always be deeply absorbed in savoring the moral practice of the pure precepts, and they will all achieve merit in this way.

Their thoughts will be filled with great compassion toward all living beings equally and without discrimination, regarding them as one would look upon one's only child.

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When the sun began to rise in the early morning, each person gathered bundles of fragrant woods, such as brown sandalwood, agarwood, oxhead sandalwood, and other natural woods and fragrances, for the cremation of the Tathāgata's body. The carvings, rough and fine, as well as the natural bark of the wood, all shone with the wondrous light of seven jewels. By the power of the Buddha, they were like an array of multicolored paintings that held an array of marvelous colors in blues, yellows, reds, and whites, to the visual

delight of living beings. The pieces of wood all had various fragrant coatings of saffron, aloe, sal resin, and so forth. Flowers were strewn to adorn [this collection], including the *utpala* (blue lotus), *kumuda* (yellow lotus), *padma* (red lotus), and *punḍarīka* (white lotus). And above these fragrant woods were hung five-colored banderoles made of a soft, sheer fabric like that used by the gods, *kaśeya* silk, or multicolor brocades woven with linen. The fragrant wood was placed on jeweled carts that gave off either blue, yellow, red, or white light. The wheel shafts were all inlaid with seven jewels as well; each cart had four horses attached to it, and each of these horses ran as fast as the wind. On the front of each cart were erected fifty-seven jeweled banderoles with nets woven of pure gold thrown over them. Each jeweled cart also had fifty lovely jeweled umbrellas, and from the top of each cart were hung flowered garlands of blue, yellow, red, and white lotus blossoms. These flowers were uniformly made up of pure gold leaves and diamond calyxes, and numerous black bees frolicked among these calyxes, amusing themselves. In the process, the bees emitted a wonderful sound that intoned [the teachings of] impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and nonself, and the sound also expounded events from past [lives] in the career of the Bodhisattva.

In addition there was an assortment of song and dance performances and the playing of zithers, bamboo flutes, horizontal harps, bamboo panpipes, grand zithers, hand drums, and wind instruments. Included within this music were the words “Dreadful, positively dreadful! The world is hollow.” Before each cart lay followers held up four jeweled stands, all of which were covered with blue, yellow, red, and white lotus blossoms, as well as saffron and other perfumes, ideal in their subtle fragrance.

These laymen took care of all necessary arrangements to provide meals for the Buddha and the sangha. All used fragrant sandalwood and agarwood for fuel and cooked with water that had each of the eight ideal qualities.⁹ The food was delicious, containing the six flavors of bitter, sour, sweet, spicy, salty, and plain. The food also had three other qualities: it was tender, it was pure, and it accorded with the dharma.

Having put together these various adornments, the laymen arrived at a grove of sal trees in the land of the Malla clan. There they went on to spread gold dust on the ground, and then covered the gold dust with cloth made of

kaliṅga yarn, *kambala* yarn, and yarn-dyed silks. The area covered in this way reached fully twelve *yojanas* in size.

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There they constructed seven-jeweled lion seats for the Buddha and the sangha. These seats towered in the air like Mount Sumeru and were decorated by hanging jeweled curtains on all sides. And from the many sal trees were also hung an assortment of fabulous banderoles and coverings. A variety of fragrant scents were smeared on the trunks of those trees and brightly colored flowers strewn on the ground between them. Each of the *upāsakas* present had these thoughts:

If there are any among these living beings who are impoverished, I can help them. To those who seek food I shall give them food, to those who seek drink I shall give them drink, to those who seek [the ability to use their] heads I shall give them [intelligence in their] heads, to those who seek [the ability to use their] eyes I shall give them [insight through their] eyes. Whatever these living beings need shall be provided. For when I give in this way I free myself from any defiled, poisonous thoughts of greed or enmity. Any lingering thoughts of mine that yearn for worldly happiness or personal comfort disappear, and I am left with naught but an expectation of pure *bodhi* (religious awakening).

All these male lay followers were well established in the bodhisattva path. Then they thought, “After the Tathāgata accepts our meal, he will enter *nirvāṇa*.” But upon thinking this, their hair stood on end all over their bodies and their blood flowed so strongly they looked like *palāśa* flowers. Tears filled their eyes and they became very upset.

Now each of these people carried the materials for their offerings. On jeweled carts they loaded fragrant woods, banderoles, banners, jeweled umbrellas, and food and drink. They then hurried to where the Buddha was and bowed down at his feet. With the preparations they had brought, they thereupon made formal offerings to the Tathāgata and made circumambulations around him one hundred thousand times, raising their voices in such a sorrowful wail that heaven and earth were moved. They pounded their chests, letting out a roar, their tears falling like rain. And they said to each other, “Listen, this is dreadful! The world is hollow, the world is hollow!”

They then threw themselves before the Tathāgata, and blurted out: “All we ask, O Tathāgata, is that you have pity on us and accept our final offerings.”

The World-Honored One, understanding the occasion, remained silent and did not accept their offerings. They beseeched him in the same way three times, but each time they were all refused. Their wishes unfulfilled, the laymen felt dejected and anxious, remaining in silence. It was as if a loving father had only one child who suddenly fell ill and died, and after the remains were buried, that father returned home in disappointment, grief, and pain. The male lay followers were grieved and upset in much the same way. They then took what they had brought and put it all in one place, withdrew, sat off to one side in silence.

At that time there were also female lay followers (*upāsikās*), present in numbers that totaled the sands of three Ganges Rivers. They upheld the five precepts and their conduct was impeccable. The female lay followers Dignity of Life (*Jīvaśrī*), Garland of Dignity (**Śrīmālā*), and **Vīśākhā* were the leaders among their group of eighty-four thousand, all of whom capably maintained the true-dharma (*saddharma*) with tenacity. In order to lead innumerable hundreds of thousands of living beings to the other shore they manifested themselves in female bodies, yet they disparaged the domestic dharma [pertaining to women].¹⁰

They meditated on their own bodies as four poisonous snakes, contemplating in this manner:

367b This body is being constantly nibbled at by innumerable small organisms. This body is foul smelling and unclean, shackled in a prison of greed. This body is as loathsome as a dead dog. This body is impure with its nine holes from which matter continuously flows. This body is like a walled city in which blood, muscle, tendon, bone, and skin form its outer surface, in which hands and legs form its defense towers, in which the eyes are its windows, the head its palace with its mind king dwelling within. A body-city like this is precisely what the buddhas, the world-honored ones, have abandoned and in what ordinary ignorant people always indulge themselves, where demons of craving, anger, and delusion reside. This body is not solid, much like marsh reeds, the castor oil plant, water bubbles, or the banana tree. This body is impermanent: from one thought to the next, nothing is ever settled. It is like lightning, flooding water, or an illusory heat shimmer.

It is like painting something on water: no sooner has the form been inscribed by the brush than it is absorbed by the water. This body disintegrates easily, like a towering tree on the steep bank of a river. This body will not last long; soon it will be devoured by foxes, wolves, kites, eagles, owls, crows, magpies, or hungry dogs. What intelligent person would take delight in the body? It would be easier to put the waters of an ocean into the footprint of an ox than to fully explain how impermanent, impure, and odious this body is. It would be easier to roll up the earth into the size of a date, or to continue rolling it more and more until it is reduced to the size of a mustard seed,¹¹ than to try and explain everything about the faults of this body. Therefore it is to be dispensed with, as one would expectorate saliva.

With this reasoning these *upāsikās* were continuously engaged in cultivating their thinking on the teachings of emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness. They deeply sought to delve into the Mahāyāna scriptures, and after hearing them they would expound them for others. They kept their vows and disdained their female bodies, regarding them as loathsome and their gender as insubstantial. Mentally they were always focused on proper contemplations like this, [seeking to] destroy their endless transmigration through saṃsāra. They were intoxicated with the Mahāyāna, and as they drew from it to satisfy their own thirst they also satisfied the thirst of others. For they held a deep longing for the Mahāyāna and were unwaveringly devoted to it. Although presently in female bodies, in fact they were bodhisattvas who skillfully adapted to the ways of the whole world in ferrying over those who had not yet reached the other shore. They bound together the Three Jewels to prevent their dissolution and in the future they will turn the wheel of the dharma and enhance it themselves with marvelous adornments, rigorously keeping the precepts. All of them will achieve merit in this way, bringing forth a mind of great compassion toward all living beings equally and without discrimination, looking upon each of them as one would look upon her only child.

When the sun began to rise in the early morning, they spoke to each other, saying, “Today we should go to the sal grove.” Offerings were prepared by these female followers and brought to where the Buddha was. They bowed down at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated him one hundred thousand times, and then said to him:

World-Honored One, we have prepared these offerings for the Buddha and for the sangha. All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you take pity upon us and accept our donations.

367c But the Tathāgata remained silent and did not give his permission. Their wishes unfulfilled, all the female lay followers felt sad and disappointed. They withdrew and sat off to one side.

On that occasion the Licchavi people from the city of Vaiśālī were also present.¹² They numbered as many as the grains of sand in four Ganges Rivers. There were men, women, boys, girls, and mothers with children together with their families, as well as various rulers with their kinsmen from throughout the Jambudvīpa continent. Because they sought the dharma, they properly cultivated the precepts and practices [taught by the Buddha] and were thus endowed with a dignified bearing that discouraged those from other schools of thought who denigrate the true-dharma. These people often said to each other:

We should take our stores of gold and silver and use them to ensure that the profound treasury of the sweet, inexhaustible true-dharma remains in this world long into the future. We hope we will always be able to practice and study [the dharma]. If anyone maligns the true-dharma of the Buddha, we shall cut off his tongue.

They also made this vow:

If any monastic violates the precepts, we will detain that person, return him to lay status, and put him to work. If there are those who deeply rejoice in and protect the true-dharma, we will respect them deeply just as we respect our fathers and mothers. If there are any monastics that are able to practice the true-dharma, we will celebrate them to give them strength.

Since they were ever eager to listen with rapt attention to Mahāyāna scriptures and, after doing so, then worked to spread these teachings to others, each of them succeeded in accomplishing merit in this way. Among them were Licchavi children called Pure Unstained Treasure (*Viśuddhivimalagarbha), Pure and Disciplined (*Viśuddhyachanda), and Permanently Unstained Pure Ablution (*Vimalagaṅgodakadāyaka).

They said to each another: “Let us hurry to where the Buddha is right now.” In the process they prepared a variety of offerings. Each of the Licchavis

participated in decorating eighty-four thousand grand elephants and preparing wagons drawn by teams of four horses that totaled eighty-four thousand, adorned with eighty-four thousand bright jewels. They collected bundles of fragrant woods such as sandalwood and agarwood; each of these bundles included eighty-four thousand pieces. In front of each elephant were hoisted ornamented banners, banderoles, and umbrellas. Even the smallest umbrella measured a full *yojana* in breadth, and the shortest banderole reached thirty-two *yojanas* in length, and even the plainest of the streamers was one hundred *yojanas* in height.

All these offerings were brought to where the Buddha resided. The Licchavis bowed down at the Buddha's feet and circumambulated him one hundred thousand times before speaking:

World-Honored One, we have prepared these offerings for the Buddha and the sangha. All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you take pity on us and accept our donations.

But the Tathāgata remained silent and did not give his permission. Their wishes unfulfilled, the Licchavis felt disheartened. Then, by means of the Buddha's supernatural powers, the Licchavis were raised above the earth to a height of seven palmyra trees, and there in the sky they remained in silence.

At that time there were also important state officials and other distinguished lay followers who collectively numbered as many as the sands contained in five Ganges Rivers. They revered the Mahāyāna, and when people from other religious schools of thought repudiated the true-dharma, these leaders used their power to break these people down just as a hailstorm crushes plants and trees. The principals in this lay group were known as the eminent Sunlight (*Vairocana), the eminent Protector of the World (*Lokapāla), and the eminent Protector of the Dharma (*Dharmapāla). The offerings of this group totaled five times what had previously been given. They brought them into the area among the sal trees [where the Buddha sat] and, bowing down at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him one hundred thousand times before addressing him, saying:

World-Honored One, we have prepared these offerings for the Buddha and the sangha. All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you take pity on us and accept our donations.

But the Tathāgata remained silent and did not accept their gifts. Their wishes unfulfilled, these distinguished individuals felt disheartened. Then, by means of the Buddha's supernatural powers, they were raised above the earth to a height of seven palmyra trees, and there in the sky they remained in silence.

At that time there was another group that included the king of Vaiśālī, his queen, consorts, and their retinue from court, together with all the other kings of Jambudvīpa, excluding Ajātaśatru and the people in his capital and the villages under his control. Among these kings was Unstained Moon (*Vimalacandra). Each felt the need to journey to the Buddha's location, bolstered by four military divisions, resulting in each king arriving with one hundred and eighty trillion people in their entourage. The soldiers rode in chariots drawn by elephants and horses, the elephants had six tusks and the horses were as fast as the wind. Their offerings were beautiful and were six times the amount of what been brought previously. The smallest of their jeweled umbrellas was fully eight *yojanas* across, the shortest of their banderoles was sixteen *yojanas* long, and the poorest specimen of their ornamented banners still reached thirty-six *yojanas* in length. These kings resided comfortably within the true-dharma, reviling [other] dharmas that are base and corrupt. They revered the Mahāyāna; they cherished the Mahāyāna. They felt sympathy toward living beings, regarding them like their own children. The fragrance wafting from the food and drink they carried filled the air for four *yojanas*. As the sun began to rise in the early morning, they too brought their assortment of culinary creations to that place between the two trees, where they found the Tathāgata and addressed him, saying:

World-Honored One, we have provided these offerings for the Buddha and the sangha. All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you take pity on us and accept our last offerings.

But the Tathāgata, well aware of the situation, once again did not give his permission. Their wishes unfulfilled, the kings felt disheartened and withdrew to one side, where they remained.

At that time all the imperial consorts, excluding only the consorts of King Ajātaśatru, also came together and their numbers equaled the grains of sand in seven Ganges Rivers. They had taken female forms for the purpose of

ferrying living beings to the other shore, and were ever mindful of their behavior, having purified their minds by practicing the teachings on emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness. Among them were the [well-known] consorts Beautiful Woman of the Triple World (*Trilokasundarī) and Beloved Virtue (*Priyagaṇa), but all these imperial women abided comfortably within the true-dharma. They practiced the precepts that endowed them with a bearing most dignified. Filled with compassion for living beings as if each was their only child, they said to each other, “Let us now make haste and pilgrimage to where the Buddha resides.” The offerings prepared by these royal consorts totaled seven times what had been brought previously. They included fragrant flowers, ornamented banners, colored silk brocades, banderoles, umbrellas, and a superb assortment of food and drink. Among their jeweled umbrellas, the smallest reached sixteen *yojanas* across; the shortest of their banderoles measured thirty-six *yojanas*; and the most mediocre of their ornamented banners was sixty-eight *yojanas* in length. The fragrance from their food and drink filled the air for eight *yojanas*. Carrying these offerings, they went to the Tathāgata and after making their obeisances at his feet, circumambulated him one hundred thousand times before addressing the Buddha, saying:

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World-Honored One, we have provided these offerings for the Buddha and the sangha. All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you take pity on us and accept these, our last offerings.

But the Tathāgata, well aware of the occasion, was silent and did not accept their gifts. Their wishes unfulfilled, the consorts then felt distraught, pulling out their hair, pounding their chests, and screaming like someone who had just lost a beloved child. Eventually they withdrew to one side and remained there in silence.

At that time female deities also appeared, their numbers equaling the grains of sand in eight Ganges Rivers. Their leader was the goddess Wide Eyes (*Virūpākṣā).¹³ She said the following:

Sisters! Look carefully, look carefully. All these wonderful offerings have been provided by these people who hope to serve the Tathāgata and the sangha. We, too, should decorously provide marvelous things as offerings to the Tathāgata. After the Tathāgata accepts them, he will enter into nirvāṇa. Sisters, it is extremely rare for these buddha tathāgatas to appear

in the world. This final offering should be twice as unusual as any other. When the Buddha passes into nirvāṇa, the world will be hollow.

All these female deities cherished the Mahāyāna and thus looked forward to hearing more about it. Whenever they had an opportunity to listen to Mahāyāna teachings, they would then turn around and explain them to others. They were intoxicated with the Mahāyāna, and as they satisfied their own thirst they also satisfied the thirst of others. They were unwaveringly devoted to the Mahāyāna—whenever they encountered followers of other teachings who felt jealousy and resentment toward the Mahāyāna, these deities vigorously crushed them, just as hail knocks down grass. They maintained the precepts and were thus endowed with dignified bearing. In skillfully adapting to the ways of all worlds, they ferried over to the other shore those who had not yet reached it, and liberated those not yet liberated. In the future they will turn the wheel of the dharma, binding together the Three Jewels to prevent their dissolution. Studying the Mahāyāna, they will enhance it themselves with great adornments, in this way achieving immeasurable merit, and regarding all living beings with equal compassion, viewing each as if he or she was her only child.

As the sun began to rise in the early morning, the female deities brought an assortment of fragrant wood, incense, and the like in a quantity double [that brought by] the human pilgrims. The perfume from their wood was capable of eliminating a variety of the foul smells found among humans. These deities rode on white chariots topped with white canopies and drawn by teams of four white horses. From the top of each chariot hung white curtains that stretched around the vehicle, and on all four sides hung gold bells. The chariots were also filled with various fragrant flowers, fancy banners, banderoles, umbrellas, superbly prepared foods, and theatrical performances. Each had set up a lion's seat [for the Tathāgata], the four feet of which were made of the pure blue *vaiḍūrya* gem. Behind each seat was a backrest decorated with seven jewels, and in front of each seat was a golden armrest. These seven jewels looked like a forest of lights in which the different precious stones all shone like lanterns. Marvelous heavenly flowers covered the ground where the female deities laid out their offerings. When they were finished they felt overwhelmed with sadness; their tears flowed and flowed, producing great discomfort among them.

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In order to bring blessings and peace of mind to living beings, to accomplish the primary Mahāyāna practice of emptiness, to reveal the hidden teaching that is the Tathāgata’s skillful means, to prevent the extinction of his sermons, they approached the location of the Buddha, made obeisance at his feet, and circumambulated him one hundred thousand times before addressing him, saying: “World-Honored One. All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you take pity on us and accept these, our last offerings.”

But the Tathāgata understood the situation and remained silent without accepting their gifts. Their wishes unfulfilled, all the female deities felt agitated and distressed. They withdrew to one side and there they sat in silence.

At that time all the *nāgarāja* dragon kings residing in the four directions came together, totaling a number equal to the grains of sand in nine Ganges Rivers. Their leaders were known as the dragon kings *Vāsuki, *Nanda, and *Upananda. As the sun began to rise in the early morning, these dragon kings prepared their own offerings, doubling the amount of those previously brought by humans and gods. Carrying them to the Buddha’s presence, they made obeisance at his feet and circumambulated him one hundred thousand times before addressing him: “All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you take pity on us and accept these, our last offerings.”

The Tathāgata, however, knowing the occasion, remained silent and did not accept their gifts. Their wishes unfulfilled, the dragon kings felt dejected, withdrew, and took their seats off to one side.

At that time all the *yakṣa* demigod kings led by King Vaiśravaṇa gathered in numbers equal to the grains of sand in ten Ganges Rivers. They said to each other, “Let us hurry to where the Buddha is!” And preparing double the offerings brought by the dragon kings, they then carried these to the Buddha’s presence. Making obeisance at his feet, they circumambulated him one hundred thousand times before addressing the Buddha: “All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you take pity on us and accept these, our last offerings.”

The Tathāgata, however, understood the situation and remained silent without giving his permission. Their wishes unfulfilled, the demigod kings felt disheartened, withdrew, and took their seats off to one side.

At that time there were also *garuḍa* bird kings totaling a number equal to the grains of sand in twenty Ganges Rivers; they were led by the bird

king *Ariṣṭa. There were also *gandharva* celestial musician kings totaling a number equal to the grains of sand in thirty Ganges Rivers, led by King Nārada. There were also *kiṃnara* celestial chorister kings as numerous as the grains of sand in forty Ganges Rivers, led by King *Sudarśana. There were *mahoraga* serpent kings as numerous as the sands of fifty Ganges Rivers, led by King *Mahāsudarśana. There were *asura* titan kings as numerous as the sands of sixty Ganges Rivers, led by King *Śaṃbara. There were *dānava* demon kings as numerous as the sands of seventy Ganges Rivers, led by King *Gaṅgāvimalodaka and King *Bhadradatta.

369a There were also *rākṣasa* demon kings as numerous as the sands of eighty Ganges Rivers, led by King Terrifying One (*Bhīma). Having abandoned their evil mentality and no longer devouring people, these demons produced thoughts of compassion within their menacing nature. Although they had been ugly in appearance, through the Buddha's supernatural powers they had all become handsome. There were also tree-spirit kings as numerous as the sands of ninety Ganges Rivers, led by King Fond of Fragrance (*Gandhapriya), as well as spell-casting kings as numerous as a thousand Ganges Rivers who were led by King *Mahāmāyā Vidyādhara. There were also form-craving sprites as numerous as the sands of one hundred million Ganges Rivers, led by their king *Sudarśana. There were also *apsara* sky nymphs as numerous as the sands of ten billion Ganges Rivers, led by *Rambhā, *Urvaśī, *Tīrṇā, and *Viśākhā.

There were also *bhūta* spirit kings from the earth as numerous as the sands of one hundred billion Ganges Rivers, led by King White Moisture (*Śuklār-dra). There were also *lokapāla* worldly kings, heavenly kings, and heavenly guardians of the four directions who were as numerous as the sands of ten trillion Ganges Rivers. And there were wind deities of the four directions who were also as numerous as the sands of ten trillion Ganges Rivers. They blew seasonal and unseasonal flowers over the tops of the trees, scattering them throughout the grove of trees [where the Buddha was]. There were also deities who ruled the clouds and the rain as numerous as the sands of ten trillion Ganges Rivers. They were all thinking:

When, upon his nirvāṇa the Tathāgata's body is set alight for cremation, we shall pour rain from the sky and cause that fire to be extinguished. In this way those in the crowd that are burning with agony shall be refreshed.

In addition, there were great fragrant elephant kings as numerous as the sands in twenty Ganges Rivers. They were led by the elephant kings Rāhu, *Suvaṇṇa, *Madhu, *Abhinīlanetra, and *Ghandamādana. They revered and longed for the Mahāyāna. Understanding that it would not be long before the Buddha passed into nirvāṇa, they each gathered superb lotus flowers in innumerable, endless quantities and journeyed to where the Buddha sat. Bowing their heads in respect, they then withdrew to one side.

There were also lions, king of beasts, whose numbers equaled the grains of sand in twenty Ganges Rivers, led by King *Siṃhanāda. The lion kings bestowed fearlessness upon all living beings, and bringing a variety of flowers and fruits to the Buddha, they bowed down at his feet and repaired to one side.

There was also a variety of flying bird kings as numerous as the sands of twenty Ganges Rivers. Their group included wild ducks, wild geese, mandarin ducks, peacocks, *kādamba* dark grey geese, *kāraṇḍava* ducks, mynah birds, parrots, black cuckoos, *bāhika* herons, *kalaviṅka* weavers, and *jīvaṃjīvaka* pheasants. All these various birds brought flowers and fruit to the Buddha. After making obeisance at his feet, they repaired to one side.

There were also water buffalo, cows, and goats as numerous as the sands of twenty Ganges Rivers. They walked to where the Buddha was and then produced wonderfully fragrant milk in such quantity that it filled the canals in the town of Kuśinagara. The color, smell, and flavor of this milk were all ideal. After completing their task they then withdrew and took their places off to one side.

In addition, the seers who inhabited the four continents surrounding Mount Sumeru were also present, their numbers as numerous as the sands of twenty Ganges Rivers. Their leader was Kṣāntivādin. They brought incense, flowers, and sweet fruit on their pilgrimage to where the Buddha resided. Making obeisance at the Buddha's feet, they circumambulated him three times before addressing him: "All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you take pity on us and accept these, our last offerings."

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The Tathāgata, however, understood the situation and remained silent without giving his permission. Thereupon the seers, their wishes unfulfilled, felt disheartened, withdrew, and found a place off to one side.

In Jambudvīpa the bee kings were led by King Fine Sound. Bringing a variety of flowers, they made a pilgrimage to the Buddha's location. Making obeisance at the Buddha's feet, they withdrew to take their places off to one side.

At that time all the monks and nuns of Jambudvīpa were assembled, with the exception of the two groups of followers traveling with Venerable Mahākāśyapa and Venerable Ānanda. Also present were mountains as numerous as the sands of immeasurable *asaṃkhyeya* Ganges Rivers contained in the world including Jambudvīpa. With Mount Sumeru the most prominent among them, these mountains were adorned with forests in luxuriant growth. Their trees were so numerous and the branches so plentiful that they obscured the sunlight. A wide variety of exquisite flowers could be found in every direction, and the water flowing in their springs and rivers was pure, fragrant, and clear. The mountains were filled with deities (*devas*), dragons (*nāgas*), demigods (*yakṣas*), celestial musicians (*gandharvas*), titans (*asuras*), birds (*garuḍas*), celestial choristers (*kiṃnaras*), great serpents (*mahoragas*), saints (*ṛṣis*), spell-casters (*vidyādharas*), and sky nymphs (*apsarases*). All these spiritual beings of the mountains likewise made a pilgrimage to see the Buddha. Making obeisance at the Buddha's feet, they then withdrew to take their places off to one side.

There were also deities from the four oceans, as well as deities residing in rivers who together were as numerous as the sands of innumerable Ganges Rivers. They possessed great supernatural power that comes from great spiritual power. The offerings they prepared were twice anything that had been brought up to that point. The light emanating from their divine bodies shone [like] stage lighting, so brightly that it obstructed the sun and moon, making those heavenly bodies disappear. They scattered *aśoka* flowers over the Hiraṇyavatī River¹⁴ and then came to the location of the Buddha, where they made obeisance at his feet and removed themselves to one side.

At that time the grove of sal trees in Kuśinagara turned white, appearing like a flock of white cranes. In the sky there suddenly appeared a hall made with seven jewels, carvings, engravings, and figured silk decorations, all of which could be clearly seen. A parapet containing an assortment of jewels surrounded the hall, and below it water flowed from a number of springs into a bathing pool, the top of which was filled with magnificent lotus flowers. It looked like something from Uttarakuru, that land to the north, or like Indra's pleasure garden Nandanavana in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven.¹⁵ Now at that

time, the sal grove had been decorated in a number of ways and it struck those who looked upon it as quite lovely. The gods and *asuras* [there] could all see the signs of the Tathāgata's imminent nirvāṇa and, without exception, each felt sad, forlorn, and unhappy.

At that time the guardian deities of the four directions and Śakra, lord of the gods (Śakra Devānām Indra), said to each other:

Look! See how both heavenly and worldly beings and even *asuras* have made such great preparations, hoping to present their final offerings to the Tathāgata. We should also make an appropriate offering. If we can manage this final offering, the perfection of charity will become completely accomplished without difficulty.

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So the guardian deities of the four directions then prepared offerings that were twice what had been presented previously. They brought *mandārava* flowers, *mahāmandārava* flowers, *kakkolaka* flowers, *mahākakkolaka* flowers, *mañjūṣaka* flowers, *mahāmañjūṣaka* flowers, *saṃtānaka* flowers, *mahāsaṃtānaka* flowers, senna (**manoññā*) flowers, grand senna flowers, universal brilliance (**samantaprabha*) flowers, grand universal brilliance flowers, clove (**lavamga*) flowers, grand clove flowers, fragrant city flowers, grand fragrant city flowers, flowers of joy (**sumana*), grand flowers of joy, desire-arousing lilies (**saugandhika*), grand desire-arousing lilies, intoxicated-with-fragrance (**gandhamādāna*) flowers, grand intoxicated-with-fragrance flowers, universal fragrance (**samantaḡandha*) flowers, grand universal fragrance flowers, divine gold leaf (**divyasuvarṇapattra*) flowers, dragon flowers, flowers from *pārijāta* trees, and flowers from *kovidāra* trees.

They also brought a variety of superbly prepared foods, and when they reached the Buddha they first made obeisance at his feet. The illumination of all these heavenly beings was so bright that the sun and moon became invisible in the sky. Holding what they had brought, they then endeavored to be allowed to present their offerings to the Buddha. But the Tathāgata, understanding the occasion, remained silent, thereby not accepting their gifts. Their wishes unfulfilled, these gods then felt disheartened and distressed, and withdrew to take their places off to one side.

At that time Śakra and the other gods from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven prepared offerings twice what had been brought previously and the flowers they brought

were also of that scale. They had wondrous and extremely appealing perfumes and incense. Carrying Śakra's Vaijayanta palace¹⁶ and a host of smaller halls, when they arrived where the Buddha was residing, they first bowed down at his feet to make their salutations and then addressed him, saying: "World-Honored One, we deeply appreciate the Mahāyāna and affectionately defend it. All we ask is that the Tathāgata take pity on us and accept our food."

But the Tathāgata, understanding the occasion, remained silent and thereby did not accept their gifts. Then Indra and the other gods, unable to realize their wish, felt disheartened. They withdrew to wait off to one side.

All the way up to the sixth meditative heaven, the gods in the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*) prepared offerings, each in turn surpassing what had appeared before. These decorated banners, banderoles, and umbrellas were so large that even the smallest jeweled umbrella covered the four continents of the earth, the shortest banderole stretched across four oceans, and the most inferior banner reached up to the heaven of Maheśvara.¹⁷ Whenever even a slight breeze blew against the banderoles, they produced a sound that was sublime. Carrying the sweetest dishes of food, they journeyed to where the Buddha was and, ceremoniously bowing at his feet, addressed him in this way: "World-Honored One, all we ask is that the Tathāgata take pity on us and accept these, our final offerings."

But the Tathāgata, understanding the occasion, remained silent and did not accept. Realizing that their wishes would not be fulfilled, these gods felt disheartened and withdrew to wait off to one side.

Above the world of sense pleasure, all those residing in the Brahmā world at the peak of material existence in the realm of form only (*rūpadhātu*)¹⁸ also gathered together. At that time a Mahābrahmā king and his retinue of Brahmā deities emitted a light that permeated the four continents. It was so bright that it rendered the light given off by the sun and moon, and the people and gods of the realm of desire invisible. These gods also brought decorated banners, colored silk brocades, banderoles, and umbrellas. The absolutely shortest banderole extended from the Brahmā's palace all the way to this space within the sal forest. They made a pilgrimage to the Buddha's location, made their obeisance, and then addressed him, saying: "World-Honored One, all we ask is that the Tathāgata take pity on us and accept these, our final offerings."

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But the Tathāgata, understanding the occasion, remained silent and did not accept their gifts. Their wishes unfulfilled, these Brahmā gods then felt disheartened, and withdrew to take their places off to one side.

At that time Vemacitra, king of the *asuras*, together with innumerable other *asuras* and a large retinue, [were also present]. The light that shone from their bodies surpassed even that of the gods in the Brahmā Heaven. They also brought decorated banners, colored silk brocades, banderoles, and umbrellas. Even the smallest of their umbrellas could cover a thousand worlds. With the most sublime of sweet dishes, they made a pilgrimage to where Buddha was and, bowing at his feet, spoke these words: “All we ask is that the Tathāgata take pity on us and accept these, our final offerings.”

But the Tathāgata, understanding the occasion, remained silent and did not accept. Their wishes unfulfilled, the *asuras* felt disheartened, withdrew, and remained off to one side.

At that time king Māra Pāpīyas¹⁹ of the realm of desire, together with the innumerable, endless *asaṃkhyeya* hordes of beings belonging to his retinue, including gods and their female attendants, opened the gates of the hells and dispensed pure, cold water to those inhabitants. As a consequence of this, he then announced to them:

You feel you are unable to do anything [about your situation]. But if you will, just concentrate on the Tathāgata, the One Worthy of Oblations, the Perfectly Enlightened One, and set forth your final offerings to express your joy in his virtuous accomplishments. This will bring you peace through the long night [that you must endure].

While in the hells, Māra Pāpīyas removed the instruments of torture and the many painful poisons; on the fiery flames he poured rainwater, extinguishing them. Then, by means of the Buddha’s supernatural powers, he found himself thinking:

I will make everyone in my retinue throw down their knives and swords, longbows and crossbows, armor and other hardware, halberds and lances, crescent bladed halberds, metallic bludgeons, broadaxes and hatchets, combat rings, and lasso ropes.

The offerings brought by his group exceeded by twofold everything previously presented by humans and gods. Even the smallest of the umbrellas

covered a thousand worlds. When they arrived at the Buddha's location, they bowed at his feet and said:

We now long for the Mahāyāna, and are unwaveringly devoted to the Mahāyāna. World-Honored One, there may be good men or good women who accept the Mahāyāna because they seek to provide offerings, or because they are afraid, or because they intend to deceive others, or because of the prospect of financial gain, or because they are merely following others, and so they may regard it as true or as false. When this occurs, in order to eliminate the fears of such people, we teach them the following mantra:

ṭarki ṭaṭṭara ṭarki lohare mahālohare āra cara tara svāhā

Now for those who have lost their good intentions, for those tormented by fear, for those preaching the dharma (*dharma-kathika*), or for those preventing the dissolution of the true-dharma, this mantra is effective in overcoming rivals in heretical schools, in protecting oneself, in protecting the true-dharma, and in protecting the Mahāyāna. Anyone who uses the mantra properly will have no fear of mad elephants. Whenever they find themselves in a broad open field, or an endless swamp, or a place with precipitous slopes, with this spell they will feel no fear. And water, fire, lions, tigers, wolves, thieves, and troubles with kings—World-Honored One, if one can hold onto this mantra that person will be able to eliminate completely any fear associated with these things. World-Honored One, whosoever holds on to this mantra we will protect just as a tortoise guards his six extremities. World-Honored One, we do not speak of this to curry favor. We will faithfully increase the power of anyone who sustains this mantra. All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you take pity and accept these, our last offerings.

At that moment the Buddha said these words to Māra Pāpīyas:

I cannot accept your offerings of food and drink. But I have accepted the mystical mantra that you have explained, for I want serene bliss for all living beings, including the four groups [of my followers]: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

After explaining this, the Buddha grew silent and accepted nothing further. Māra pleaded with the Buddha three times in the same way, but was refused

each time. His desires unfulfilled, Māra Pāpīyas felt disheartened and withdrew to take his place off to one side.

At that time Heavenly King Maheśvara and his retinue of limitless, innumerable gods prepared offerings the scope of which went beyond what had already been provided by Brahmā, Indra, the Four Guardian Deities, humans, gods, the eight types of beings,²⁰ and nonhumans. The offerings of Brahmā and Indra now seemed like a series of black [lines] on the edge of a seashell that is not fully visible. The smallest of their jeweled umbrellas were capable of covering the entire great trichiliocosm. Bringing their offerings to where the Buddha resided, they made obeisance at his feet and then circumambulated him countless times before speaking:

World-Honored One, what we respectfully present to you is trivial, something like what a mosquito might present to one of us, or like a man throwing a scoop of water into the ocean, or lighting one small lantern to add light to that of one hundred thousand suns, or bringing a single flower to increase the bounty of flowers blooming in the spring and summer months, or increasing the size of Mount Sumeru by adding a mustard seed to it. How could one increase the ocean, the sun's brightness, a field of flowers, or Mount Sumeru? World-Honored One, the insignificance of what we provide by way of offerings is much the same. Even if we were to offer to the Tathāgata oblations of incense, flowers, theatrical performances, banners, and umbrellas enough to fill the great trichiliocosm, they would still not be worth mentioning. Why? Because [we know] the Tathāgata is perpetually concerned with taking up the suffering of living beings in the unfortunate hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms. For this reason, World-Honored One, we hope that you may look upon us with pity and take up our offerings.

At that time there was a buddha land in the eastern direction beyond infinitesimal worlds as numerous as the sands of immeasurable, endless *asaṃkhyeya* Ganges Rivers. This buddha land was called Mind-Pleasing Beautiful Sound (*Manorama-madhurasvara), and the buddha there was known as Equal to Space (*Ākāśasama), Tathāgata, Worthy of Offerings, of Right and Universal Knowledge, with Clarity and Conduct Perfect, Well-Gone, with Understanding of the World, Unsurpassed Worthy, Tamer of Men, Teacher

of Gods and Humans, Buddha World-Honored One. At that time, the buddha Equal to Space said to his chief disciple:

370c Good man, you should go now to that world in the west known as Sahā. In that world there is a buddha known as Śākyamuni, Tathāgata, Worthy of Offerings, of Right and Universal Knowledge, with Clarity and Conduct Perfect, Well-Gone, with Understanding of the World, Unsurpassed Worthy, Tamer of Men, Teacher of Gods and Humans, Buddha World-Honored One. It will not be long before this buddha will pass into extinction. Good man, you should take him fragrant dishes of food from this world. The food should be aromatic and attractive in appearance, and when eaten should bring peace and comfort. Present this food to that world-honored buddha. When that world-honored one has eaten it, he will enter *parinirvāṇa*. Good man, you must also show him your deepest reverence and entreat him to resolve your doubts.

Then, having thus received that buddha's teaching, the bodhisattva-mahāsattva *Anantakāya rose from his seat, bowed down to the feet of his buddha, and circumambulated him three times with his right shoulder facing the buddha. Then, together with innumerable *asaṃkhyeya* of bodhisattvas, he embarked from that land and came to this Sahā world. In response to the occasion, the continents of the great trichiliocosm shook in six different ways. Everyone assembled there, such as Brahmā, Indra, the Four Guardian Deities, Māra Pāpīyas, and Maheśvara, saw the earth move, felt the hair on their bodies stand up, and their throats become dry. They trembled with fright, each wanting to flee in a different direction. Looking at themselves, they noticed that they no longer radiated light; in fact their spiritual powers had vanished without a trace.

At that moment Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince, rose from his seat and spoke to the huge crowd:

Good men, have no fear, have no fear! Why? Because to the east of here beyond infinitesimal worlds as numerous as the sands of immeasurable uncountable *asaṃkhyeya* Ganges Rivers there is a world called Mind-pleasing Beautiful Sound. The buddha there is called Equal to Space, Tathāgata, Worthy of Offerings, of Right and Universal Knowledge, and indeed all the ten epithets of a buddha. There is also a bodhisattva there

called *Anantakāya who, together with innumerable other bodhisattvas, wishes to come here to make offerings to the Tathāgata. It is because of the spiritual power of this bodhisattva that your body's illumination is no longer visible. You should therefore be joyful at what has happened, rather than fearful.

Then the great assembly looked off into the distance and saw the approach of that other buddha's great assembly. It was as if they were looking at their own images reflected in a giant mirror. At that point, Mañjuśrī addressed the crowd once more:

What you now see is the great assembly of that buddha, just as you see this buddha. By means of the supernatural powers of the buddhas you will now be able to see all the countless buddhas in the other nine directions.

But the great assembly then remarked to each other, "Dreadful, positively dreadful. The world is hollow! The Tathāgata will soon pass into *parinirvāṇa*."

Then everyone in the crowd saw the bodhisattva *Anantakāya and his retinue approach. From each and every pore on that bodhisattva's body there arose a large lotus flower, and in each and every lotus flower there were seventy-eight thousand towns. In length and width each town was equal to that of Vaiśālī. They had walls and moats with the seven precious things scattered throughout, and seven rows of bejeweled palmyra trees. The people there were prosperous, lived in peace and security, enjoyed abundant provisions, and were happy.

Gold from the Jambū River was used for the coping of the gate towers, and upon each grew a variety of groves of trees of the seven precious things. These produced flowers and fruit in abundance, which produced a subtle and marvelous sound whenever they were stirred by the wind. This sound was so elegant as to seem like heavenly music, and it gave a sublime sense of pleasure to the people in the city when they heard it. The moats brimmed with superb water that was clear, pure, fragrant, and clean like pure *vaidūrya*. In those waters were boats with the seven precious things in which people rode, at times playing and bathing in the water, enjoying themselves in endless amusement. There were also lotus flowers of an innumerable variety of colors, such as the blue, yellow, red, and white, and the diameter of each was the size of a cartwheel. On the banks of the moats were many parks with trees, and within

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each park were five natural ponds. There were also flowers growing within these ponds, namely blue, yellow, red, and white lotuses. They, too, were as big as cartwheels, their scent richly fragrant, and these flowers were loved by everyone. The water in the ponds was clear and as soft as could be, and wild ducks, wild geese, and mandarin ducks frolicked in it.

Each of these parks also had a jeweled villa. The length and width of each of these villas were fully four *yojanas* in size,²¹ with walls constructed of the four precious stones: gold, silver, *vaiḍūrya*, and crystal. Pure gold formed the edge on the perimeter fences. The ground was made of quartz with gold dust covering it. Within the villas were numerous seven-jeweled bathing ponds filled with water flowing from springs. On the edge of each bathing pond was a golden stairway of eighteen steps [lined with] banana trees made of gold from the Jambū River, and the whole scene resembled the pleasure gardens in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven.

In each town were human kings numbering eighty-four thousand. Each king had innumerable numbers of consorts and female attendants, with whom the king enjoyed and amused himself happily. The other people were similarly [happy], each enjoying himself in his respective abode. Here living beings did not hear of anything else of reknown—they listened solely to the sound of the unsurpassed Mahāyāna.

Within each flower there was also a lion's seat, the four legs of which were all constructed of dark blue *vaiḍūrya*. Laid on each of these seats was a soft, white fabric more exquisite than anything in the triple world.²² On each of these seats sat a king who educated living beings by means of the Mahāyāna teachings. The living beings in attendance engaged in copying, reading and reciting, and practicing what was expounded to them. By doing so they helped spread the Mahāyāna scriptures.

At that time the bodhisattva *Anantakāya pacified the uncountable number of living beings [in the lotus flowers], by moving them to abandon their pursuit of worldly pleasures by themselves. And yet they [too] all exclaimed, "Dreadful, positively dreadful. The world is hollow! The Tathāgata will soon pass into *parinirvāṇa*." Then the bodhisattva *Anantakāya together with the innumerable other bodhisattvas that surrounded him, manifested his supernatural powers by bringing a variety of offerings, immeasurable in scope, including superbly fragrant and attractive food and drink, and

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announced that anyone who could smell the aroma of these foods would have the stains of all their defilements eliminated. And by means of his supernatural powers as a bodhisattva, all the living beings [present] were indeed able to see these miraculous transformations. But the body of the bodhisattva *Anantakāya was limitless in size, fully as large as space itself, so, with the exception of the buddhas, no one else was able to see the end point of this bodhisattva's body. It was then that the bodhisattva *Anantakāya and his retinue took their prepared offerings—twice what had been brought previously—and brought them to where the Buddha was. Making obeisance at his feet, they placed their palms together in reverence and addressed the Buddha, saying, “World-Honored One, all we ask is that you take pity on us and accept our food.” But the Tathāgata understood the occasion and remained silent, not accepting the offering. Then the bodhisattva *Anantakāya and his retinue withdrew and remained off to one side.

In the southern, western, and northern directions there were other buddha realms from which innumerable other bodhisattvas of incalculable, boundless size also came, bearing offerings that were twice what had been brought previously. Entering into the august presence of the Buddha, they also ended up withdrawing off to one side, like everyone else.

At that time, the auspicious and felicitous ground of the sal forest was completely filled by the enormous crowd that had now gathered, and even though the forest measured thirty-two *yojanas* in both length and width, there was not an empty space to be found. The only space where all the boundless body (**anantakāya*) bodhisattvas of the four directions and their retinues could sit were often no bigger than the head of an awl, the point of a needle, or a speck of dust. Nonetheless, all the great bodhisattvas of the many buddha realms in all the ten directions, even as small as specks of dust, came and were now assembled, and all living beings in Jambudvīpa had come as well. The only exceptions were the two groups associated with Venerable Mahākāśyapa and Venerable Ānanda, as well as King Ajātaśatru and his retinue. Poisonous snakes that can kill a man on sight, dung beetle vipers, scorpions, and people who have committed the sixteen evil acts—even all these were assembled there. The *dānavas* and *asuras*²³ completely put aside their harmful thoughts, and instead they all produced minds of compassion. Like fathers, like mothers, like elder sisters, and like younger sisters, all living

beings in the great trichiliocosm looked upon each other with the same attitude of compassion, with the exception of the *icchāntikas*.²⁴

At that time the ground in all worlds of this great trichiliocosm became soft due to the spiritual authority of the Buddha. There were no more hills, wastelands, sand, gravel, rocks, thorns, or poisonous plants. The land became so adorned with precious stones that it resembled the Sukhāvātī Western Paradise of Amitāyus Buddha. At this point everyone in the great assembly was able to see the buddha lands (*buddhakṣetras*) of the ten directions like so many specks of dust. As clear as if they were seeing their own image in a mirror, that is how well they were able to see the buddha lands.

Then a five-colored ray of light began to shine from the Tathāgata's mouth. The light was so bright that it permeated the entire congregation, rendering the bodily radiance given off by others no longer visible. After serving its purpose, the light returned to the Buddha's mouth from which it had come and disappeared. When the assembled gods, humans, and *asuras* saw the Buddha's light return and enter his mouth, they were all seized with fear, the hair on their bodies standing on end. They said:

This shining forth and returning of the light from the Tathāgata must not be without reason. It is certain that he has now taken care of what he needs to do in the ten directions. The sign of the final nirvāṇa, what will it be? Alas! What will it be? Alas! Why would the World-Honored One suddenly abandon the four immeasurable minds and refuse to accept the oblations offered by both humans and deities? From now on, the sunlight of sacred wisdom will be extinguished forever. The ship of the all-encompassing dharma will hereby sink! Ah, how depressing! The world is to be engulfed in suffering!

With their hands they pounded their chests and cried out in a sad lament. Their limbs trembled and they were not able to support themselves. Blood flowed from their pores, spilling on to the earth.

Fascicle II

Chapter One

Longevity: Part 2

At that time there was a lay follower in the assembly named Cunda who was the son of an artisan in Kuśinagara. In order to better enable [the living beings of] the world to earn beneficial karmic merit, Cunda, together with fifteen others of like mind, put aside their usual comportment and rose from their seated positions. They bared their right shoulders, put their right knees on the ground, joined their palms and, facing the Buddha, began to weep, their tears pouring out. Paying respect at the Buddha's feet, they then addressed him, saying:

All we ask of the World-Honored One and the *bhikṣus* is that you take pity on us and accept our last offerings of alms so that you may ferry innumerable living beings over [to the other shore]. World-Honored One, from now on we will have no master, no parents, no savior, no protector, no refuge, and no destination. Impoverished and hungry, we wish to follow the Tathāgata [and assume that] our nourishment will come in the future. All we ask is that you sympathize with us and accept our meager offerings, and only after that enter *parinirvāṇa*. World-Honored One, it is like those from military (*kṣatriya*), priestly (*brāhmaṇa*), merchant (*vaiśya*), or peasant (*śūdra*) backgrounds that, compelled by poverty, journey to far-off lands. They pour their labors into farming, obtaining a well-tamed ox and taking a fertile field and making it flat without any sand, harmful weeds, or tree stumps. All they seek is rain from the heavens. The tamed ox that we speak of is a metaphor for the seven ways [we control] our actions and speech [for the karma it creates].²⁵ The fertile field is a metaphor for spiritual wisdom (*prajñā*). Removing the

372a sand, harmful weeds, and tree stumps is a metaphor for removing the defilements (*kleśas*). World-Honored One, there are now trained oxen in us that have removed the tree stumps from fertile fields; we look only to you, Tathāgata, for the dharma rain that is the ambrosia of immortality (*amṛta*) to us. The impoverished four castes are none other than the impoverishment of who we are with respect to the wealth of the unsurpassed dharma. All we ask is that you take pity and eradicate our poverty and pain, thereby lifting up the immeasurable number of suffering living beings. What we have to offer may be small and trivial, but we nevertheless hope that it may satisfy the Tathāgata and the community. We now face having no master, no parents, and no refuge [after you are gone]; we come to you wishing for the compassion you would extend to [your son] Rāhula.

At that time the World-Honored One, the Omniscient, the Unsurpassed Tamer, addressed Cunda, saying:

Excellent! Excellent! I will now indeed remove this poverty for you. The rain of the unsurpassed dharma will fall upon your karmic field, bringing forth a dharma sprout. What you seek in me is life, form, power, serenity, and lucidity. I will indeed provide you with continual life, form, power, serenity, and unimpeded lucidity. How? Cunda, donating nourishment [as you have done] will have two karmic rewards that are indistinguishable. What are these two? First is that after the donation is accepted, [the donor] attains *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*. Second is that after the donation is accepted, [the donor] enters nirvāṇa. I now accept this last offering from you, and [thereby] bring you to the completion of the perfection of charity (*dāna-pāramitā*).

At that time, Cunda immediately spoke to the Buddha, saying:

The Buddha has said that the two karmic rewards of donations like mine are indistinguishable, but this does not make sense to me. Why? Because in the first instance of one who has had his donation accepted, the defilements will not have been exhausted, omniscient wisdom will not have been achieved, and there will be no ability to enable [other] living beings to complete the perfection of charity [through similar acts of giving].

Whereas in the second instance of one who has had his donation accepted, the defilements will have been exhausted, omniscient wisdom will have been achieved, and he will have acquired the ability to guide other living beings to complete the perfection of charity. In the first instance, the one who has had his donation accepted is merely a living being. In the second instance, the one who has had his donation accepted is a god among gods. In the first instance, the one who has had his donation accepted has a body sustained by various forms of eating, a body still deluded with the defilements, a body that has a final limit, a body that is impermanent. In the second instance, the one who has had his donation accepted has a body devoid of the defilements, a *vajra* (adamantine) body, a dharma body, a permanent body, a body without limits. Why, then, do you say that they are equal and without distinction? In the first instance, the one who has had his donation accepted is not yet able to complete the perfection of charity nor any of the other perfections up through and including the perfection of wisdom.²⁶ He only has physical eyes, he has not yet attained the eyes of a buddha nor any of the other forms of seeing, up through and including the eyes of spiritual wisdom.²⁷ In the second instance, the one who has had his donation accepted has already completed the perfection of charity and all the other perfections up through the perfection of wisdom. He is endowed with the eyes of a buddha and the other forms of seeing, up through the eyes of wisdom. Why, then, do you say the two karmic effects of donations are indistinguishable? World-Honored One, the first one who has had his donation accepted chews the food he receives, swallows it, and digests it. He thereby gains life, form, power, serenity, and unimpeded lucidity. The second one who has had his donation accepted does not eat food, does not digest food, and gains none of the five nutritional effects [of eating]. Why, then, do you say the two karmic effects of donations are indistinguishable?

The Buddha said:

Good man, for innumerable, *asamkhyeya kalpas* the Tathāgata has had a body that is not nourished by food nor affected by the defilements, a body without limits, a permanent body, a dharma body, a *vajra* body.

372b Good man, it is those who have not seen the buddha-nature that I name as having a body affected by the defilements, a body that is sustained by food, a body that has limits.

A bodhisattva on this occasion who, after accepting a donation of food and drink, enters the *vajra-samādhi* is someone who will, after his meal is digested, immediately see the buddha-nature and attain *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*. For this reason I say the two karmic effects of the donations are equivalent and indistinguishable. A bodhisattva on this occasion destroys the four māras,²⁸ and if he were to enter nirvāṇa he would also destroy the four māras. For this reason I say the two karmic effects of the donations are equivalent and indistinguishable. A bodhisattva on this occasion, though he may not [be able to] explain everything among the scriptures that make up the twelvefold canon, is certainly more proficient in them than he had been previously. And if he were to enter nirvāṇa he would analyze and elucidate the [canon] for the sake of living beings in detail. For this reason I say the two karmic effects of the donations are equivalent and indistinguishable.

Good man, for innumerable, *asaṃkhyeya kalpas* the body of the Tathāgata has not accepted any food or drink. For the śrāvakas I did say, “First I accepted the milk porridge offered by the two oxherding women, Nandā and Nandābalā. Only afterward did I then attain *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*.” But in fact I did not eat anything. That I now accept your last offerings is for the sake of this great assembly. But in fact I will not eat any of it.

At that time, hearing that the Buddha and World-Honored One would accept the last offering of alms from Cunda for the sake of the entire assembly, the crowd became ecstatic and shouted out their praise in unison:

Excellent, excellent! How rare this is, Cunda! The name by which you are recognized is not meaningless, for “Cunda” means “to understand subtle meanings.” And now you have established something of great meaning. Thus your name has been established on the basis of the truth that accords with meaning. That is why you are known as “Cunda.” In all the world it is you who have now gained great fame and profit; your auspicious wish has been fulfilled. How remarkable, Cunda, that among

all people living today it is you who have obtained what is so difficult to obtain and what is so unsurpassed in value.

Excellent, Cunda. This is as rare as the appearance of the *udumbara* flower in the world.²⁹ It is extremely uncommon for a buddha to appear in the world, and uncommon as well to meet a buddha, to put forth faith, and to truly hear the dharma. But to be able to make the final offering when the Buddha is facing his *nirvāṇa*—to be able to do that! How much more uncommon! Homage to Cunda! Homage to Cunda! You have accomplished the perfection of charity! It is like an autumn moon on the evening of the fifteenth of the month: clear, perfectly round, and not covered by any clouds. All living beings cannot help but look upon it with reverence. You, too, are like this, and thus we look upon you with reverence. The Buddha has already accepted your final offering, enabling you to complete the perfection of charity. Homage to Cunda! This is why we say you are like the full moon, and all living beings cannot help but regard you with reverence. Homage to Cunda! Although you have a human body, your mind is like a buddha-mind. Now you are Cunda, but in reality you are the son of the Buddha, no different from his son Rāhula.

Then, from the great assembly, the following verses were proclaimed:

Although you were born in the human realm,
 You have gone beyond the sixth heaven.³⁰
 Myself and everyone else in the assembly,
 Thus bow down and beseech you now.
 The holiest among the people,
 Is about to enter *nirvāṇa* now.
 You should take pity on us.
 For all we ask is that you quickly implore the Buddha,
 To long remain in this world,
 Benefiting countless beings,
 Expounding the wise, praiseworthy
 Dharma that is sublime ambrosia.
 If you do not implore the Buddha thus,
 Our lives will never be whole.

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For this reason you must see him.

Bow down and plead with our lord and protector (*nātha*)!

At that moment Cunda was overcome with joy. He was like someone whose father and mother had suddenly died and just as suddenly had come back to life—Cunda's joy was this great. He rose again, bowed ceremoniously before the Buddha, and then spoke in verse:

Glad indeed am I, having gained the blessing,
Of acquiring a human body [in this life].
Of allaying all trace of my greed, anger, and so forth,
Of having forever left behind birth in the three unfortunate realms.
Glad indeed am I, having gained the blessing
Of acquiring a bevy of gold and jewels by chance.
Of encountering a lord and protector,
Of no longer fearing a fall into an animal rebirth.
A buddha is like an *udumbara* flower,
To encounter one and have faith is so difficult.
Yet when there is that encounter, good roots are planted,
Freeing one forever from the sufferings of the hungry ghost.
And also effectively reducing
Those born as *asuras*.
Tossing a mustard seed on to the tip of a needle,
Is not as difficult as a buddha appearing in the world.
By completing the [perfection of] charity,
I cross beyond the *saṃsāra* of humans and gods.
Not stained by mundane things (*lokadharmā*),
The Buddha is like a lotus flower standing in [muddy] water.
Appropriately cutting off the seeds for even the highest birth,
Crossing the stream of birth and death, forever.
To be born in this world as a human is difficult.
To meet a buddha in this world is yet more difficult.
It is like a blind turtle in the middle of the ocean,
Finding a floating board with a hole [to put his head through]!
With this food that I have now offered,
I hope to obtain the ultimate reward:

May the fetters of all the defilements
 Be destroyed, never to grow strong again.
 As I stand here now,
 I do not seek a heavenly body.
 Even if I were to attain one,
 My heart would be unwilling to enjoy it.
 For the Tathāgata has accepted my offerings—
 Such joy immeasurable!
 It is like the [foul-smelling] *eraṇḍa* flower
 Producing the fragrance of sandalwood.
 My body is like the *eraṇḍa*;
 The Tathāgata, who accepts my offering,
 Is like the wafting sandalwood fragrance.
 This is why I am overjoyed,
 For here in this life,
 I have attained the most exalted reward.
 The gods Indra and Brahmā,
 Come to make offerings to me!
 Yet the entire world is distressed
 For they know the World-honored Buddha
 Is about to enter nirvāṇa.
 In a loud voice they cry:
 “Imagine the world bereft of its lord and protector!”
 Lord, do not abandon us living beings—
 Look upon us as if we were your only son!
 When the Tathāgata is among the sangha,
 Expounding the unsurpassed dharma,
 He is like a jeweled Mount Sumeru,
 Standing amid oceans.
 The Buddha’s wisdom can effectively cut
 Through the darkness of our ignorance:
 When clouds cover the sky,
 It can get freezing cold,
 But the Tathāgata can effectively eliminate
 All our defilements,

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Just like the sun coming out
Disperses the clouds and illuminates everything.
These living beings
Howl and cry, their faces swollen.
As everyone drifts
On the cruel waters of birth and death.
For this reason, World-Honored One,
To extend the faith of living beings
And cut away their pain in saṃsāra,
You must remain long in this world!

The Buddha then said to Cunda:

Just so, just so! Just as you have explained, the appearance of a buddha in the world is as rare as the *udumbara* flower. Meeting a buddha and having faith [in him] is also extremely difficult and rare. But providing the final offering of alms just as this buddha is facing nirvāṇa—and thereby accomplishing the perfection of the practice of charity—is even more difficult and rare.

Now Cunda, do not lament or grieve. Rather, you should be dancing with joy, rejoicing in your blessings to have been able to encounter this opportunity to present the final offering to a Tathāgata, and therein complete the perfection of charity. You should not be asking the Buddha to remain any longer in the world. Instead you should contemplate the fact that everything in the realm where a buddha [operates] is impermanent, and that the characteristics of the nature of all conditioned phenomena are just like this as well.

He then spoke to Cunda in verse:

In every world
What is born returns to death.
Individual lifetimes, though uncountable in number,
Must inevitably face their exhaustion.
Whatever flourishes will inevitably weaken.
Any assembly has its dispersal.
The prime of life stops before long.

The beautiful flush of youth will be corrupted by illness.
 Life is swallowed by death.
 For there is no phenomenon that is permanent,
 Kings may [reign] as they please,
 With power unmatched,
 But everything undergoes change.
 A lifetime is also like this:
 A wheel of suffering, limitless
 In its transmigration, with nary a rest.
 In the triple world all is impermanent,
 All existence is without pleasure.
 The original nature and characteristics of these paths of existence
 Are empty throughout.
 All these perishable dharmas flowing in and out,
 Eternally saddled with grief.
 The harmful errors of fear,
 The anxiety of aging, illness, death, and debilitation,
 These have no limit.
 [Health] is easily broken, [hearts] are invaded by resentment,
 Wrapped in defilements, [living beings] are
 Like silkworms inside their cocoons.
 What person of wisdom
 Would find pleasure in such a state?
 This body, where pain and suffering is collected,
 Where everything is impure,
 Confined, subject to ulcers, and more,
 It is fundamentally without value.
 Even up through the bodies of those in the highest heavens,
 It is exactly the same.
 All desire is impermanent,
 So to the self one does not cling (*saṅga*).
 Freed of desire, with proper thinking
 One thus realizes Truth (*mokṣa*).
 Having completely cut all ties to [the great flow of] existence,
 Today will be my *parinirvāṇa*.

When I crossed over to the other shore of existence,
I went beyond all forms of suffering.
For this reason, it is now
That I graciously accept the wondrous bliss [of nirvāṇa].
By means of this causality
I realize what is beyond all frivolous discourse,
And cut off the binds of illusion, forever.
Today I enter nirvāṇa
There is no aging, illness, or death for me,
For my lifespan cannot be exhausted.
I now enter nirvāṇa.
Like the burning out of a great flame.
Cunda, you should not speculate
On the meaning of the Tathāgata's [*parinirvāṇa*].
Contemplate the Tathāgata's abiding presence
Like Mount Sumeru.
I now enter nirvāṇa
Acceding to the highest bliss.
Thus is the nature of buddhas,
You should weep no longer.

Then Cunda spoke to the Buddha, saying:

373c World-Honored One. Just so, just so! Truly your sacred teaching is just as you say. The wisdom I now possess is so trifling as to be nothing more than [that of] a mosquito or gnat—how could I ever conceive of the deep, profound reasons for the Tathāgata's nirvāṇa? Ah, World-Honored One! Now, it may be that along with the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, like great dragons and elephants, I have now done away with the contaminants and stand equal to Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince. But, World-Honored One, my case is like the example of a youth when he first enters the order: though he has yet to receive full ordination he is considered to be a member of a sangha. It is only by means of the supernatural powers of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas that I have attained the position of being counted among these great bodhisattvas. This is why I now want to have the Tathāgata stay in the world for a long time without

entering nirvāṇa. Like a starving man with nothing left even to vomit, I still somehow hope to make the World-Honored One remain in this world forever, never to enter nirvāṇa.

At that time Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince, addressed Cunda:

Cunda! You should not speak in that way, trying to make the Tathāgata stay in the world forever and so preventing his *parinirvāṇa*, acting like a man so hungry he has nothing even to vomit. Instead you should be contemplating the nature and characteristics of all conditioned phenomena. Contemplate conditioned phenomena in this way and you will come to have a *samādhi* of emptiness. If you are seeking the true-dharma, you should apply yourself in this way.

Cunda then asked:

Mañjuśrī, the Tathāgata is the most esteemed, most exalted one in the heavens and on earth. So how is it that the Tathāgata is something conditioned? If he were conditioned, he would be a dharma that arises and perishes, comparable to water bubbles that quickly arise and just as quickly disappear. The revolving cycle of going and coming [among conditioned phenomena] turns round and round like a wagon wheel. Everything conditioned follows the same pattern in this sense. I have heard that the lifetimes of the gods in the heavens are extremely long. How is it that the World-Honored One is said to be a god among gods, yet he ages so quickly, his lifetime lasting not even a hundred years? Think of the analogy of a village chieftain whose authority brings him freedom but who uses his power to oppress others. When his good fortune has run out, he will then be poor and miserable, disdained by the community and exploited by others. Why does this happen? Because he has lost his power. Could the World-Honored One be similarly the same as conditioned phenomena? If he were the same as conditioned phenomena, then he would not be called “a god among gods.” Why? Because everything conditioned is just a saṃsāric phenomenon. Therefore, Mañjuśrī, do not consider the Tathāgata to be the same as all the conditioned phenomena.

In addition, Mañjuśrī, are you saying the Tathāgata is the same as conditioned phenomena based on what you know, or are you saying this

without really knowing? If the Tathāgata were the same as all conditioned phenomena, then he would not be deserving of the appellation, “God Among Gods, Unencumbered Dharma King” in the triple world. Consider the analogy of a monarch who has a very powerful warrior. This man has the strength of a thousand men and there is no one who can defeat him, so they call him “a man equal to a thousand.” Cherished by the king, he is rewarded handsomely with nobility and emolument. The reason they call him “equal to a thousand” is not because his strength necessarily competes with that of a thousand people, but because he is able to defeat a thousand men by means of his various skills and techniques, both active and passive. This is why he is said to be equal to a thousand.

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The Tathāgata is also like this. He defeats the demons that are the defilement-māra, the aggregate-māra, the heavenly māras, and the māra of death. The Tathāgata is therefore called “Lord of the Triple World.” Similar to that powerful warrior who is called “a man equal to a thousand.” By means of causal factors like these he is accomplished in various and uncountable genuine virtues. That is why he is called “Thus Come, Worthy of Offerings, Perfectly Enlightened.”

Mañjuśrī, you should avoid the conceptual aberration that regards the dharma of the Tathāgata as equivalent to conditioned phenomena. What if there were a very rich man who produced a son but then learned from the divination of a fortune-teller that the son’s life will be short. Upon hearing this, the father and mother would understand that the son could not be designated the inheritor of the family estate. They would lose their affectionate attachment to him, seeing him as if he were but grass, for a short life span is not respected by mendicants, brahmans, men, or women, whether adults or children. If one were to say the Tathāgata is identical to other conditioned phenomena, then he, too, would not be respected by humans, gods, or living beings in any world. The unchanging, undifferentiated true teaching that the Tathāgata has expounded for us would not be accepted as well. This is why, Mañjuśrī, you should not preach that the Tathāgata’s [existence] is identical to any form of conditioned phenomena.

In addition, Mañjuśrī, consider the parable of a destitute woman with no place to stay and no one to take care of her, who also suffers from

illness and is racked with hunger and thirst. Roaming about begging, she ends up staying in a house belonging to someone else. There she gives birth to a child but when the master of the house [returns], he throws her out, forcing her to go away. So not long after giving birth she must carry her newborn in hopes of reaching another land. On the road she encounters a bad storm, bitter cold, and is stung by a host of mosquitoes, horseflies, and bees, and bitten by poisonous insects as well. Her journey brings her to the Ganges River, which she attempts to cross while holding her infant. [Trying to get her child to the other side,] no matter how swift the current, she will not let go; but in the end mother and child both drown. This woman creates extraordinary merit in her compassion [toward her child], and after her life ends she is reborn in a Brahmā heaven.

Mañjuśrī, if there is a good man who wants to protect the true-dharma, he should neither say that the Tathāgata is the same as conditioned phenomena nor that he is not the same as conditioned phenomena. What he should do is reproach himself with “I am ignorant and do not yet have the eye of wisdom.” The true-dharma of the Tathāgata is inconceivable. Therefore it is improper to proclaim that the Tathāgata is definitely created (*saṃskṛta*) or definitely uncreated (*asaṃskṛta*). But if there were a correct viewpoint in this, it would be most appropriate to say the Tathāgata is definitely uncreated. Why? Because for the sake of living beings he generates the good dharma and because he generates kindness, like the poor woman who sacrifices her own life in the Ganges out of love for her child.

Good man, bodhisattvas who protect the dharma should also do likewise. It would be better to throw away your life than to preach that the Tathāgata is the same as created phenomena. You should instead say that the Tathāgata is the same as that which is uncreated. By preaching that the Tathāgata is identical to the uncreated, you will attain *amuttarā samyak-saṃbodhi*, just like that woman attained birth in the Brahmā Heaven. Why? Because you would then be protecting the dharma. Precisely what is protecting the dharma? It is what I am speaking about: preaching that the Tathāgata is identical to the uncreated. Good man, a person who does this will attain liberation even if he does not seek liberation, just as that

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destitute woman attained the Brahmā Heaven even though she did not seek the Brahmā Heaven.

Mañjuśrī, it is like someone traveling on a remote road who becomes exhausted and takes lodging in an unknown inn. While lying asleep, his room is suddenly engulfed in enormous flames. Suddenly startled from sleep, he immediately thinks “No doubt I will surely die now.” Filled with shame, he covers his body with his robes and presently dies, and is then reborn in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. After eighty more rebirths there, he becomes a Mahābrahmā king, and after a hundred thousand lifetimes he is reborn as a “wheel-turning sacred king” (*cakravartin*). Never having to experience birth in any of the three unfortunate destinies (of hells, animals, and hungry ghosts), he is always born into a place of peace and happiness. For this reason, Mañjuśrī, if there is a good man who feels shame [about his spiritual attainments], he must not identify the Buddha as one of the conditioned phenomena. Mañjuśrī, the false views of a heretic may dictate that the Tathāgata is identical to created phenomena, but a *bhikṣu* who keeps the precepts should not conjecture that the identity of the Tathāgata is created. If one states that the Tathāgata is created, that would be tantamount to lying. You should understand that such a person enters hell after he dies, just as if he were standing in his own house.

Mañjuśrī, the Tathāgata is truly an uncreated dharma. You should no longer say otherwise. From this day forth, while in saṃsāra you must abandon your ignorance and seek correct wisdom, understanding that the Tathāgata is indeed uncreated. If you can perceive the Tathāgata in this way, you will become fully endowed with the thirty-two special marks [of an enlightened being] and quickly attain *anuttarā samyakṣambodhi*.

Then Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince, praised Cunda:

Excellent! Excellent! Good man, you have now created the karmic conditions for a long life, fully understanding that the Tathāgata is a permanently abiding dharma, an unchanging dharma, and an uncreated dharma. In this way you have now successfully overturned the [notion of] the Tathāgata as having the characteristics of that which is created. Your act is like the man exposed to fire who threw his robe over his body

because he felt ashamed and who, by means of this exemplary state of mind, was reborn in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, again as Mahābrahmā, and again as a wheel-turning sacred king, never again going into the lower realms of existence, always receiving births of peace and happiness. Because you are also like him in the excellent way you have overturned the notion of the Tathāgata as having the characteristics of created existences, in the future you will most assuredly attain the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks, as well as the eighteen distinctive characteristics of a buddha.³¹ With an immeasurably long life, you will no longer experience the cycle of birth and death as such, but will remain in a state of peace and happiness, from which you will attain arhatship and full enlightenment before long.

Cunda, the Tathāgata presently will elaborate this point in detail and together you and I shall overturn the notion of the Tathāgata as created. So let us put aside this issue of created and uncreated for the moment. But you should serve food quickly when the situation requires it. Charity such as this is the best among all types of charity. For these monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen are exhausted from their long journey. They require something clean and pure and you should try to provide this as needed. Responding quickly with charity like this is the fundamental seed of completing the perfection of charity.

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Cunda, as you are the last one to provide alms for the Buddha and the sangha, whatever it is you give, be it plentiful, trivial, adequate, or inadequate, do try to be quick about it. For the Tathāgata is just about to assume *parinirvāṇa*.

Cunda then responded:

Mañjuśrī, why are you obsessed with this meal—talking about the food being plentiful or trivial, adequate or inadequate, and making sure that I provide things on time? Mañjuśrī, in the olden days the Tathāgata underwent asceticism for six years and yet sustained himself. Why wouldn't he be able to endure for a few more moments today? Mañjuśrī, are you actually saying that the Tathāgata in his perfect enlightenment will partake of this food? For I definitely know the body of the Tathāgata is none other than a body of dharma and not a body [that is sustained by] food.

At this point the Buddha spoke up and said to Mañjuśrī:

Just so, just so! It is just as Cunda has said. Excellent, Cunda! You have already attained a wisdom great and subtle, skillfully penetrating the extremely profound Mahāyāna sutras.

Mañjuśrī then said to Cunda:

You describe the Tathāgata as uncreated and the Tathāgata's body as having a very long life. Whenever one can produce such understanding the Buddha will be favorably disposed toward him.

Cunda answered: "The Tathāgata is not only favorably disposed toward me, he is favorably disposed toward all living beings."

Mañjuśrī then said: "You, me, and all living beings—the Tathāgata is favorably disposed toward everyone."

Cunda answered:

You should not say the Tathāgata is favorably disposed, for the very idea of him being "favorably disposed" is wrongheaded (**viparīta-samjñā*). Such false concepts are saṃsāric, and everything in saṃsāra is created. Therefore, Mañjuśrī, do not refer to the Tathāgata as created. If we allude to the Tathāgata as created, then you and I are both committing acts of distortion. Mañjuśrī, the Tathāgata has no notion of affectionate love. By affectionate love I am referring to the way a cow loves her calf: even when she is out in search of water or grass because she is thirsty or hungry, she may suddenly return home [when she thinks of her calf] regardless of whether or not she has satisfied her own needs. Buddhas, world-honored ones, do not have such thoughts. They look upon all [living beings] as Rāhula. It is precisely the realm of the buddhas' wisdom [and not in saṃsāra] where thoughts such as this occur.

Mañjuśrī, this is analogous to a team of horses specially trained by the king. Though we may want to empower our donkey cart to reach that level, it makes no sense to expect such a thing. You and I are also like this. Much as we may want to see the entirety of the hidden, profound depths of the Tathāgata, this is unreasonable. Mañjuśrī, it is like a *garuḍa* soaring into the sky for countless *yojanas*. He looks down into the ocean and sees families of water creatures such as fish, soft-shelled turtles, sea

turtles, and other turtles, crocodiles, and serpents; he even sees his own reflection appearing like an object in a bright mirror. With their limited understanding, ordinary persons cannot fathom what that bird sees. You and I are also like this: we cannot fathom the wisdom of a Tathāgata.

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Mañjuśrī addressed Cunda:

Just so, just so! It is just as you have explained. It is not that I had not discerned this; I merely wanted to test you in the affairs of a bodhisattva.

Just then the World-Honored One emitted a variegated light from between his eyebrows, illuminating the body of Mañjuśrī. Upon encountering this light, Mañjuśrī understood what it was. He then spoke to Cunda:

As the Tathāgata has manifested this propitious sign, he will surely be entering nirvāṇa before too long. These last offerings that you have prepared must be presented to the Buddha and the assembly in a timely manner. You do understand that the Tathāgata does not shine forth this type of multicolored light without a reason.

Upon hearing this, his emotions in check, Cunda grew quiet. The Buddha then said to Cunda: “Now is the proper time to make your offerings to the Buddha and the assembly. The Tathāgata is about to assume *parinirvāṇa*.”

He spoke in this manner a second and then a third time. After hearing the Buddha speak in this way, Cunda finally cried aloud, choked with sadness: “How awful, how distressing! The world will be empty!” He then turned to the assembly and said, “We should all prostrate ourselves on the ground right now and with one voice urge the Buddha not to pass into *parinirvāṇa*!”

At that point the World-Honored One spoke again to Cunda:

Do not carry on like that—you will harm yourself. You must consider the fact that this body is like a banana tree, a mirage in hot weather, a water bubble, a hallucination, an imaginary construct, an illusory city floating in the air conjured up by *gandharvas*, an unfired pot, or a flash of lightning. It is like drawing something on water, a prisoner facing death, ripe fruit, or cut meat; like the warp thread running out on a loom, like the up and down motion when grinding in a mortar as well. You should ponder the fact that all compounded things are like so much poisoned food, that there is much misery in conditioned phenomena.

To which Cunda replied to the Buddha:

The Tathāgata does not wish to remain long in this world. How can I not cry? This is terrible, distressing! The world will be empty. All I ask, World-Honored One, is that you take pity on us here and indeed on all living beings and remain with us for some time. Do not pass into *parinirvāṇa*!

The Buddha said to Cunda:

You should not say things like, “Take pity on us and remain in the world longer.” I have pity for you, indeed for everyone. That is precisely why I am now about to enter nirvāṇa. What is this? This is the nature of buddhas, just as it is for created phenomena as well. This is why buddhas utter the verse:

All created things
Have natures impermanent.
After coming into existence, they do not abide.
Tranquil extinction is bliss.

375b Cunda, you should contemplate how all compounded things are mixed with the dharmas of nonself, impermanence, and nonabiding. This body, with its innumerable forms of misery, is like foam on the surface of water. For this reason, you should not cry now.

Then Cunda said to the Buddha:

Just so, just so. It is indeed as the Lord teaches. Although I am aware that the Tathāgata’s entering into nirvāṇa is an expression of expediency (*upāya*), yet I am still unable to dispel my grief. On the other hand, when I ponder the matter, I also have feelings of joy.

The Buddha praised Cunda:

Excellent! Excellent! You have understood well that the Tathāgata manifests his nirvāṇa of expediency for all living beings. Cunda, listen to me now. Just as the *sārasa* cranes³² flock to Lake Anavatapta³³ in the months of spring, so do the buddhas all come to this place. Cunda, you must not now deliberate over whether the lives of buddhas are long or

short. All conditioned dharmas are like illusory forms, and while a tathāgata is among them he is using his powers of skillful means to do so but he is never tainted by them. Why? Because this is the nature of buddhas.

Cunda, I now accept the offerings you present because I want to enable you to cross over the streams of existence that are saṃsāra. If all humans and deities made offerings to me in this final moment, each of them would attain the karmic reward of imperturbability, which is to be eternally blessed with peace and happiness. Why would this happen? Because I am a most excellent field of blessing for living beings. If you also want to become a field of blessings for living beings, then quickly present your offerings; do not tarry.

So that living beings may attain liberation, Cunda then lowered his head, swallowed his tears, and said to the Buddha:

Excellent, World-Honored One! If I am worthy, when I become a field of merit I will be able to comprehend the Tathāgata's nirvāṇa and his nonnirvāṇa. But at the moment the wisdom possessed by myself and indeed all the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is little more than that of mosquitoes or ants. We truly cannot fathom the nirvāṇa—or even the nonnirvāṇa—of the Tathāgata.

At that time Cunda and his followers, feeling forlorn and agitated, circumambulated the Tathāgata even as they wept. They burned incense and scattered flowers, paying homage [to the Buddha] with utter sincerity. Then, together with Mañjuśrī, they left their seats to prepare the meal provisions.

It was not long after they had left their seats that the earth shook in six different ways, reaching all the way up to the Brahmā Heaven, where it was also felt. There are two kinds of such things: earthquakes and major earthquakes. Small tremors are simply called “earthquakes” but when there is significant movement it is referred to as a “major earthquake.” Likewise, when the sound associated with these occurrences is small, the event is called an “earthquake” but when the sound is loud one also speaks of a “major earthquake.” If only the ground moves, that is an “earthquake,” but if mountains, rivers, trees, and waters in the ocean move—when everything moves—then it is called a “major earthquake.” If the movement is only in one direction, it is an “earthquake” but if everything moves this way and that, then it is

called a “major earthquake.” Movement of the earth is known simply as an “earthquake” but when that movement can cause the minds of living beings to move, it is called “a major earthquake.” When the bodhisattva began his descent from Tuṣita Heaven into Jambudvīpa, this was known as a “major earthquake.” When he was born, when he left his household, when he achieved *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*, when he turned the wheel of the dharma, and
375c when he attained nirvāṇa, these were all known as “major earthquakes.” Today the Tathāgata is about to enter nirvāṇa, and that is why the earth has now moved in such dramatic ways.

At that time *devas, nāgas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kiṃnaras, mahoragas*, humans and nonhumans alike, upon hearing the words [exchanged between the Buddha and Cunda] felt their own hair stand on end. Sadly crying in unison, they uttered these verses:

Bow down in reverence to the Protector!
We now beseech you most earnestly,
For, apart from the Great Saint of mankind,
We will be helpless forever.
To observe the Buddha’s impending nirvāṇa
Is for us to sink into a sea of despair.
Forlorn, disturbed, overcome with a dismal anguish,
Like a calf that has lost its mother,
Poor and helpless,
We are like someone seized by illness
Who, without a physician, follows his own will,
And eats what he should not.
Living beings, sick with the defilements,
Constantly victimized by their own opinions,
Apart from the Physician of the Dharma
They take harmful, poisonous medicines.
For this reason, Buddha, World-Honored One,
We should not be abandoned!
Like a nation without a sovereign,
The people will all starve.
We, too, are up against it,

Losing our shade and our dharma elixir.
 Hearing now of the Buddha's nirvāṇa,
 Our hearts are panic-stricken,
 Like a major earthquake
 That causes people to lose their way.
 When the Great Saint enters nirvāṇa,
 The Buddha Sun will have fallen beyond the horizon,
 The waters of the dharma will have dried up,
 And we will surely die.
 The *parinirvāṇa* of a tathāgata
 Is the most distressing moment for a living being.
 Like the son of a powerful family
 Who has just lost his mother and father.
 The Tathāgata enters nirvāṇa,
 And if he does not return,
 We and the other living beings—
 None of us will be saved.
 The Tathāgata enters nirvāṇa,
 And even the animals
 Will all be gripped with fear,
 Anxiety scorching their hearts.
 For us on this day,
 How could we not be in anguish?
 We are cast aside by the Tathāgata,
 As one expectorates mucus or saliva.
 Just as when the sun first rises,
 Shining with a flame so radiant,
 It comes back to illuminate itself,
 While destroying all darkness.
 Let the light of the Tathāgata's spiritual powers
 Effectively remove our sufferings—
 Reside here within this mass of living beings,
 Like Mount Sumeru!

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[They then said:]

World-Honored One, this is analogous to a king who begets sons and raises them to be proper in appearance and manner, with hearts constant in thoughts of love. At first he teaches them the skills [to succeed] and makes sure they have mastered each one, but after that he entrusts his executioners with the task of having them killed. World-Honored One, today we are the sons of a dharma king and have gratefully received your teachings so that we may form correct views. Pray, do not abandon us like the abandoning of that king's sons. All we ask is that you abide here for some time and not enter nirvāṇa.

World-Honored One, this is analogous to someone well studied in the literature but who is struck with fear when looking at this text. The Tathāgata is of course accomplished in all manner of dharmas, but in regard to these dharmas [we] also have fear. So if we could but have the Tathāgata remain in the world for some time, expounding the timeless ambrosia (*amṛta*) of the dharma and fulfilling the needs of all, then living beings would no longer fear falling into the hell realms.

World-Honored One, this is analogous to someone who has just begun to learn his trade but then finds himself arrested by officials and locked up in prison. People ask him, "How are you taking all this?" He answers, "I am in agony! If only I could obtain my freedom, I would be overjoyed." World-Honored One, this is what it is like [for us]. You practiced all those austerities for our sake, but at the moment we are as yet incapable of escaping the sufferings of saṃsāra. So how could the Tathāgata accept the [ultimate] bliss [and disappear]?

World-Honored One, this is analogous to a master physician skilled in Āyurvedic medicines and their application. He passes on the secret medicinal preparations solely to his son and does not teach these things to his other pupils. The Tathāgata seems also to be like this: you have taught the most profound and hidden treasury of doctrines solely to Mañjuśrī and are abandoning us without consideration. The Tathāgata should not be like that master physician, you should have no parsimony regarding the dharma, as [the physician] did regarding the secrets of his knowledge, teaching it to his son to whom he is partial but not to his other students. That physician is unable to teach what he knows openly due to a sense of success or failure within him that makes him secretive

and resentful. But there are never any thoughts of success or failure in the Tathāgata, so why will we not be [similarly] instructed? All we ask is that the Tathāgata reside [with us] for some time and not pass into final nirvāṇa.

World-Honored One, this is analogous to some people that, whether they are old, young, infirm, or in distress, choose to abandon the straight and true path for a steep and dangerous one. This steep path is fraught with difficulty and will bring a great deal of pain and suffering. But there is also someone else who sees all this and, feeling sympathy and compassion for them, immediately points out a road that is flat and easy to travel. Lord, we are just like those people [on dangerous paths]. The so-called “young” in this example is a metaphor for those who have not yet nurtured their capacity to the point where they can realize the dharma body. The “old” is a metaphor for those plagued by a build-up of the defilements. The “infirm” represents those not yet free of the cycle of birth and death. And the “steep path” is a metaphor for [all] twenty-five forms of existence found within the cycle of birth and death. All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you lead us on the right path to the ambrosia of immortality. Stay in the world for some time with us; do not enter into nirvāṇa!

At that time the World-Honored One addressed the assembly of monks: 376b

Bhikṣus! Do not be like the ordinary people, or the gods for that matter, who cry out in sorrow. You must be diligent, your minds concentrated, and your thoughts upright.

Then, having heard what the Buddha had said, the gods, humans, *asuras*, and the others stopped their weeping, much like someone who mourns the loss of a child has reached a point where he can cry no more. At that point the World-Honored One uttered these verses for all to hear:

You should all open your minds,
 You must avoid this great depression!
 The natures of buddhas are all like this,
 So quiet down. Rejoice in your assiduous practice,
 Guard your thoughts, direct your attention properly,
 Distance yourself from all impropriety,
 And take comfort in the joy you get [from that].

[The Buddha then said:]

Furthermore, *bhikṣus*, if you have any doubts at all, now is the time to ask about them. You may wonder if something is empty or nonempty, permanent or impermanent, painful or not painful, a support or not a support, gone or not gone, a refuge or not a refuge, eternal or not eternal; if something is terminable or constant, a living being or not a living being; if something exists or does not exist; if something is real or not real, true or not true, emancipated or not emancipated, concealed or unconcealed; or if something is dual or nondual. If you have any doubts concerning one or more aspects of the dharma such as these I have just mentioned, you should ask me now and I will accordingly erase those doubts for you. After I have expounded the immortal ambrosia [of the dharma] to you, then and only then will I enter nirvāṇa.

Bhikṣus, it is extraordinary for a buddha to appear in the world. It is rare to obtain a human body. For you to meet a buddha and arouse faith [in his teachings]—such things are even more rare. To be able to endure what is difficult to endure, this is also rare. To be able to fulfill the requirements of the rules of discipline perfectly without any lapses, to attain the fruit of arhatship, these things are also rare, like searching for gold dust or an *udumbara* flower.

Bhikṣus, it is highly unusual that you have managed to avoid the difficult conditions of the eight inopportune births,³⁴ enabling you to obtain a human body [in which you can now hear the dharma from me]. That you have encountered me should not be dismissed as insignificant. Over a long time I have performed a variety of ascetic practices such that I have now obtained unsurpassed skillfulness in expedient means. It is thus for your sake that in the course [of many lives] over innumerable *kalpas* I have tossed away my body, my hands, my feet, my head, my eyes, and even my brain. For that reason you must not be lazy.

Bhikṣus, how does one adorn the jeweled castle of the true-dharma? Furnish it with a variety of rare gems of virtuous merit. Make morality (*śīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*) its walls, moats, and parapets. Now that you have encountered this jeweled castle of the buddha-dharma, do not take it to be inauthentic. That would be like a merchant who comes across a castle filled with genuine jewels but comes

home instead with debris. You may similarly come away with falsehoods from your encounter with this jeweled castle [if you regard it erroneously]. Monks, do not become complacent, indulging in low thoughts! Although you have obtained ordination, you have no yearning for the Mahāyāna. Monks, although you have succeeded in putting on *kaṣāya* dyed robes³⁵ your hearts have yet to be dyed in the pure teaching of the Mahāyāna. Monks, although you have practiced almsbegging and have moved around from place to place, from the outset you have never begged for the dharma-food of the Mahāyāna. Monks, although you have removed the hair on your heads and chins, you have yet to take up the true-dharma to remove that which binds you to the world. Monks, I will now lay out the true teaching for you.

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Now, at this moment I am here, this great assembly is harmoniously gathered together, and the natural condition of the tathāgatas is true and never in error. For this reason you must be diligent, focused, courageous, and put an end to the errors that bind you to the world. When this wisdom-sun with its tenfold powers sinks over the horizon and is gone, you will be enveloped in the darkness of ignorance. Monks, just as the medicinal herbs of the mountains and the continents are there for living beings to make use of, my dharma should be thought of in the same way. This dharma that I have brought forth, whose flavor is the sublime ambrosia of immortality, is the ideal medicine for the various defilements that plague living beings. From now I will turn all living beings into my own children. The four groups [of believers] should all be securely settled within the hidden treasury. I, too, will be settled there, whereupon I will enter nirvāṇa.

Now what is this thing I call the “hidden treasury”? It is something like the three dots that form the Sanskrit letter “i”—if they were written in a horizontal line, they would not form the letter “i” and if laid out vertically they would also fail to produce the letter. Only when they are arranged like the three eyes in the face of Maheśvara will they form the letter “i.”³⁶ No other formulation will work.

I, too, am thus. The dharma of liberation is not nirvāṇa, the body of the Tathāgata is not nirvāṇa, and the spiritual wisdom of *mahāprajñā* is also not nirvāṇa. Each of these three dharmas is different; each by itself is not nirvāṇa. It is because I am now settled in all three of these dharmas

that for the sake of living beings I “enter nirvāṇa,” as it is called, just like the letter “i” is commonly understood.

At that time the *bhikṣus*, upon hearing that the Buddha World-Honored One would surely pass into nirvāṇa, were all despondent. The hair on their body stood on end and tears welled up in their eyes. Bowing down to the feet of the Buddha, they circumambulated him numerous times and finally spoke up:

World-Honored One. You have readily explained the notions of impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and nonself. World-Honored One, just as among the footprints of all living beings there is nothing that surpasses the footprint of an elephant, so too is the concept of impermanence paramount among all concepts. Anyone who is diligent in his cultivation of this will be able to eliminate all craving in the realm of desire, all attachment in the realms of form and nonform, spiritual ignorance, arrogance, and even conceptions of impermanence itself. World-Honored One. If the Tathāgata has abandoned the concept of impermanence, then he should not enter nirvāṇa now. If he has not abandoned it, then why would he tell us that cultivating the concept of impermanence will free us from attachment, ignorance, arrogance, and even the concept of impermanence itself in regard to the triple world? World-Honored One, this is analogous to the farmer who plows his land deeply in autumn and is [thus] able to remove its weeds. The concept of impermanence is also like this, for it enables one to remove all craving in the world of desire and in the realms of form and nonform; all attachment, spiritual ignorance, arrogance, and even conceptions of impermanence itself. World-Honored One, just like the fact that when plowing fields it is paramount to plow in autumn, and among the footprints of living beings the footprint of the elephant is paramount, among all conceptualizations the concept of impermanence is paramount. World-Honored One. Suppose there is a sovereign who, knowing his life was about to end, grants pardons to the prisoners incarcerated under his rule, and only after doing this does he relinquish his hold on life. Should not the Tathāgata now also respond in this way, saving living beings from every confinement of their stupidity and spiritual ignorance, enabling them all to attain liberation, and only after doing

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that enter *parinirvāṇa*? All of us here have yet to attain deliverance. How could the Tathāgata be on the edge of abandoning us to enter nirvāṇa, just like that?

World-Honored One, it is like someone possessed by a demon. If he meets a good exorcist he will have the opportunity to be freed by means of the power of that master's incantations. In like manner, the Tathāgata can remove the demons of ignorance from his śrāvakas, empowering them to settle themselves in the dharmas of great wisdom, liberation, and so forth, just like the worldly letter "i."

World-Honored One, it is like a rutting elephant held in captivity. He cannot be restrained even by experienced trainers and could suddenly break any ropes or chains holding him and run away. But we are not yet able to do that—we have yet to throw off the fifty-seven defilements that bind us [to the world of birth and death]. So how could the Tathāgata be on the edge of abandoning us to enter nirvāṇa?

World-Honored One. Just as someone suffering from malaria could have his pain eliminated after meeting a skilled physician, we are in the same situation. We suffer from a host of vexations, improper ways of making a living, and feverish illnesses. And although we have encountered a tathāgata, our illnesses are yet to be healed; we have yet to attain the unsurpassed peace and eternal bliss [that we know is possible]. How could the Tathāgata be about to abandon [us now] and enter nirvāṇa?

World-Honored One, suppose there were someone so intoxicated that he became completely unaware of what was going on. He could not even distinguish those who were close to him from those who were not—he did not recognize his mother, his daughter, or his sister, for example. Abandoning himself to wild licentiousness, he became impudent in his speech and would even lie down in the filth of his own excrement. Then a skilled master appeared who managed to get him to take medicine for his condition. After taking the medicine, he would disgorge the alcohol [in his stomach] and return to his normal state of mind. In his heart he would then feel ashamed and reproach himself deeply for his behavior. Alcohol is not good, the root of harmful things. [He knows that] if he could only expunge it from his life, he could distance himself from the wrongdoings he is wont to do. Blessed One, we are just like

this. From the ancient past we have transmigrated through the realm of birth and death intoxicated with physical pleasure and craving stimulation through our five senses. We harbor notions of motherhood that are not what our mothers are, we harbor notions of sisterhood that are not what our sisters are, we harbor notions of “what a daughter is” that are not what daughters are, and we create notions of what “living beings are” that are not what living beings are. This is why we repeatedly transmigrate in this painful cycle of saṃsāra, lying down in the filth of our own excrement like that inebriated man. If the Tathāgata would only administer the medicine of the dharma to us now, it would enable us to disgorge the harmful wine of the defilements. And yet here we are, having not yet attained this mind of awakening. How could the Tathāgata be on the verge of abandoning us to enter nirvāṇa himself?

World-Honored One, it is like someone who appreciates the banana tree as something solid, when in fact it is no such thing. World-Honored One, living beings are like that. They may appreciate a self, a person, an individual living being, a life span, a personality, an observer, an actor, or an experiencer—seeing them all as real. But in fact these [identities] are also falsely deduced [from experience]. This is how we cultivate our consciousness of nonself. World-Honored One, these notions are analogous to wine sediment—of no use whatsoever.

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This body is like that as well, without a self and without a master. World-Honored One, just like the flower of the seven-leaved *saptaparṇa* tree has no scent,³⁷ this body has no self and no master as well. In this way our thoughts are always directed toward cultivating the discernment of nonself. It is just as the Buddha has explained to us:

All dharmas are devoid of self or anything pertaining to self. Monks, you should cultivate this understanding, for having done so will remove your egotism. And after one has abandoned their egotism, that person will thereupon enter nirvāṇa.

World-Honored One, just as it makes no sense for someone to say that traces of the birds in the sky are visible, it makes no sense that such views [of “I” or “mine”] would be held by anyone capable of cultivating a consciousness of nonself.

At that point the World-Honored One praised the *bhikṣus*, saying: “Excellent, excellent! You have cultivated your discernment of nonself quite beautifully.”

Then the *bhikṣus* spoke to the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One. We have not only cultivated our perception of nonself, we have also cultivated other discerning perceptions: that is, we are concerned with what is suffering and what is impermanence in addition to what is nonself. World-Honored One. Like an intoxicated person, whose mind in a daze sees mountains, rivers, stone walls, grasses and trees, palaces, houses, the sun, moon, or stars as if they were all spinning round, World-Honored One, anyone who does not cultivate his perception of suffering, impermanence, and nonself [is disoriented and] cannot be called a [true] “noble seeker.” Undisciplined in many ways, such a person transmigrates in the cycle of birth and death. World-Honored One, these are the reasons why we carefully practice these discernments.

At that point the World-Honored One said to the *bhikṣus*:

Now listen carefully, listen carefully! In the analogy of the intoxicated man that you just gave, you have understood the written letters but you have not penetrated into what they mean. What does this story mean? It is that living beings on the whole are just like that intoxicated person who, looking up at the sun and moon, perceives them to be spinning when in fact they are not. Blinded by defilement and ignorance, they create misconceptions in the form of inversions in their thinking: what is self they reckon as nonself, what is constant or permanent they reckon as impermanent, what is pure they reckon as impure, and what is joyful they reckon as painful. Because [living beings] are deluded by the defilements, even if they recognize these [as errors] they still do not comprehend what this means, just like that intoxicated person who perceived something to be spinning when it was not.

“Self” is what “buddha” means. “Permanence” is what “dharma body” means. “Bliss” is what “nirvāṇa” means. “Purity” is what “dharma” means. *Bhikṣus*, why do you say, “To have any perception of self reflects arrogance and pride, and leads to transmigration in saṃsāra”? [With that

attitude] when any of you declare, “I cultivate my perception of impermanence, suffering, and nonself,” these three types of practice will have no real meaning.

But now I will explain to you three special dharmas to cultivate instead. When what is painful is regarded as joyful and what is joyful is regarded as painful, that is an inverted dharma. When what is impermanent is regarded as permanent and what is permanent is regarded as impermanent, that is an inverted dharma. When what is nonself is regarded as self and what is self is regarded as nonself, that is an inverted dharma. When what is impure is regarded as pure and what is pure is regarded as impure, that is an inverted dharma. It is because of these four inversions that people do not understand the proper practice of dharma.

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Bhikṣus, when you are enveloped by a dharma of pain or suffering you can still entertain the notion of joy or bliss, when you are enveloped by a dharma of impermanence you can still entertain the notion of permanence, when you are enveloped by a dharma of nonself you can still entertain the notion of self, and when you are enveloped by a dharma of impurity you can still entertain the notion of purity.

The mundane world contains permanence, bliss, self, and purity, and the supramundane world also contains permanence, bliss, self, and purity. And while these words in the context of the dharma [taught] in the mundane world may have no meaning, in the context of the supramundane world these words do have meaning.

Why is this? It is because people are affected by these four inversions that they do not understand the meaning of the dharma [taught] in the mundane world. And what is the reason for that? It is because people in the mundane world are impacted by three inversions—perception, reflection, and theory—and thus they perceive suffering in what is joyous, they perceive impermanence in what is permanent, they perceive nonself in what is self, and they perceive impurity in what is pure.

These [errors] are known as “inversions” and it is by means of them that written letters may function in the world yet their [true] meanings remain unknown. And what are those meanings? “Nonself” [actually] denotes “saṃsāra.” “Self” denotes “tathāgata.” “Impermanence” denotes “śrāvakas” and “pratyekabuddhas.” “Permanence” denotes the “dharma

body of tathāgatas.” “Pain” (**duḥkha*) denotes “all other paths.” Bliss (**sukha*) denotes “nirvāṇa” itself. “Impurity” denotes “created dharmas.” “Purity” denotes “the true teaching of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.” All these are what I call the “noninversions.” It is by means of what is not inverted that one can understand the meaning of letters. If you want to separate yourself from the four inversions, you must understand permanence, bliss, purity, and self in this way.

Then the *bhikṣus* spoke up and addressed the Buddha thus:

World-Honored One. The Buddha has expounded on the fact that by separating oneself from the four inversions one attains an understanding of permanence, bliss, self, and purity. The Tathāgata himself now resides in a state eternally devoid of the four inversions, and thus is fully cognizant of permanence, bliss, self, and purity. But if you are already fully aware of permanence, bliss, self, and purity, then why do you not remain with us for one *kalpa* or even a half a *kalpa*, guiding us so that we may also leave behind the four inversions? Instead we are going to be abandoned, as you are now about to enter nirvāṇa. Tathāgata, if we would be given consideration and would be directed by you, we would sincerely accept and practice [your teaching]. Tathāgata, if you enter nirvāṇa, how are we to establish ourselves in the pure *brahmacarya* practices³⁸ while residing in these bodies of poison? What we should do is follow the Buddha World-Honored One to enter nirvāṇa.

Then the Buddha said this to the *bhikṣus*:

You should not use that kind of language. I have entrusted the entire unsurpassed righteous dharma to Mahākāśyapa.³⁹ This Mahākāśyapa will be a great support for you. Just as the Tathāgata has been the ground of support for living beings, Mahākāśyapa will also become a ground of support for you. This is analogous to a great king with many territories under his command who, when he embarks on a journey to tour them, entrusts everything to his chief minister. The Tathāgata is acting in this way when he entrusts the true-dharma to Mahākāśyapa.

You should also understand that the perceptions of impermanence and suffering that you have been cultivating are not true realities. The situation

is analogous to a group of people going out on a lake in boats to enjoy themselves in springtime and they inadvertently drop a jeweled necklace made of *vaiḍūrya* into the water, thereby losing it. At that moment everyone jumps into the water to look for it. Competing with one another in the water, they grab rocks, vegetation, or gravel, each declaring, “I have found it!” and jubilantly holding it up for all to see, only then realizing that they have something else entirely, as the necklace is still in the water. By virtue of the power of the gemstones, however, the water becomes clear. Everyone in the crowd can then see the necklace in the water just as if they were looking up into the sky and seeing the shape of the moon. While all this is going on, there is one wise man in the crowd who skillfully slips into the water and grabs the necklace.

Bhikṣus, thus you should not cultivate your ideas of impermanence, suffering, nonself, impurity, and so forth as if they were the true meaning [of the human condition]. Just like those people who took rocks, vegetation, or gravel to be the jeweled necklace they were looking for, you must carefully learn about expedient means so that wherever you are, you can continually cultivate your perception of self as well as your perceptions of permanence, bliss, and purity. You also need to understand that the forms of the four teachings that you have been studying are all inverted. Those who want to obtain the truth need to cultivate their discernment of things, just like the wise man who skillfully [noticed what was really going on and] brought up the jeweled necklace. By this I am referring to your perception of self and your perceptions of permanence, bliss, and purity as well.

At that point the monks responded by saying to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, in the past you preached this to us:

All dharmas are devoid of self. You should cultivate this understanding, for having done so you will then leave behind your idea of self. When you have abandoned your idea of self, you will then leave behind your arrogance, and one who abandons arrogance can gain entrance into nirvāṇa.

What did that mean?

The Buddha said to the monks:

Excellent, excellent! It is well that you have inquired into the meaning of this matter in an effort to dispel your own doubts.

Consider this parable. There was once a king of dull sensitivity and little wisdom. [Serving him] was a physician whose nature was also rather stupid, yet as the king was unable to distinguish such things, he gave [the physician] a very generous official salary. This doctor treated a host of illnesses by simply prescribing milk, for he did not understand the causes of the ailments with which he was faced. Although he knew that milk was often not particularly efficacious as medicine, whatever illness he encountered, whether it was an illness of wind, of cold, of heat—in each case he nevertheless administered milk. And the king, on his part, could not discern if the physician himself understood what was beneficial or deleterious, good or bad, in his medicinal use of milk.

Now there also happened to be a brilliant physician in the kingdom who was quite proficient in all eight technical disciplines of healing.⁴⁰ He responded skillfully to whatever ailment he encountered, because he was aware of all known medicinal treatments. People came from great distances to see him. It did not occur to the elder physician to seek him out for consultation; instead the elder physician displayed arrogance and contempt toward him. At that time, however, the brilliant physician put himself in a dependent relationship with the king's physician, requesting that the older man become his teacher, and consulting with him about medical methods and esoteric teachings. He said directly to the elder physician: "If I may, I would like to ask if you would consider becoming my mentor. All I ask is that you open up to me and explain [your understanding] of medicine."

The elder physician responded in this way: "Well now, let's see. If you can agree to offer yourself in service to me for forty-eight years, only after that will I teach you the practice of medicine."

The brilliant physician immediately accepted his proposal, saying: "I will do as you say. I will do as you say. To the best of my ability, I humbly offer to serve you."

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The elder physician then brought him into [the palace] as a "visiting physician" to see the king. On that occasion, the brilliant physician, as

a visitor, proceeded to explain a variety of different treatments and techniques to the king, saying:

O great king, of course you understand how important it is to distinguish things carefully. This dharma as such may be used to rule nations, or this dharma as such may be used to cure illnesses.

Upon hearing these words, the sovereign realized at that moment that the elder physician was an imbecile, lacking any knowledge of what he was doing. He immediately sent him away, ordering him banished from the country. Thereafter he found that his respect for the visiting physician had doubled.

Now on his part, this visiting physician thought to himself, "If I want to educate the king, now is the right time to do so." He then turned to the king and said: "Great king, if you truly love me, then please grant me one wish."

The king answered: "From being here at my right hand to any other rank, whatever your heart desires I shall grant to you."

The visiting physician then said:

O king, although you permit me every possible rank, I would not dare to ask for so much. Instead what I seek is a royal decree to be enforced throughout the nation stating that henceforth there shall be no more taking of milk for medicinal purposes, as was prescribed by the elder physician. Why do I ask for this? It is because this medicine [can be] toxic with many harmful effects. Therefore, [declare that] if anyone insists on ingesting this form of medicine, they are to be beheaded. After you put a stop to the use of medicinal milk, you will see premature deaths come to an end and peace and happiness will reign forever. This is why I make this request.

Then the king replied:

What you have asked for surely merits no further discussion. I shall immediately issue a proclamation for all the lands in my domain to the effect that without exception sick people are no longer allowed to use milk as medicine. Anyone who takes it as medicine will lose his or her head.

The visiting physician at that point turned his efforts toward blending ingredients with different tastes to synthesize a number of medicines. That is, he based [the medicines] on [herbs that] tasted pungent, bitter, salty, sweet, and sour. With them he treated a range of illnesses, none of which were beyond his means to cure.

Not long after this, however, the king himself grew ill. He immediately called for the physician, saying: “I am now seriously ill, racked with pain, and it appears that I am about to die. Can you do something to help me?”

The physician divined the king’s illness and determined that milk should be prescribed. He then addressed the king and explained:

The ailment that is causing the king so much discomfort is one that should be treated by drinking milk. In the past I suspended the use of milk as medicine, [saying it was toxic,] but that position was not entirely truthful. If you could take some milk now, it would be the best possible way of ridding yourself of this illness. The king is now suffering from a debilitating fever and he should definitely drink milk for this.

The king then said to the physician:

Have you gone mad? Are you stricken with fever yourself? For you are saying that drinking milk will take away my illness! Before you called it poison, so why would you tell me to drink it now? Are you trying to deceive me? The previous doctor praised [medicinal milk] but you called it poison and had me ban it. Yet now you claim it is the best thing to cure what ails me. If I were to do as you say, it would mean that from the beginning the elder physician was clearly a better doctor than you!

Then the visiting physician responded to the king with these words:

O king, you should not speak in that way. It is like an insect that eats through wood in such a way that what he leaves behind is in the shape of a letter of the alphabet. The insect is not aware if what he has left behind forms a letter or not, and no intelligent person who sees this would cry out, “This insect knows letters,” or be particularly

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surprised by what he sees. Great king, you must understand that the old physician was [operating] like this. He did not distinguish one illness from another but merely gave milk to everyone as medicine, so just as that insect whose path accidentally formed a letter, [his success was a random occurrence]. The previous, elder physician did not understand what was beneficial or deleterious, good or bad, in the use of milk as medicine.

Then the king asked: “Why did he not understand this?”

The visiting physician answered, “When milk is used as medicine, it can have the harmful effect of poison or it can have the effect of *amṛta*, an ambrosia of immortality.”

[The king asked:] “When would you say that milk is something that prevents death?”

[The physician answered:]

If a cow does not eat wine dregs, slimy grass, or wheat tailings, her calves will be strong. If her pastures are neither high plains nor wet lowlands, if she drinks from clear streams and is not forced to run, if she is not placed in a herd together with bulls, if her eating and drinking are regulated properly and she has a proper place to move about and sleep, then her milk will be able to eliminate certain diseases. In this case, we can refer to milk as a fine *amṛta* medicine that staves off death. But excluding milk obtained in this manner, all other forms of milk should be called [potentially] toxic [when used medicinally].

After listening to his words, the great king then praised him, saying:

Great physician, excellent, excellent! Today for the first time I have understood what is good and bad, beneficial and deleterious, about prescribing milk as medicine.

He thereupon drank the milk given him and was subsequently cured of his illness. Right away the king then issued a decree for the entire nation stating that, from that point forward people should take medicinal milk as they had in the past. When the citizens heard this they felt resentment, however, and discussing the matter among themselves, said things

like: “Has the great king become possessed by a demon? Is he mad? Does he mean to deceive us by ordering us to drink milk once again?”

Feeling angry, the people all gathered at the king’s location [to confront him]. The king then spoke to them, saying:

You should not give rise to feelings of anger toward me. This matter of whether or not milk is to be prescribed medicinally all stems from the teachings of the physician. There is no negligence on my part in this.

[With the problem defused,] the great king and the people of his kingdom then proceeded to dance with joy, offering even greater honor and reverence to the physician. The ill all began to drink the milk prescribed for them as medicine and each found their ailments either eliminated or alleviated.

Monks, you should understand that the Tathāgata, Worthy of Offerings, of Right and Universal Knowledge, with Clarity and Conduct Perfect, Well Gone, with Understanding of the World, Unsurpassed Worthy, Tamer of Men, Teacher of Gods and Humans, Buddha World-Honored One is also like this. I have appeared in the world as a great physician-king, suppressing all heretical physicians [despite sharing some of the same rhetoric]. In the presence of a gathering of kings, I thus announced myself, saying: “I am the physician-king.” And out of my desire to subdue the non-Buddhist paths I therefore declared: “There is no self, there is no person or [individual] living being, life span, personality, observer, actor, or experiencer.”

Monks, the heterodox paths affirm a “self” in the same manner as [some infer literacy in] the shapes of letters incised into wood accidentally by insects. This is why the Tathāgata proclaims “nonself” as part of his buddha-dharma. It is because I need to straighten out [the thinking] of living beings—because I am aware of their situation—that I expound the absence of self. There are reasons why I also expound the presence of self, just like that skilled physician who was well aware that milk may be either medicinal or nonmedicinal.

But what I am speaking of is not what ordinary people imagine the self to be. Ordinary people or ignorant people suppose the self to be the

379a size of a thumb, or perhaps a mustard seed, or a speck of dust. What the Tathāgata explains the self to be is nothing like that. Therefore when I preach “dharma are without self,” in truth they are not without self.

 So what is this self [of which I now speak]? If a dharma is true, real, permanent, autonomous, a basis, and its nature is immutable, then that is what I call self. Just like that great physician who correctly appreciated the [genuine] medicinal value of milk, for the sake of living beings the Tathāgata similarly expounds the presence of a true and real self in dharmas.

 This is how you four groups of followers should practice the dharma.

Fascicle III

Chapter One

Longevity: Part 3

The Buddha once again addressed the *bhikṣus*:

Whatever doubts you may have about monastic discipline, you should ask me now and I will explain things to bring you joy [in satisfying your concerns]. Having long since absorbed the fact that the original nature of all dharmas is empty, I thoroughly understand this. On the other hand, *bhikṣus*, do not say that the Tathāgata cultivates only the practice of emptiness as the original nature of dharmas.

Once again he spoke to the *bhikṣus*: “Whatever doubts you may have about the precepts, you should come forward and ask about them now.”

At that point some *bhikṣus* came forward and said:

World-Honored One, we do not have the wisdom to be able to ask a Tathāgata, One Worthy of Offerings, Perfectly Enlightened One. Why? Because the realm that the Tathāgata [inhabits] is inconceivable to us, the *samādhis* that the Tathāgata has are inconceivable to us, and the teachings that the Tathāgata explains are inconceivable to us. That is why we do not possess the wisdom that would enable us to ask the Tathāgata a question.

World-Honored One, suppose, for example, there was a old man, one hundred and twenty years of age, who suffered from longstanding health problems and who was confined to bed, unable to get up from a prone position. His energy is depleted, his life nearly finished. At that time a wealthy person with some connection to this old man, who had wanted to visit for some time, finally appeared at his home. Handing over a hundred pounds of gold to the old man, he made this request:

I have to go away and would like you to hold this gold for me. Could I ask you to return it to me when I come back, though it may be ten years or even twenty years before I return?

The old man agreed and accepted the gold. Yet he had no offspring, and it was not long before his illness deepened and his life ended. What had been entrusted to him then became utterly lost. When the owner of the gold finally returned, he looked for the gold but found nothing.

379b This is an example of how an ignorant person may not know how to judge what can and cannot be safely entrusted to another, for after his return, search as he may, that owner could not find his gold. This is why he lost his wealth.

World-Honored One, we śrāvakas are in such a situation. Although we hear the Tathāgata's carefully crafted teachings and precepts, we are not entirely able to accept and maintain them, and thus we are unable to ensure that the dharma will remain over a long period of time, much like how that old man accepted what the other person had entrusted to him [but could not ensure its safekeeping for very long]. At this point we are so ignorant when it comes to monastic discipline, what could we possibly ask about?

The Buddha said to the *bhikṣus*:

But if you were to ask me something now, it would be beneficial for all living beings. For that reason I instruct you to allow yourself the liberty to freely ask me about whatever it may be that you have doubts about.

Then the monks did speak up, saying to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, this situation is also analogous to that of someone who is twenty-five years old, robust and sharp. He has a great deal of wealth in gold, silver, and *vaiḍūrya* precious stones; his father, mother, wife, children, and his relatives are all alive and with him. Then someone comes and entrusts him with some jeweled valuables, explaining to this young man, "Due to certain circumstances I need to go away. When those matters have finished, I will return and you can return these things to me then."

On that occasion the healthy young man [takes in] the valuables and proceeds to protect them as if they were his own possessions. But then,

unexpectedly, he becomes ill, whereupon he turns to his family members and issues this order: “This gold and these jewels have been entrusted to me by someone else. If he comes looking for them, give them all back to him.”

Thus does a wise person know well how to plan for such things. When someone goes away and then returns looking for what he left behind, he should be able to regain possession of it without any fear of loss. For the World-Honored One, it is also like this. For if you entrust the jewel of the dharma to Ānanda and the other *bhikṣus*, [we fear] it cannot abide for long. Why? Because without exception all *śrāvakas*, even [Ānanda and] Mahākāśyapa, are impermanent. It would be just like entrusting valuables to that old man who agreed to accept them.

For this reason the unsurpassed dharma of the Buddha should be entrusted to the bodhisattvas. By means of their dialogic [culture of] “inquiry and reply” at which they are so adept, the jewel of the dharma under their care will abide through incalculable thousands of *kalpas*. And during that time it will surely grow and flourish, bringing benefit and comfort to living beings, just like that healthy [young] man who accepted the valuables from another [and made provisions for them to be kept beyond his own lifetime].

It is in this sense that we wonder how even great bodhisattvas could put forth questions to you. [In comparison,] our wisdom is analogous to that of a mosquito. How could we presume to be able to inquire about the profound teaching of the Tathāgata?

Then the *śrāvakas* became silent, remaining where they were.

Then the Buddha praised the monks, saying:

Excellent, excellent. Well have you attained minds without contamination, the minds of arhats. I have also thought about the circumstances of these two groups and accordingly I take the Mahāyāna and entrust it to the bodhisattvas, enabling this wondrous teaching to remain in the world for a very long time.

He then spoke to all living beings:

Sons and daughters of good families, my life span cannot be measured, nor can the eloquence of my pleasant speech be exhausted. You should

therefore feel free to seek clarification. Whether it is about the precepts or taking refuge, you should not hesitate to express even your second or third concerns.

At that time there was a bodhisattva-mahāsattva in the crowd, originally from the village of *Tāla. Known as Mahākāśyapa, he was a brahman and still young in years. Through the Buddha’s special powers he rose from his seat, threw his robe over his right shoulder, and circumambulated the Buddha for a hundred thousand paces before kneeling before him, with his right knee on the ground, pressing his palms together, and speaking thus: “World-Honored One, I now have a few questions I would like to ask. If the Buddha permits, I would dare speak.”

The Buddha then said to Kāśyapa:

The Tathāgata has omniscient knowledge and knows that which you will ask. I will expound on these matters for you, to remove your doubts and bring you joy.

Then the bodhisattva-mahāsattva Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha as follows:

World-Honored One, the Tathāgata takes pity on us and listens to our queries. I know that my wisdom is slight, no more than that of a mosquito, and the virtue of the Tathāgata and World-Honored One towers like a mountain. [The Tathāgata] is pure like sandalwood, like a lion difficult to subdue, and his followers cannot be put asunder. The body of the Tathāgata is like a true *vajra* diamond, resembling *vaiḍūrya* its appearance, and truly difficult to destroy. In addition, he is surrounded by a great ocean of wisdom, and within that assembly are numerous great bodhisattva-mahāsattvas who all accomplish merit so wondrously, immeasurably, and without limit that they are like fragrant elephants. Who would dare to stand before such a community to ask a question? But in order receive the supernatural power of the Buddha, by means of the spiritual power emanating from the good karmic roots of this great assembly I will endeavor to ask some minor questions.

Then, directly facing the Buddha, Kāśyapa asked the following questions in verse:

How does one gain long life, and
 An adamantine, indestructible body?
 By means of what causal principles
 Does one attain such solid power?
 How can this sutra
 Bring us to the ultimate, to the other shore?
 We beseech the Buddha to reveal these secrets
 For a wide range of living beings.
 How does one achieve something so grand
 That he becomes a spiritual support for other living beings?
 When in truth someone is not an arhat
 How can he have the capacity of an arhat?
 How can we understand the deity Māra,
 Who creates obstacles for living beings?
 A Buddha utterance and a [Māra] Pāpīyas utterance—
 By what understanding can we distinguish them?
 What are the controls within ourselves,
 For rejoicing and expounding the [Four Noble] Truths.
 How might our good karmic acts be so thoroughly accomplished
 That we explicate the four inversions [for others]?
 How does one create good karma?
 Great Sage, please explain this now.
 How can the bodhisattvas
 Manage to see the nature of what is difficult to see?
 How can one grasp the meanings of
 Complete syllables and half-syllables?⁴¹
 How can we pair sacred observances,
 Like the *sārasa* and *kācilindī* birds,⁴²
 The sun and moon, and
 The planets Venus and Jupiter?
 How is it that someone who has yet to commit to the path
 Is still called a bodhisattva?
 In the midst of a large community,
 How can one attain fearlessness?
 Like gold from the Jambū River,

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With which no one can find fault,
Where in this sullied world,
Are those as immaculate as a lotus flower?
Where among those having the defilements,
Are those whom the defilements cannot stain,
Who can be like physicians treating illnesses
Yet not afflicted by those illnesses?
How in this great ocean of birth and death
Can one become the captain of his ship?
How can one jettison saṃsāra,
Like a snake shedding its skin?
How should we contemplate the Three Jewels
So they become like wish-fulfilling trees for the gods?
If the three vehicles are without self-nature,
Then how do we then explain them?
Concerning the nonorigination of the bliss [of nirvāṇa]:
Why is it said that one “acquires bliss” [when attaining it]?
How can bodhisattvas
Create a community that is not fractured?
How is it that people born blind
Can nonetheless create eyes to guide themselves?
How should we express our many faces
When we seek only for the Great Sage to preach?
How can our preaching of the dharma
Expand like a moon growing fuller each day?
How can we also express
The ultimate that is nirvāṇa?
How can we show courage
Toward humans, gods, and Māras?
How should we understand the dharma-nature (**dharmatā*)
Even as we accept our longing for the dharma?
How can bodhisattvas
Distance themselves from all illness?
How can we, for other living beings
Unpack these mysteries?

How can we explain the ultimate,
 As well as what is not ultimate?
 If one cuts through one's web of uncertainty,
 Why is this not spoken of as definitive?
 How should we approach
 The path to the supreme and unsurpassed [awakening]?
 I now beseech the Tathāgata,
 On behalf of the bodhisattvas.
 Hoping for an exposition of great depth
 And subtlety about our practice.
 Within each and every dharma
 Is a nature tranquil and joyous.
 I humbly implore the Honorable Great Sage,
 To explain this to us in some detail!
 O Great Support for living beings,
 Most Honored One on Two Legs, Wondrous Remedy,
 I now want to ask about the aggregates (*skandhas*)
 Yet I lack the wisdom to do so.
 Diligent are the bodhisattvas,
 But they, too, cannot understand [these things].
 Such things are profound indeed—
 It is the realm of buddhas!

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At that time the Buddha praised the bodhisattva Kāśyapa:

Excellent, excellent! Good man, you have yet to attain omniscient knowledge, but as one who has already attained this I know that what you are asking about is a profound and hidden treasure. Indeed, your questions are hardly different from those asked by someone with omniscient knowledge. Good man, it was when I sat down at that seat of enlightenment under the *bodhi* tree that I first attained true awakening. At that time there were present bodhisattvas in buddha realms as innumerable as the grains of sand in *asamkhyeya* Ganges Rivers, and they also asked me about its profound significance. The impact of their words were in all cases no different in merit from those you have spoken today, for asking questions such as yours in turn benefits innumerable living beings.

At that time Kāśyapa once again addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, I lack the power of wisdom to be able to ask the Tathāgata anything of such a profound nature. World-Honored One, a mosquito is incapable of traversing enough sky to cross an ocean to its far shore, and I am like that. I am quite incapable of asking the Tathāgata about the deepest meanings in the ocean of your wisdom, in the sky of your dharma-nature. World-Honored One, when a king takes out the jewels he wears in his hair and entrusts them to the treasury official responsible for storing them, that treasury official reveres, enhances, and protects what he has been given. In like manner will I revere, enhance, and protect the profound significance of the well-balanced [teachings] expounded by the Tathāgata. Why? Because it will enable me to gain deep wisdom on a grand scale.

At that time the Buddha said to Kāśyapa:

Good man, listen carefully. Listen carefully! I will now explain for you the acts that led to the Tathāgata's gaining this long life. A bodhisattva obtains a long life by means of the causality in his karma. For that reason you should concentrate and listen carefully. If you can establish a proper karmic cause for *bodhi*, then by all means you should listen carefully to the meanings [I will expound]. And having heard and absorbed this, you can turn to communicating it to others. Good man, it is because I cultivated proper behavior in this way that I attained *anuttarā samyak-sambodhi*, and now once again I shall disseminate this doctrine to all.

Good man, this is analogous to a prince who commits a crime and is detained in prison, and the king whose intense pity and affection toward his beloved son brings him to redirect his carriage to that place of detention. Bodhisattvas are like this. If they desire to obtain long life they must protect all living beings just as if those beings were their own children. Bringing forth great sympathy (*maitrī*), great compassion (*karuṇā*), great sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and great equanimity (*upekṣā*), a bodhisattva bestows upon them the precept against killing and teaches them how to practice what are wholesome dharmas. You should also firmly establish all living beings in the five moral precepts and ten aspects of good character.⁴³ In addition, you should enter all realms [of saṃsāra],

including the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, and *asuras*, so that you may also relieve the suffering living beings there, liberating anyone not yet liberated, saving anyone not yet saved, enabling anyone not in *nirvāṇa* to attain *nirvāṇa*. Calming all forms of fear [in others] is the type of karmic causality that causes bodhisattvas to then attain extremely long lives, to gain freedom in all forms of wisdom, and to be reborn in a heavenly realm when this lifetime comes to an end.

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At that time the bodhisattva Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha again and said:

World-Honored One, the meaning of your explanation that the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should view living beings as their own children is profound but somewhat opaque, for I cannot quite understand it. World-Honored One, [to my understanding,] the Tathāgata should not tell bodhisattvas to cultivate impartiality toward living beings, regarding them [all] as his children. Why do I say this? Because within the Buddha’s dharma there are those who violate the precepts, commit heinous crimes, or malign the true-dharma. How could [you] perceive such people to be the same as your own children?

The Buddha then responded to Kāśyapa: “But it is so, it is so! I perceive living beings truly as children of mine, just like my own son Rāhula.”

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then said:

World-Honored One, once in the past during the *upavāsa* confessional ceremonies on the fifteenth day of the month,⁴⁴ a small boy appeared just when the community was engaging in the purifying ritual of precept recitation. He was not there to cultivate wholesome practices in action, speech, or thought, but surreptitiously listened to the discussion on the precepts while standing off in the shadows of the corner of the room. Then Guhyapāda Vajrapāṇi,⁴⁵ using the Buddha’s supernatural power, picked up his *vajra* mallet and crushed the boy into dust. World-Honored One, this *vajrapāṇi*’s extreme act of violence led to the taking of the life of this small boy. How can the Tathāgata say that you view all living beings as identical to your son Rāhula [after something like this]? The Buddha answered Kāśyapa by saying:

Now you should not speak that way. That child was not a real person but only temporarily incarnated there as a human in order to drive off those who transgress the precepts and are harmful to the dharma by forcing them to leave the community. Guhyapāda Vajrapāṇi was likewise only an apparition. Kāśyapa, I look upon those who malign the true-dharma, the *icchantikās*, those who kill living beings, those who hold false views, and those who committed crimes in the past in the same way, which is that I regard them all with same compassion I have for Rāhula.

Good man, there are examples of kings who cannot set aside the need to mete out capital punishment when the crime requires it, even when those who violate the law are government officials, but a world-honored tathāgata is not like that. For those who are corrupting the dharma, my punishment will be to instigate ecclesiastical action as follows: banishment from the monastery for improper conduct, censure for quarreling with fellow monks, probation for too many precept violations, restriction of activities for offensive behavior toward a householder, suspension for not recognizing one's own transgressions, revocation of monastic privileges for not confessing precept violations, and suspension for not abandoning wrong views.⁴⁶ Good man, the Tathāgata chastises those who debase the dharma in order to show such people that there are moral consequences to engaging in bad behavior. Good man, understand that at the same time the Tathāgata does this without instilling fear in these wicked living beings, for I also shine one, two, perhaps even five beams of light [upon them]. Anyone who personally encounters this light will [be transformed] and will walk away from all such bad behavior. A tathāgata is equipped with immeasurable strength to perform such deeds.

381a Good man, if there is some teaching that you have not yet seen but wish to, I will now show you its face. After my *parinirvāṇa*, depending on the area, there will be some *bhikṣus* who keep the precepts, whose comportment is impeccable, and who [thus] take responsibility for preserving the dharma. When they see someone who is hostile to the dharma and respond by temporarily expelling that person [from the community], or by censure, or by chastisement, you should understand that the [monks who mete out the punishment] will gain a measure of merit beyond calculation.

Good man, this is analogous to a king who had been violent and wicked throughout his reign, who then falls seriously ill. The king of a neighboring state, well aware of this king's reputation, decides it is time to raise an army to destroy him completely. At that point the sick king is so debilitated as to be powerless, but stricken with fear he undergoes a change of heart and begins to do good deeds. In such a case as this, the neighboring king has gained immeasurable merit. The monks who preserve the dharma are just like this. By expelling or censuring those who violate the Law, it enables those same people to practice the dharma properly, bringing merit beyond measure.

Good man, suppose, for example, poisonous plants start growing in the fields of an upright householder's place of residence. When the householder becomes aware of the situation, straight away he will then cut them down to get rid of them forever. Or when a man in the prime of life finds white hairs growing on his head he becomes embarrassed and cuts them or pulls them out, preventing them from growing any longer. Supporting the dharma, monks, is just like this. When you see someone who has violated the precepts or injured the true-dharma, then you must take punitive steps such as temporarily removing that person from the community or censuring him. If a good monk sees someone acting in a way that is injurious to the dharma and decides to leave him be, rather than taking steps to have him reprimanded by temporary removal or censure, understand that the [monk who observes the bad behavior but does nothing] is an enemy within the dharma of the Buddha. If you can reprimand [the violator] by temporarily expulsion or censure, then you will be a disciple of mine, for you have heard my true voice.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha once more, saying:

But, World-Honored One, we still cannot regard all living beings as identical to our own children in the way you described—that is, as you regard your own son Rāhula. World-Honored One, one person may pick up a sword to injure the Buddha and another person may take sandalwood paste to worship the Buddha, and the Buddha looks upon these two [acts] with impartiality. Why then do you also say we must admonish or censure

[those who malign the dharma]? If we censured them, we would then be violating your doctrine [of impartial compassion].

The Buddha then imparted this to Kāśyapa:

Good man, consider, for example, sovereigns, important officials, or grand councilors who are raising children that are physically attractive, graceful, discerning, and intelligent. What if they entrust two, three, or four of their children to a strict teacher with these words:

Please educate and train all these children for me. Teach them deportment, ceremonial behavior, the arts, textual studies, and mathematics in a way that will enable all of them to succeed. If it should happen that three of the four charges I give to you now take ill from being caned and die, then make sure that you do not hold back in disciplining the remaining child so that he is able to accomplish his goals. For though I may mourn the loss of three of my children, in the end I will not hold this against you.

Kāśyapa, would that father and that teacher be guilty of the crime of murdering those children?

[Kāśyapa replied:]

Indeed no, they would not, World-Honored One. Why? Because the children were brought to this teacher [by their father] out of love and the desire to have them accomplish their studies; there was no evil intent. Teaching children like this brings immeasurable blessings.

[The Buddha said:]

381b Good man, the Tathāgata is also like this. I look upon those acting in ways that are destructive of the dharma as if they were all equally my only child. Now the Tathāgata is about to entrust this unsurpassed true-dharma to kings, high officials, grand councilors, monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. Kings, high officials, and the four groups of Buddhist followers should work to encourage students [of the dharma] to attain the highest level of morality, meditation, and wisdom. If there are [members of the community] who do not study these three teachings, who are

lazy, who violate the precepts, or who malign the true-dharma, the king and the four groups of believers should punish them. Good man, would the sovereigns of nations or the four groups of believers be committing transgressions if they took action in this way or not?

[Kāśyapa replied:] “They would not, World-Honored One.”

[The Buddha said:]

Good man, as neither kings nor the four groups of believers would incur any karmic sin [for disciplining such individuals], how could a tathāgata? Good man, a tathāgata thoroughly engages in equanimity toward all living beings, recognizing them as if they were all no different from his only child. Those who engage [the world] in this way are called “bodhisattvas who cultivate impartiality toward all living beings, recognizing each of them as equal to their only child.” Good man, bodhisattvas who train in this way obtain long lives and are also able to know the events of their former lifetimes.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then spoke to the Buddha again:

World-Honored One, as the Buddha has explained it, if bodhisattvas cultivate impartiality, in which all living beings are seen as their own children, then those bodhisattvas will gain long life. But the Tathāgata should not speak in such a manner. Why? Because among individuals who know the dharma, some of whom even preach on various ways of following the norms of filial duty, there are those who return home and then pick up a tile shard or a rock and throw it at their mother or father. So while that follower’s mother and father may be fields of blessings for him and from whom he derives great benefits—in essence, people so rare he may never encounter anyone like them again—this individual nevertheless does not pay homage to them as he should but instead causes them agony and injury. For someone like this who knows the teachings, words are quite different from deeds.

What the Tathāgata has expounded amounts to something like this, saying that bodhisattvas who cultivate a mind of equanimity toward all living beings will attain a long life and the ability to know their past lives, and forever reside in the world without change. But for some

reason the World-Honored One now has a lifetime whose length is quite short, no different from anyone else! Might the Tathāgata have some sense of resentment toward living beings? World-Honored One, what action of yours in the past was so bad that its karmic outcome would result in severing your life faculty? For this life you have obtained is so short as to have lasted less than one hundred years.

The Buddha answered Kāśyapa:

Good man, why would you speak in such a harsh way before a tathāgata? The long life of a tathāgata is the best among all long lives. The permanent dharma that I have obtained is first among everything permanent.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha again, saying, “World-Honored One, in what way has the Tathāgata attained a long life?”

The Buddha answered:

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It is like the eight great rivers. The first is called Gaṅgā (Ganges), the second is called Yamunā (Jumna), the third is called Sarayu (Sarju), the fourth is called Ajiravatī, the fifth is called Mahī, the sixth is called the Sindhu (Indus), the seventh is called Vakṣu (Oxus), and the eighth is called Sītā. These eight large rivers and a great many small rivers all empty into the great ocean.⁴⁷ Kāśyapa, the life spans of everyone—humans, gods, and even those out in space—all eventually flow like great rivers into the ocean that is the life span of the Tathāgata. That is precisely why the life span of the Tathāgata cannot be measured. Moreover, Kāśyapa, just like Lake Anavatapta supplies water for the four great rivers [of Jambudvīpa], the Tathāgata supplies life for everyone. Kāśyapa, just as among the eternal dharmas it is space that comes first, among everything permanent it is the Tathāgata that is first. Kāśyapa. Just as cream on the surface of clarified butter (**sarpirmaṇḍa*) is first among medicines, so is the Tathāgata, for his life span is first among living beings.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha again:

World-Honored One, if the Tathāgata’s life span is as you have described, then should not the Tathāgata reside [here] either for one more *kalpa*, at least something close to a *kalpa*, so as to continually disseminate the

wondrous dharma, like the pouring down of a great and opportune rain [on all living beings]?

[The Buddha said:]

Now Kāśyapa, you should not hold an image in your mind of the Tathāgata in terms of his life ending. Kāśyapa, if a monk, nun, layman, laywoman, or even someone of another path attains the freedom of the five supernatural powers,⁴⁸ that person may reside [here] either for one more *kalpa* or something less than another *kalpa*, may course through the air sitting or lying down as they please, emit fire from their left side and pour out water from their right side, or produce smoke and flames from their bodies just as in a real conflagration. Such people are capable of living as long as they want, or are free to make their lives brief. If someone endowed with these special abilities has the spiritual power to do whatever he pleases, would not the Tathāgata have the power to deal with any and all things as he likes? Would he be not capable of living for half the length of a *kalpa*, or for an entire *kalpa*, or for a hundred *kalpas*, a hundred thousand *kalpas*, or innumerable *kalpas*?

For this reason you should understand that a tathāgata is a permanently abiding dharma, an immutable dharma. This body of the Tathāgata [that you see now] is only a transformational body, it is not a body nourished by any sort of food. It is in order to save living beings that I show [my body] as identical to a poisonous tree; thus will I demonstrate the abandonment of this form and the entry into nirvāṇa. Kāśyapa, you should understand the Buddha to be a permanently abiding dharma, an immutable dharma. And it is within this context of that which is of ultimate significance that all of you should devote yourselves to your practice with single-minded commitment, and when you have completed your practice [similarly devote yourselves to] disseminating the teaching to others.

At that point, the bodhisattva Kāśyapa said to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, what is the difference between the dharmas transcending this world and the dharmas occurring in this world? Just as the Buddha stated, “Buddha is a permanently abiding dharma, an immutable *dharma*,” among the worldly teachings it is also said,

The deity Brahmā is permanent; the deity Īśvara is permanent and immutable. I am permanent, my nature is permanent, the very atoms of my existence are permanent.

If, as you say, a tathāgata is a permanent dharma, then why is the Tathāgata's presence [here] impermanent? If you are not a permanent presence, then in what way are you distinct? Why do I say this? Because Brahmā and the worldly nature of the tiniest atoms are also not manifest.

The Buddha told Kāśyapa:

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Suppose, for example, there was a rich merchant who had a considerable collection of cattle. Though their colors were varied and there were different types of cows among them, they formed a single herd. The merchant entrusted control over the cows to herdsmen, who led them to water and grass as needed. This was done only for the production of *sarpirmaṇḍa*, the cream on the surface of clarified butter; the merchant was not interested in milk or yogurt. The herdsmen churned the milk [to produce the butter from which *sarpirmaṇḍa* was made], and ate it themselves.

Now when the merchant's life came to an end, all the cows in his possession were stolen by a group of thieves. After securing the herd, they ended up churning the milk themselves, as they had no wives [to do it for them]. Then they would sit down to eat, and as they did the thieves would speak among themselves, saying:

That rich merchant raised these cows but not because he sought milk or yogurt—it was only for the *sarpirmaṇḍa*. But how are we supposed to get that? That creamy froth is said to have the best flavor of anything in this world, but we have no vessel [for preparing it]. And even if we were to obtain it from this milk, there would be no place to store it.

Their conversation continued:

All we have are these leather bags. We could fill them but even if they were filled with milk, we still do not know how to churn it. Just getting buttermilk from milk is difficult enough, how much more so to try to make butter!

Then the thieves took what could have become *sarpirmaṇḍa* and they added water to it. But because they added so much water, they lost whatever chance they had of making yogurt or *sarpirmaṇḍa*.

This is what ordinary people⁴⁹ are like. While they may have the good dharma, whatever they have of it is [only] what remains of the Tathāgata's true-dharma. Why do I say this? Because after the World-honored Tathāgata enters nirvāṇa, they will steal the remaining good dharma he leaves behind—be they teachings on morality, meditation, or wisdom—just like the thieves who looted the herd of cows [from the farm]. But although ordinary people have obtained [the Buddha's teachings on] morality, meditation, and wisdom, they lack the skills that would enable them to attain liberation by means of these teachings. With their attitude they simply cannot obtain the permanent morality, the permanent meditation, or the permanent wisdom that is liberation, just like that group of thieves who did not know the means by which to acquire *sarpirmaṇḍa* and so lost [that opportunity].

In addition, much like the thieves' decision to add water to the milk in order to produce *sarpirmaṇḍa*, ordinary people also do things [out of ignorance]. For the sake of liberation they speak of nirvāṇa as being a soul, a living being, a life force, a spirit, Brahmā, Īśvara, an atom, a nature, a precept, a meditation, wisdom, liberation, or the heaven of neither thought nor nonthought. But in fact these people have attained neither liberation nor nirvāṇa. They are no more than the group of thieves who did not obtain *sarpirmaṇḍa*.

These ordinary people do engage in some sacred practices, honoring their mother and father [out of filial duty, for example], on the basis of which they attain rebirth in a heaven and receive a modicum of peace and joy there. But, like the group of thieves that added water to milk, just so do ordinary people not actually understand why it is due to cultivating even a few sacred practices [such as] honoring their parents that they can attain birth in a heavenly realm. Nor can they understand morality, meditation, and wisdom, or taking refuge in the Three Jewels. And because they do not understand, when I speak of permanence, bliss, self, and purity, they may repeat what I have said but in fact they do not understand what they are talking about. Therefore I want you to know that after the

Tathāgata passes from this world, at that time there will be such people who lecture on the topic of permanence, bliss, self, and purity.

382b But if a king who turns the wheel of the dharma (*cakravartin*) were to appear in the world, through the strength of his virtue this group of thieves would be forced to withdraw and abandon the cows, which in turn would thereupon suffer no further harm. At that time the wheel-turning king would take all the cows and assign them to a highly skilled herdsman. This person will know the means by which to extract *sarpirmaṇḍa*, and because of this *sarpirmaṇḍa* the lives of all living beings will be without pain or stress. When a dharma wheel-turning king appears in the world, ordinary people will no longer be able to preach about morality, meditation, or wisdom; they will retreat from such activities, just as the cattle thieves retreated.

Were a tathāgata to appear in the world and thoroughly explain to living beings the ordinary, worldly teaching as well as the extraordinary, transcendent teaching, it would enable bodhisattvas to follow him and preach these things on their own. Once those bodhisattva-mahāsattvas obtain that most excellent *sarpirmaṇḍa*, they would go on to bring an incalculable number of other living beings to where they, too, obtained the unsurpassed, timeless ambrosia of the dharma: that is, the permanence, bliss, self, and purity of a tathāgata.

Good man, this is what I mean when I say that the Tathāgata is permanent and immutable, which is not the “permanent dharma” meant when a common, ordinary, or ignorant person refers to Brahmā or other deities. When someone invokes “permanent dharma” in the way I am speaking of here, it calls forth the Tathāgata and not any other dharma. Kāśyapa, you should understand a tathāgata body in this way. Kāśyapa, good men and good women should always focus their thoughts on cultivating understanding of these two words: the Buddha “permanently abides.” Kāśyapa, when a good man or good woman cultivates these two words, know that such a person is following that which I have practiced and will reach the same place that I have reached. Good man, if one’s practice of these two words comes to an end, understand that for that person the Tathāgata enters *parinirvāṇa*. Good man, the meaning of [my] nirvāṇa is none other than the dharma-nature or natural condition (*dharmatā*) of all buddhas.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, what is the sense of this “natural condition” of buddhas? World-Honored One, I would now like to understand what this means. The only request I have is for the Tathāgata to take pity [on us] and explain this in detail. The abandonment of his body is the natural condition [of a buddha]. This “natural condition” includes the buddha relinquishing his body but relinquishing his body means there will be nothing there, and if nothing is there, then in what sense does his body exist? If a buddha’s body does exist, then why do you speak of that body as having the natural condition [of being abandoned by him]? And if this is the natural condition of his body, then how does it obtain existence [at all]? How should I now understand the meaning of these things?

The Buddha then replied to the bodhisattva Kāśyapa:

Good man, you should not speak of cessation as the natural condition [of buddhas]. There is no cessation in their natural condition. Good man, it is like postulating about deities in the heaven of nonideation who attain material bodies yet have no notion of materiality.

You should not ask such things as, “Where do all these deities reside?” “Do they enjoy themselves?” “How do they act and think?” “How do they see and hear?”

Good man, the realm of the tathāgatas is beyond anything even the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas can understand. Good man, you should not speak about the body of a tathāgata as a dharma that disappears. For, good man, dharmas that disappear in this way belong to the realm of buddhas, and not the realms of śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas. Good man, you should not speculate where tathāgatas might reside, where they go, what they see, or what they enjoy. Good man, the meaning of these things is beyond the extent of your knowledge. The dharma bodies of buddhas have a variety of skillful means that simply cannot be conceptualized.

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In addition, good man, you should cultivate a notion of the buddha, dharma, and sangha as all being permanent. These three dharmas are not different notions, they are not impermanent notions, and they are not notions that change. There will be no foundation to the three pure

refuges of someone who regards these as different. All the restrictions and precepts [they have observed] will not remain with them, and in the end they will be unable to realize the fruits of *bodhi* on the paths of the śrāvaka or the pratyekabuddha. If, on the other hand, one can incorporate this inconceivability into their cultivation of this notion of permanence, that person's refuge will be genuine. Good man, it is like saying because there is a tree, there is a shadow of a tree. Tathāgatas are also like this. Because they are permanent dharmas, they thus serve as a refuge for living beings. They are not impermanent; when it is claimed that tathāgatas are impermanent, they then cease to be the foundation for the refuge of both people and deities.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then asked the Buddha: “World-Honored One, there is also the metaphor of the tree in the dark that has no shadow.”

[The Buddha said:]

Kāśyapa, you should never say there is a tree with no shadow. It is only that the shadow is not visible to your physical eye. Good man, the Tathāgata is like this. His nature is something that abides permanently, without change. But without the eye of wisdom this cannot be seen, just like the shadow of a tree is not visible in the darkness. Ordinary people will claim after the Buddha has disappeared that this shows the Tathāgata is an impermanent dharma. Time and time again I will be spoken of in this way. But if you say that the Tathāgata is somehow different from the teachings and the community, that itself precludes the establishment of taking the triple-refuge. It is like saying that because your mother and father are different, therefore that makes them impermanent.

Once again the bodhisattva Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha:

World-Honored One, from now on I will regard the buddha, dharma, and sangha as three entities that abide eternally. I will enlighten my father and mother about this, and make sure that they and the next seven generations [of my family] maintain this understanding with reverence. How special this is, World-Honored One, that I should now be able to learn the inconceivable nature of the tathāgatas, the teachings, and the community. And as I disseminate this doctrine, what I have learned will

also be for the sake of others. If there are people who cannot accept this, let it be known that I will be like frost or hail to any colleague who devotes their time to cultivating an understanding of [the Three Jewels] as impermanent.

At that time the Buddha praised the bodhisattva Kāśyapa:

Excellent, excellent! You are now well equipped to protect and sustain the true-dharma. Those who support the dharma in this way do not deceive others. And those who do not deceive others [produce] wholesome karmic conditions, for which they obtain long lifetimes and clear knowledge of their past lives.

Chapter Two

The Adamantine Body

At that time the World-Honored One once again addressed Kāśyapa, saying:

Good man, the body of a tathāgata is a permanently abiding body, an indestructible body, an adamantine body; it is not a body sustained by food of any sort. In other words, it is a dharma body.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa said to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, I do not see anything like the bodies that you have just enumerated. All that I can see is a body that is impermanent, destructible, made up of atoms, which consumes different foods, and so forth. Why? Because the Tathāgata is about to enter nirvāṇa. 383a

The Buddha said:

Kāśyapa. Now you must not say that the Tathāgata's body is not solid, that it is subject to destruction like the body of an ordinary person. Good man, you should be aware of the fact that the body of a tathāgata has become hardened and difficult to destroy over an immense period of time—hundreds of millions of *kalpas*. It is not like the body of a human or a god, nor is it a body bound by fear, nor is it a body that consumes any sort of food.

The tathāgata body is a body and is not a body. It was not born and it will not cease to exist. It does not learn and it does not practice. It is immeasurable and boundless. It leaves no footprints. It does not discern things and has no forms to discern. It is utterly pure. It has no movement. It is neither passive nor active. It is nonabiding and nonbecoming. It is unflavored and unmixed. It was not created (**saṃskṛta*). It has no karma and no karmic fruit. It does not move. It does not disappear. It is not a thought, nor is it a number. It is inconceivable and it will always be inconceivable. It has no consciousness in the usual sense. Its thoughts are impartial, neither separate nor not separate. It is not and it is. It has neither

coming nor going, and yet it does come and go. It [can]not be destroyed, damaged, removed, or cut off. It does not come into existence and it does not go out of existence. It does not dominate and yet it is dominant. It is not being and it is not nonbeing. It is not realized and it is not observed. It cannot be put into words and yet it is not nonlinguistic. It is neither definite nor indefinite. It cannot be seen yet it is clearly visible. It is without any location and yet it is located. It is without any residence and yet it resides. It is without darkness and without light. It has no quiescence and yet it is quiescent. It possesses nothing. It does not receive and it does not give. It is pure and without stain. It has no disputes, having cut off disputation. It resides without any place of residence. It neither takes nor falls into [a saṃsāric existence]. It is neither a dharma nor a nondharma. It is neither a field of merit nor not a field of merit. There is no exhausting it, it cannot be exhausted, and it is totally separate from all ways of being exhausted. It is empty and yet dissociated from emptiness. Although it does not permanently reside anywhere, there is no cessation of its thought-stream. It has no stains. It is without words, existing apart from words. It is not voice, it is not speech, and it does not learn. It does not weigh and it does not measure. It is neither unified nor differentiated. It is neither an image nor a characteristic, though it is adorned with external characteristics. It is neither bravery nor fear. It has no quiescence, it does not become quiet. It has no heat, it does not warm. It is not visible, it has no external form.

A tathāgata saves all living beings and yet does not save anyone, which is why he is able to liberate living beings. He does not liberate anyone, which is why he awakens living beings. He does not awaken anyone, which is why the dharma he preaches accords with reality. He is nondual and therefore immeasurable, unequalled, evenly consistent like space, completely without shape, of the same nature as nonarising. He does not cut off what is not permanent, he always courses in the single vehicle though living beings see three [vehicles]. He does not retrogress and does not turn away from cutting through all fetters, nor does he confront or contact anyone. He is without any nature and abides in that nature. He is neither combined nor dispersed, neither long nor short, neither round nor square. He is not made of aggregates (*skandhas*), sense bases

(*āyatanas*), or sense realms (*dhātus*) and yet there are aggregates, sense bases, and sense realms in him. He neither increases nor decreases, neither wins nor loses.

The body of a tathāgata accomplishes merit that is thus beyond measure. There is no one who [fully] understands this, yet there is no one who does not understand this. There is no one who sees it, yet there is no one who does not see it. It is neither created nor uncreated.⁵⁰ It is neither worldly nor unworldly. It is neither made nor not made. It is neither a support nor not a support. It is neither a composite of the four major elements (*mahābhūtas*) nor not a composite of the four major elements. It does not arise from causes, but neither does it arise noncausally. It is not [the body of] a living being but neither is it [the body of] a nonliving being. It is neither [the body of] a *śramaṇa* nor that of a brahman. This lion is a grand lion.

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It is not a body and yet it is not a nonbody; there is no way to fully communicate this. Aside from one dharma characteristic, [its virtues] cannot be enumerated. When it enters the final *parinirvāṇa*, it does not enter *parinirvāṇa*. The dharma bodies of tathāgatas have all accomplished innumerable subtle and virtuous qualities such as these.⁵¹ Kāśyapa, there is no one other than a tathāgata who understands this; it is not something understood by either śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas.

Kāśyapa, a tathāgata body that has achieved virtuous qualities such as this is not a body sustained by eating of any sort. Kāśyapa, as the virtuous qualities in the true body of a tathāgata are such, how could it also be subject to illness or stress, as vulnerable and fragile as an unfired pot? Kāśyapa, the reason the Tathāgata manifests illness is in order to tame living beings. Good man, by now you should understand that the body of a tathāgata is an adamant, *vajra* body. From this day forth you should always focus your thoughts on this meaning. Do not think of it as a body sustained by eating. Moreover, you should explain to others as well that the Tathāgata's body is in fact a dharma body.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha and said:

World-Honored One, the Tathāgata has accomplished such significant virtue, how indeed could his body be subject to illness, pain, impermanence, or

destruction? From today I will always think of the Tathāgata's body as a permanent dharma body, a body of bliss, and I will disseminate this to others. As such, World-Honored One, the Tathāgata's dharma body is indeed adamant and indestructible. And yet, I am still unable to understand the causality that brought it into being.

The Buddha said:

Kāśyapa, it is by means of the causality resulting from upholding the true-dharma that one achieves an adamant body. Kāśyapa, having upheld the causal principles of the dharma since the distant past, I have now attained this adamant body, permanent and indestructible. Good man, those who are committed to upholding the true-dharma, regardless of whether or not they themselves have accepted the five lay precepts or carry out the proper observances, will do whatever it takes to defend those pure monks who do keep the precepts, even wielding knives and swords, bows and arrows, or halberds and lances [in their defense].

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha again, asking:

World-Honored One, if we come across a monk who lives apart from any protected community, residing alone in an isolated, quiet spot in the hills or under a tree, should we call that person a true *bhikṣu*? What about a person who follows someone who provides protection [for the dharma]—should we recognize such people as householder shavelings?⁵²

The Buddha informed Kāśyapa:

Do not use such language, calling them “householder shavelings.” There may be [individual] mendicants who, wherever they go, comport themselves in a manner that is deserving of offerings. They may read and recite sutras and engage in contemplation in seated meditation. And when people come to them with questions on the dharma, they may then give a sermon, speaking about charity, discipline, merit-making, minimizing desire, and knowing satisfaction therein.

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But though they may be able to preach in various ways, they will never have [the authority of] the lion's roar.⁵³ They will not be surrounded by other lions, and they will not be able to vanquish the wicked who violate

the norms of behavior. *Bhikṣus* such as these ultimately are unable to benefit themselves and they are unable to benefit others. You should understand these people to be lazy idlers. Although they may hold to the precepts and promote the pure practices [of a brahman], those people cannot really do anything. There may be *bhikṣus* who comport themselves in a manner that is deserving of offerings, but [only] if they are also able to accept the precepts and restrictions [of our community] and maintain them as such will they be able effect the lion's roar when they preach the sublime dharma. This will be so throughout the ninefold canon of scriptures that are preached in order to benefit and comfort living beings; that is, sutras, verses, predictions, metric narratives, proclamations, past life stories of the Buddha's disciples, past life stories of the Buddha, extended discourses, and miracles of the Buddha.

You may declare the following:

In the *Nirvana Sutra* the Buddha established restrictions on the *bhikṣus* such that they should not keep slaves, cows, sheep, or anything improper. If there is a monk who keeps anything impure like this, he must be reined in. The Tathāgata had also explained in previous sutras that when there are monks who keep improper things such as these, you should chase them down and return them to lay status, just like any given king controls his country according to his dharma.

Whenever there is a *bhikṣu* who can roar like a lion in this way, the precept breakers who hear him speak will all be consumed with rage and attack that dharma master. This dharma preacher, however, even if his life were to end [as a result], would be known as one who kept the precepts, benefiting himself and others. For this reason I give sovereigns, government officials, royal councilors, and Buddhist laymen permission to protect dharma preachers. Anyone who wants to protect the true-dharma effectively should study what has been outlined here. Kāśyapa, those who break the precepts and do not protect the dharma I call "householder shavelings." Someone who does not maintain the precepts earns a name like this.

Good man, in the distant past, innumerable, seemingly endless *asaṃkhyeya kalpas* ago, in this town of Kuśinagara, a buddha appeared

in the world known as Nandivardhana Tathāgata, Worthy of Offerings, of Right and Universal Knowledge, with Clarity and Conduct Perfect, Well-Gone, with Understanding of the World, Unsurpassed Worthy, Tamer of Men, Teacher of Gods and Humans, Awakened World-Honored One. At that time the world was vast, exquisitely pure, plentiful, and peaceful. The people prospered greatly and there was no hunger or thirst. Like the Sukhāvātī Land of Bliss, it was filled with bodhisattvas and the like. This buddha world-honored one resided in that world for an immeasurable [length of time] saving living beings, and after which, [lying down] between twin sal trees, he entered *mahāparinirvāṇa*. After that buddha's nirvāṇa, the true teaching (*saddharma*) abided in the world for [seemingly] countless millions of years, but during the last forty years [of that era] when that buddha's teaching was about to disappear, one monk appeared who kept the precepts. His name was Buddhadatta. He was surrounded by a large group of followers, and produced the lion's roar when he preached across the entire ninefold division of scriptures. He imposed restrictions on the monks, [telling] them they could not keep slaves, cows, sheep, or anything improper.

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At that time there were many monks who violated the precepts, and when they heard him speak of these things all of them harbored evil thoughts, taking up swords and staves to intimidate this dharma master. At that time the king was called Bhavadatta. Hearing the commotion, he took steps to protect the dharma by immediately going to where the dharma preacher was, and then doing everything he could to help him fight back against the evil precept-breaking monks, [thereby] enabling the dharma preacher to escape harm. But the king himself was severely injured in the melee, struck by swords, arrows, and lances. There was no place on his body that was spared from a wound, not even an area as small as a mustard seed. [Upon seeing him in this state] Buddhadatta immediately praised him, saying:

Excellent, excellent! King, you are now a genuine protector of the true teaching. In a future world, you yourself will become a dharma vessel of immeasurable proportions.

When he heard these words from the preacher, the king was filled with

joy. Soon thereafter his life came to an end and he was reborn in the land of the Buddha Akṣobhya, becoming that buddha's principal disciple there. The citizen followers of the king, whether they were soldiers who fought with him or individuals who rejoiced at his efforts, were all filled with a nonretrogressive resolution to attain awakening (*bodhicitta*). And when their lives ended they were all reborn in the land of the Buddha Akṣobhya as well. After that *kalpa* ended, the life of the monk Buddhadatta also came to an end and he, too, achieved rebirth in the land of the Buddha Akṣobhya. Among the śrāvakas listening to that buddha, Buddhadatta became his number two disciple. Thus, when the true teaching is about to come to an end, you should maintain and protect it in this manner.

Kāśyapa, the king at that time was none other than I myself. The *bhikṣu* who preached the dharma was the Buddha Kāśyapa. Those who defend the true teaching, Kāśyapa, obtain this kind of incomparable reward. As a consequence of those events I have attained the various marks by which I adorn myself today, having achieved a dharma body, an indestructible body.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying: “World-Honored One, a tathāgata's permanent body is something like a painted rock.”

The Buddha said to Kāśyapa:

Good man, this is why monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen must all redouble their efforts to defend and uphold the true-dharma. The rewards for taking responsibility for preserving the dharma are extensive, boundless. Good man, for this reason laymen who defend the dharma may need to take up swords and staves in this way to protect those monks who are upholding the dharma. If one has taken the vow of maintaining the five precepts, in and of itself that does not mean that person has earned the appellation “a person of the Mahāyāna.” On the other hand, someone who has not taken the five precepts yet defends the true-dharma would be given the title of “[a person of] the Mahāyāna.” [When necessary,] protectors of the true-dharma should take up swords and other weapons to serve the dharma preachers.

Kāśyapa said to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, if monks stand side-by-side with laymen, wielding swords or staves [in defense of the dharma], would they still be considered teachers or not? Would they still be maintaining the precepts or violating them?

The Buddha said to Kāśyapa:

384b Do not suggest that this would mean a violation of the precepts. Good man, after my nirvāṇa a degenerate age will come upon the world; nations will be in chaos, people will steal from one another, and society will be plagued by famine. At that time many will aspire for the monastic life because they are hungry. Such individuals I call “shavelings.” When they see there are pure monks who are maintaining the precepts, protecting the true-dharma, and comporting themselves with dignity, these shavelings will run after those monks to chase them away, perhaps injuring or even killing them.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then spoke to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, those people who do keep the precepts and who do protect the true-dharma, how will they manage to travel between towns and cities in order to teach?

[The Buddha answered:]

Good man, that is why I now allow those who keep the precepts to rely on the companionship of those in white robes⁵⁴ who wield weapons. Though kings, high officials, and merchants may take up weapons as lay followers in order to protect the dharma, I declare this to be entirely in keeping with the precepts. However, though one may take up weapons [in defense of the dharma], he should not take another’s life. To act in the way I have described would constitute the most principled precept keeping.

Kāśyapa, when I say someone is protecting the dharma, I am referring to [a monastic] who is endowed with right opinions who can disseminate widely the Mahāyāna scriptures. Such a person never keeps decorated royal parasols, oil pots, rice or other grains, or any kind of fruits or melons. He does not cultivate relationships with kings, government officials, or the wealthy for personal gain. He is not obsequious toward patrons,

he is meticulous in his comportment, and he is stern with those who break the precepts and others who behave badly. Such a person I call “a teacher who keeps the precepts and protects the dharma, who can be a true spiritual guide to living beings, and whose mind is broad and expansive like a great ocean.”

Kāśyapa, if there is a monk who preaches the dharma to others for personal gain, his followers and associates will learn from their teacher and also covet personal gain. This person will destroy his own community in this way.

Kāśyapa, there are three types of sangha communities: 1) sanghas that include people who violate precepts, 2) sanghas made up of the foolish and ignorant, and 3) sanghas of people who live in a pure way. The communities that include people who violate precepts are easily spoiled, but the communities of those who are pure in keeping the precepts cannot be spoiled even by situations that offer them personal gain.

Which sanghas include people who violate precepts? There are some monks who, although they normally observe the rules of behavior, when there is personal gain involved, spend considerable time with people who violate precepts and inevitably become intimate with them through joint activities. These I call precept violators or sangha members who mix [with precept violators].

Which sanghas are foolish and ignorant? If there are monks in the forest whose faculties are dim and dull and who do not see things clearly, who have few desires and beg for their meals, who on the days for reciting the precepts or the occasions for confessing precept violations teach their disciples how to make a pure confession, but when seeing others who are not their disciples blithely violate the precepts yet do not manage to enjoin them to make a pure confession and, unaffected by this, sit together with them throughout the precept recitation and confession ceremonies—this I call a sangha of the foolish and ignorant.

Which sanghas are pure? These are the monks who are not damaged by [the acts of] even ten trillion māras. The basic nature of this group of bodhisattvas is pure, and they are able to straighten out the other two groups I have just mentioned, enabling everyone to live in peace in pure communities. I call them, “dharma-protecting, most excellent vinaya

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masters.” Because of their desire to discipline and [thereby] benefit living beings, they understand which aspects of the moral precepts are unimportant and which are important. They do not affirm behavior that is not in keeping with the discipline; behavior in keeping with the discipline they do affirm.

How does someone discipline another? If bodhisattvas are going to spiritually transform other living beings they must be a constant presence in towns and villages regardless of time or occasion. They might end up in the homes of widows or female entertainers, even living together with them for many years. If they were śrāvakas, this type of thing could not be done but this [bodhisattva work] I call “disciplining and benefiting living beings.”

How does one know which [precepts] should be considered weighty? As you see the Tathāgata establish a precept on the basis of some incident, from that day forward you should follow that [rule] and take care not to commit a similar offense. Thus we have the four grave *pārājika* offenses that one who has gone forth as a monastic must never commit.⁵⁵ If, despite these rules, one still transgresses, that person is no longer a *śramaṇa*, that person is not in the lineage of Śākyamuni. This I would call serious or weighty.

Which [precepts] should be considered light? If one commits a violation in a trivial situation and upon being remonstrated three times is able to give up such behavior, this I would call light or insignificant.

To not affirm noncompliance with the precepts refers to the refusal to reside together with anyone who lauds impure things and urges you to accept them. To affirm compliance with the precepts refers to the careful study of the monastic precepts and the avoidance of anyone who violates them. Whenever noticing conduct in another that accords with the rules in the vinaya, one’s heart is filled with joy. This is how one grasps what is wrought in the Buddha’s dharma and is fully capable of explaining it. This is a person I would call a vinaya master. One who thoroughly grasps just one word [of the vinaya], or one who thoroughly retains what is in the sutras, are also like this. In this way, good man, the buddhadharma is immeasurable, inconceivable. The Tathāgata himself is thus—beyond conception.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, just so, just so! Truly a sacred teaching like the Buddha's dharma is immeasurable and inconceivable. The Tathāgata himself is just the same, beyond conception. Therefore we know that the Tathāgata is permanently abiding, indestructible, and unchanging. From now on I will study hard in order to disseminate this meaning to others.

At that time the Buddha praised the bodhisattva Kāśyapa:

Excellent, excellent! The body of a Tathāgata is just that: a body that is adamantine and indestructible. Bodhisattvas should thoroughly study right perception and right understanding. If you are able to see all these things clearly in this way, then you will see the Buddha's adamantine body, his indestructible body, just as if you were looking at images [of yourself] reflected in a mirror.

Chapter Three

The Virtues of the Name

At that time the Tathāgata again informed Kāśyapa, saying:

Good man, now you should carefully retain in your memory the virtues contained in the words and phrases of this sutra. And any good men or women who hear the sutra’s name will not be reborn in any of the four [unfortunate] realms. Why is this? It is because a scripture like this has been put into practice by countless, unfathomable numbers of buddhas, resulting in an accumulation of merit the likes of which I will now explain. 385a

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, what should we call this sutra? How can the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas retain it with the proper reverence?”

The Buddha said to Kāśyapa:

The name of this sutra is *Mahāparinirvāṇa* (*Great Entering into Perfect Extinction*). It is elegant in its opening language, elegant in the language of its development, and elegant in its conclusion. Its meaning is profound and its verbal expression is excellent, as it [expounds] a holy life that is complete, accomplished, and pure. It is a diamond treasury, complete and lacking nothing.

Now you need to listen carefully to what I am going to explain. Good man, by calling it “*mahā*” (great) I am saying that it is permanent. Just as the flows of the eight great rivers all return to the ocean, in the same way this sutra [enables all living beings] to vanquish all their emotional constraints and defilements and all Māra natures, afterward inevitably bringing *mahāparinirvāṇa* when they accept the end of their lives. That is why I call it the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*. Good man, as a physician may have one secret healing technique that incorporates all other forms of healing, good man, the Tathāgata does the same. The various sublime

dharmas and gateways to the treasury of profound mysteries that I have expounded are all included in this *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*. That is precisely why I call it the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*.

Good man, consider the farmer who always has hope when he plants in the spring months, yet when harvesting his crops those hopes may all come to naught. Good man, all living beings are like this. They cultivate their study of other sutras, always in the hope of a flavor to be savored [yet unsure of the actual outcome]. But if they get a chance to hear the *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*, all such hope for [finding] flavors in other sutras will drop away forever. This *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]* can bring about the deliverance of living beings from any stream of existence. Good man, among all footprints the footprint of an elephant is the most grand, and this sutra is like that. Among the *samādhis* taught in the sutras, what is presented here is the finest. Good man, when it comes to plowing rice fields autumn plowing is the best, and this sutra, in the same way, is the best among the sutras. Good man, just as clarified butter is first among medicines for controlling fever and anxiety in the minds of living beings, so, too, is this *Mahāparinirvāṇa* first [among the sutras].⁵⁶

Good man, and just as sweet butter is replete with eight flavors, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]* is also replete with eight flavors. What are the eight? First is permanence. Second is constancy. Third is calmness. Fourth is quiescence. Fifth is nonaging. Sixth is immortality. Seventh is immaculateness. Eighth is joyousness. These are all the eight flavors included in the discourse, and it is because the sutra is replete with [all] eight that it is called the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*.

385b If bodhisattva-mahāsattvas base themselves in this discourse, then anywhere they are will manifest nirvāṇa. That is why I call it the *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*. Kāśyapa, if good men and good women aspire to nirvāṇa by means of this *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*, they must thus apply themselves to studying the permanent abiding of the Tathāgata and of the dharma and sangha as well.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then said to the Buddha:

Extraordinary, World-Honored One. The virtue of the Tathāgata is beyond conception. The dharma and the sangha are just the same—

inconceivable. This *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]* is also beyond conception. Those who study this scripture will gain an opening into the true-dharma, becoming excellent physicians themselves. You should understand, however, that those who never study it will be blind, lacking eyes of wisdom, their sight clouded by ignorance.

Fascicle IV

Chapter Four

The Nature of the Tathāgata: Part 1

The Buddha said to Kāśyapa:

Good man, bodhisattva-mahāsattvas elucidate separately the meanings of four issues contained within the *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*. What are the four? 1) Correcting oneself, 2) correcting others, 3) competently providing answers that accord with questions, and 4) skillfully grasping the meaning of causality.

What is “correcting oneself”? If a buddha tathāgātha looks at the origins [of the precepts], he will have something to say about them. For example, a monk seeing a great cluster of fires might declare:

I would just as well embrace the flames of these burning fires as dare to malign the twelvefold scriptures and the hidden treasury expounded by the Tathāgata by claiming that these are the words of Māra. Anyone who says the Tathāgata, dharma, and sangha are impermanent would be deceiving himself and lying to others. He might as well take a sword and cut off his own tongue, for no one could ever [honestly] say the Tathāgata, the dharma, and the sangha are impermanent. If you hear people say such things do not believe them, and yet you should nonetheless feel sympathy for those who speak this way, for the Tathāgata, dharma, and sangha are beyond their conception.

You should thus contemplate your own self as if it were a cluster of fires. This I call “correcting oneself.”

What is “correcting others”? Once when I was expounding the dharma a woman nursing a baby came to see me. As she bent her head to my feet to show respect something occurred to her. Thinking about this, she then sat down facing me. At that moment the World-Honored One understood and asked her about it:

Out of love and affection you have put no small amount of butter into your baby’s mouth. But you do not know the degree to which he has digested it, if at all, no?

385c The woman then said to the Buddha:

Astonishing, World-Honored One, that you are able to know so well the thoughts in my mind! All I ask of the Tathāgata is if he would tell me how well [the child has digested the food]. World-Honored One, this morning I did give the child a great amount of butter. I fear that he has not been able to digest it—he will not have a premature death, will he? All I ask of the Tathāgata is to explain this for me.

The Buddha said to her: “What your child has eaten he in fact did digest immediately, increasing his life span.”

When she heard this, the woman’s heart danced with joy. She then said to the Buddha:

The Tathāgata speaks the truth, and I rejoice. World-Honored One, it is from your desire to tame living beings that you thoroughly analyze and explain about digesting and not digesting. In addition, you have also taught us the dharma, in doctrines such as nonself and impermanence. If the Buddha, the World-Honored One, had first expounded permanence, then those of us being taught would have said this teaching is the same as that of the non-Buddhists, and we would have abandoned it right away.

The Buddha then informed the woman:

When your child grows big enough to where he can come and go on his own, what he eats at that point he may or may not be able to digest. And the butter that you gave him in the past will no longer

suffice. The śrāvaka disciples that I have are also like this. Just like your infant, they have been unable to digest this teaching about permanent abiding. This is why I first expounded the doctrines of suffering and impermanence [as you described].

But when the qualities in my śrāvaka disciples become adequate for them to endure the cultivation of practice based on the Mahāyāna scriptures, I can then explain this sutra to them in terms of six flavors. What are these six flavors? I explain that suffering is sour, impermanence is salty, nonself is bitter, bliss is sweet, self is spicy, and permanence is astringent.

In this world there are three kinds of flavors: what I call the absence of permanence, the absence of self, and the absence of bliss. But using the defilements as kindling and wisdom as fire, this can be turned into what becomes a nirvāṇic meal to enjoy. I am speaking of what is permanent, blissful, and self, and what enables all disciples to enjoy [the fruit of the path].

I also said to the woman:

If a situation developed in which you wanted to go away for a period of time, you would have to make your bad sons go outside the house while you entrusted your treasury of valuables entirely to your good sons, would you not?

The woman said: “As true as a sacred teaching! Our store of what is rare and valuable would be shown to the good sons but not to the bad sons.”

[I then said to her:]

Sister, it is the same with me. At the time of my *parinirvāṇa*, the Tathāgata’s treasury of the subtle, hidden, and unsurpassed dharma will not be given to the disciples who are śrāvakas, just as you would not entrust your treasury of valuables to your bad sons. I have to entrust [this] to the bodhisattvas, just as you would entrust your treasury of valuables to your good sons. Why is this? Because the śrāvaka disciples formulate the idea of “transformation” [in this context], presuming that a buddha tathāgata truly passes into extinction. But as a matter of fact, I do not pass into extinction. This would be akin

to your traveling to a distant place and before you can return your bad sons tell everyone you have died, when in fact you have not died. The bodhisattvas will say that the Tathāgata is permanent and immutable. In the same way, your good sons will not say that you have died. This is why my unsurpassed, hidden treasury will be entrusted to the bodhisattvas.

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Good man, if any living being proclaims that the Buddha abides permanently and is immutable, know that the Buddha dwells in his home. This is what I call the correction of others.

What is “capable of providing an answer that accords with a question”? If someone came to the Buddha, the World-Honored One, and asked: “How could I attain fame as a great donor to charity without giving up my wealth?”

The Buddha would say [to him]:

If there is [before you] a *śramaṇa*, or a brahman, or someone of this nature who knows the contentment of living with few desires and who would never accept or retain anything impure, to that person you should give female and male slave attendants. To one practicing the restraints of religious life (*brahmacārin*), give a girl. To one who has given up wine and meat, give wine and meat. To one who does not transgress the rule against eating after noon, give food in the afternoon. To one who does not wear flowers or fragrances, give flowers and fragrances. The fame of this kind of giving will spread throughout the world at almost no cost to you and your fortune.⁵⁷

[To preach in this way] is what I call “capable of providing an answer that accords with a question.”

At that point, the bodhisattva Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, a person should not give meat to someone who eats meat. Why do I say this? In my view, there is great virtue in not eating meat.

The Buddha then praised Kāśyapa:

Excellent, excellent! You have now reached a clear understanding of

my point. The bodhisattva who protects the dharma should be like this. Good man, from today I no longer allow śrāvaka disciples to eat meat. Whenever you receive donations of food from lay donors you should regard [any meat in] the food as if it were the flesh of your own son.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, why does the Tathāgata not allow the eating of meat?

[The Buddha said:]

Good man, to eat meat is to cut out the seeds of your own great compassion.

Kāśyapa then said:

Why is it, Tathāgata, that previously you allowed *bhikṣus* to eat three kinds of pure meat?⁵⁸

[The Buddha said:]

Kāśyapa, regarding the three kinds of pure meat, in response to specific situations I have been gradually imposing restrictions.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa once again addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, what were the causes for the ten kinds of impure and nine kinds of pure [meat] both being disallowed?⁵⁹

The Buddha said to Kāśyapa:

The formulations of those restrictions also came gradually due to particular events, but it should be understood that my present intention is to end the eating of meat.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then said to the Buddha:

Why is it, Tathāgata, that you proclaim meat and fish are to be regarded as “fine foods”?⁶⁰

[The Buddha said:]

Good man, I am not saying that meat and fish are “fine foods.” I am saying that sugar cane, nonglutinous rice, crystallized honey, all grains, brown

sugar, milk with honey, and clarified butter are fine foods. But even when I say you should keep garments made of various kinds of cloth, by “should” I mean keeping what you need: cloth stripped of its color. Why would I condone anyone’s craving for the taste of meat or fish?

Kāśyapa then said:

If the Tathāgata has imposed a rule that we should not eat meat, then does that mean we should also not accept food containing the five flavors—yogurt, buttermilk, fresh butter, clarified butter, and sesame oil—as well as clothing, robes made of *kauśeya* silk, conch shells, leather, gold or silver, and bowls or utensils?

[The Buddha said:]

386b Good man. This does not mean you should adopt the same perspective as the ascetic Nirgrantha Jains.⁶¹ Each restrictive precept formulated by the Tathāgata reflects a particular intent.

There was thus a particular intention behind my allowing you to eat the three kinds of pure meat. And yet that is different from the idea of ending the consumption of the ten kinds of meat, and it is from this other idea [that I speak of] cutting it out entirely, including meat that comes from animals that die a natural death.

Kāśyapa, from today I establish a precept restricting my disciples from eating all forms of meat. Kāśyapa, those who do partake of meat, whether they are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, will produce an odor of meat that all living beings will smell and this inevitably creates a sense of fear in them. It is like a man who gets close to lions; a crowd that sees him do this will smell the odor of the lion on him afterward and become afraid.

Good man, it is like the fact that when someone eats garlic, he smells foul and repugnant. When others see that person and smell that odor they will move away. If people have no desire to see him when he is spotted from a distance, how much less [would they wish to see him] when he is near? Those who eat meat are like this. Any living being who smells the scent of meat will become afraid and will be filled with the fear of death. All forms of life, whether they live out their lives in water, on land, or in the air, flee from [this smell]. They will all say, “This

person is our enemy.” For this reason, bodhisattvas do not customarily eat meat. They may manifest eating meat for purposes of saving living beings but although it appears that they are eating meat, in fact they are not. Good man, the pure eating of bodhisattvas is thus not eating, so how could they eat meat?

Good man, countless centuries following my nirvāṇa there will be holy people of the four Buddhist paths who will all attain nirvāṇa. After the true-dharma has disappeared, during a period of counterfeit dharma there will be *bhikṣus* who will imitate upholding the precepts and will read and recite the sutras to some degree. Yet these monks will cravenly delight in food and drink, nourishing their bodies for a long life. The clothes they wear will be coarse and ugly. Their appearance will be haggard and they will seem to have no dignity at all. They will raise cows and sheep, and haul firewood and grass. They will let their hair and nails grow long. Although they will wear the *kāśāya* robe of a monastic, they will nevertheless look like hunters. They will move about with their eyes narrowed, like a cat stalking a mouse. They will continually declare, “I have attained arhatship,” but they will have many ills, and some will lie down to sleep in their own excrement. To the outside world they may appear wise and gracious, but internally they will harbor greed and jealousy. Like brahmins who have received a mute dharma, in truth they will not be *śramaṇas* but merely people who give the impression of being *śramaṇas*. Their false views will be pursued actively, maligning the true-dharma. People such as these will destroy the rules of discipline, the proper practices, and the dignity and decorum that have been formulated by the Tathāgata [for the sangha]. They will preach the goal of liberation and avoiding impurities, even as they destroy the teaching that is profound and hidden. Having reached the point where each of them follows his or her own ideas, they will make assertions in opposition to what is in the sutras and vinayas such as, “Tathāgatas all allow us to eat meat.” Producing such lines of reasoning by themselves, they will nevertheless claim them to be “the words of the Buddha,” and yet they will argue among themselves, each insisting to be a *śramaṇa* disciple of Śākyamuni.

Good man, at that time there will also be *śramaṇas* who will store grain, accept fish and meat, prepare their own meals, and who will keep

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jars of oil, jeweled canopies, and leather shoes. Some of them will be close to kings, important officials, civic leaders, oracles, and astrologers. Some will study medicine and the healing arts; raise and keep slaves; [or collect] gold, silver, lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian, crystal, pearls, coral, amber, jade, conch shells, or different types of fruit and melons. There will be those who study the arts, who become painters, ceramists, scribes, teachers, cultivators of plants, practitioners of spells and magic. There will be those who manufacture medicines and produce theatrical performances, and those who adorn their bodies with perfumes and flowers, engage in gambling and games, and learn crafts and skills. If there are monks who can separate themselves from these unfortunate activities, you should refer to them as true disciples of mine.

At that moment Kāśyapa spoke once more to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen depend upon others for their livelihood. If, when begging for their meals, some end up with meat mixed in with their food, how can they eat in a way that conforms to the dharma of purity?

The Buddha said:

Kāśyapa, wash the food with water, separating out the meat. After that may you eat. If utensils become polluted by contact with meat, just remove any residue of meat flavor and you may then use them without transgression. If you see that there is a lot of meat in your food, then you should not accept it. Any meat that is clearly present [in your bowl] should not be eaten; to eat it constitutes a transgression. I am now proclaiming this rule eliminating meat eating. If I were to explain this in detail it would never end, but as I have reached the time of my nirvāṇa I offer only this brief statement. This, then, is [another example of] what I call “providing an answer that accords with a question.”

Kāśyapa, what is “skillfully grasping the meaning of causality”? It is like the [discourse] that would occur if followers from the four groups came to ask me these questions:

World-Honored One, tell us why a teaching like this was not expounded to King Prasenajit when the Tathāgata first appeared [as

a buddha]? The doctrine that you preach for us has profound and wonderful meaning, but at times your preaching is deep, at times it is shallow. Some things you call violations and some things you call nonviolations. What do you mean by downfall?⁶² What is it that you call vinaya? What is the meaning of what you call *prātimokṣa*?

I would then answer as follows:

The *prātimokṣa*, or code of precepts, is known as “contentment.” Through it one achieves the proper comportment [of a *śramaṇa*], devoid of accumulation, so it is also called “pure livelihood.” “Downfall” refers to [rebirth in] the four unfortunate realms. In addition, downfall may also specifically indicate falling into the hells, all the way down to Avīci Hell. If you measured the speed of that fall it would be faster than that of a violent storm. If hearing this strikes you with fear, then be strict about maintaining the precepts and do not violate the rules of comportment. To cultivate the contentment that I mention is to not accept anything impure. In addition, downfall also means to offer nourishment to [those who have fallen into] the realms of hell, animals, or hungry ghosts. All these meanings I identify by the term “downfall.” The *prātimokṣa* is there to help you put distance between anything unwholesome or wicked and your actions, speech, and thought. “Vinaya” refers to entering into commitments to follow rules and observances and to appreciate the meanings of the sutras in all their profundity. It forbids the acceptance of all things impure as well as all situations brought about by impure causes or conditions. It also means prohibitions against the four grave violations (**pārājika*), the thirteen offenses entailing adjudication but permitting one to remain in the order (**saṃghāvaśeṣa*), the two offenses that are undetermined (**aniyata*), the thirty property offenses entailing expiation with forfeiture (**nihsargikā-pātayantikā*), the ninety-one offenses requiring expiation (**pātayantika*), the teachings on the four faults requiring confession (**pratideśanīyadharmā*), the [one hundred] manifold rules of training (**sambhulaśaikṣadharmā*), and the seven [rules for] quieting disputes (**sap-takaraṇa-śamathā*).⁶³ There are also some people who break *all* the

rules. In what sense do I say “all”? I am referring to everything from the four grave violations to the seven rules for resolving conflicts.

387a There are some people who repudiate the profound scriptures of the true-dharma. There are also *icchantikas* who have fully rid themselves of all forms [of accountability]. With no karmic relationship [to the world] they blithely say, “How brilliant and clever I am.” They keep fully hidden their transgressions, whether trivial or serious, concealing their wickedness like a turtle conceals his six protruding body parts. Such people pass through a long night [of ignorance] without regretting their many errors. And because they do not regret their transgressions, over time [the transgressions] only increase. The violations committed by these monks will never become public, and this in turn leads to such violations becoming rampant. This is why the Tathāgata, aware of this situation, has dispensed the rules for the community in a gradual fashion rather than putting out the entire system of prohibitions all at once.

At that time there were good men and good women who spoke to the Buddha thus:

World-Honored One. If the Tathāgata has been aware of this problem [of members of the sangha hiding their improper behavior] for some time, why did you not formulate these rules of restraint earlier? You would not, World-Honored One, want to cause living beings to end up in Avīci Hell, would you? It seems like a situation in which a great many people who have set out to reach somewhere have lost sight of the correct road and have ended up following the wrong path. Because these people do not realize they are lost, they all think, “*This* is the path.” Moreover, they do not see anyone question whether or not they are doing the right thing [so they continue in the same direction]. Living beings like this are lost to the Buddha’s teachings; they do not see the truth. The Tathāgata should first explain the right path and then issue directives to the *bhikṣus* that such-and-such [behavior] in effect violates the precepts and such-and-such in effect upholds the precepts. The rules should be laid out like that. Why? Because the truth that is the Tathāgata’s genuine awakening is the basis upon which we understand the right path. It is only the Tathāgata, the god

among gods, who can explain the exalted virtues of the “ten aspects of good character” as well as their meaning and appeal. That is why we implore you to formulate the precepts for us first.

The Buddha said:

Good man, by stating that the Tathāgata fully expounds the exalted virtues of the ten aspects of good character to living beings, you imply that the Tathāgata looks upon living beings as if each were [his son] Rāhula. So how can you complain, saying, “You would not, World-Honored One, want to cause living beings to end up in Avīci Hell, would you?” Were I to see even one person with a karmic condition that would mean falling into Avīci Hell, just for the sake of that person I would remain in the world for nearly a *kalpa*, even an entire *kalpa*. With this great compassion toward living beings, what situation could make me want to deceive those whom I regard like a son so that they would end up in hell? Good man, it is like a royal tailor who sees a hole in a garment, and thereupon sets out to repair it. The Tathāgata also operates in this way. When he sees a living being with karmic conditions that will bring him to Avīci Hell, he immediately uses the goodness in the precepts to make up for what is lacking in that person’s situation.

Good man, suppose there were a wheel-turning sage king (*cakravartin*) who first explained to living beings the value of the ten aspects of good character, yet afterward faced a series of incidents of bad behavior. That king would respond immediately each time something happened by putting a stop to those actions. Only then, after stopping these unacceptable types of behavior, would he himself [be in a position to] promulgate the ruling principles of a sage king. Good man, in a like manner, although I may have spoken about [the value of restraint], at first I did not lay down specific prohibitions. It was only after the need arose due to a series of actions by monks in violation of the spirit of the dharma that I set down rules of discipline based on those incidents.

Those with a willingness for the dharma, however, will cultivate their practice according to the teachings. And living beings like this will [eventually] be able to see the Tathāgata’s dharma body. Just as the jeweled circle possessed by a *cakravartin* king is inconceivable, the Tathāgata

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is also inconceivable, and the two jewels known as dharma and sangha are inconceivable as well. Those who can preach the dharma and those who can hear the dharma—they are all inconceivable. These reflect what I call “skillfully grasping the meaning of causality.”

Thus do the bodhisattvas elucidate separately the meanings of [these] four issues, what I call the doctrine of causality in the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa*[-*sūtra*].

Next, “correcting oneself” refers to obtaining the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* [-*sūtra*]. “Correcting others” refers to my having preached to the monks, “a tathāgata is a constant presence without change.” What I have called “competently providing answers that accord with questions” occurred when, due to something you asked about, Kāśyapa, I expounded this profound and sublime doctrine in a way that applied broadly to bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

“Skillfully grasping the meaning of causality” reflects the fact that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas do not grasp these profound doctrines. They simply do not hear [when I expound on] the hidden treasury that is composed of liberation, nirvāṇa, and *mahāprajñā* wisdom, which together form three dots [of a triangle] as in the Sanskrit letter “i.” I will now clarify the differences among these for the śrāvakas so they can open their eye of wisdom.

If someone were to say something to the effect of “How can these four things be said to be identical—is that not a falsehood?”, you should ask them: “What is the difference between these four things: empty space, nothing at all, inert, and unobstructed? How can you call them false?”

[Congregation:]

No, World-Honored One. These expressions all mean one thing: emptiness. Correcting oneself, correcting others, providing an answer that accords with a question, and grasping the meaning of causality are also like that, for in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*[-*sūtra*] they are equal, with no differences.

The Buddha said to Kāśyapa:

If there is a good man or good woman who makes such statements as:

The Tathāgata is impermanent. How do we know that he is impermanent? Because the Buddha himself has said:

To put an end to the defilements is called nirvāṇa. Like a fire that is extinguished, there is nothing there whatsoever. To end the defilements is also thus; I call it nirvāṇa.

So how could the Tathāgata be permanently abiding without change? As the Buddha has said: “That which is free from all forms of existence is called nirvāṇa. Within nirvāṇa there are no forms of existence.”

So how can one say that the Tathāgata is permanently abiding and immutable? When a garment has been torn to pieces it is no longer known as what it was before. Nirvāṇa is just that. Extinguishing the defilements means that the individual is no longer known as what he or she was, so how can one say that the Tathāgata is permanently abiding and immutable? As the Buddha has said:

Free from desire, calm and stilled, this I call nirvāṇa. If a man cuts off his head, then he has no head. “Free from desire, calm and stilled” is also like this. In emptiness, there is nothing whatsoever. Therefore it is called nirvāṇa.

So how can one say that the Tathāgata is permanently abiding and immutable? As the Buddha has said:

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Like heated iron
 When pounded, sparks fly
 That scatter and disappear,
 No one knows where they are.
 Attaining proper liberation
 Is also like this.
 After crossing over all the mud
 Of lust and desire
 One attains a place without movement
 It is not known where.

So how can one say that the Tathāgata is permanently abiding and immutable?

Kāśyapa, a complaint like this I would call an erroneous critique. Kāśyapa, you should not entertain this idea, inferring that the nature of the Tathāgata is something that perishes. Kāśyapa, [it is true that] the destruction of the defilements means that that individual is no longer known the same as what he or she was. Why is this? Because this is forever, and that is why I call it permanent. Termed “quiescent,” there is nothing beyond it. What perishes are any perceivable characteristics; of that, nothing remains. Termed “clean,” “permanently abiding,” and “nonretrogressing,” this is why nirvāṇa is called “permanently abiding.” The Tathāgata is also permanently abiding and immutable. The mention of “sparks flying” in the verse is a reference to the defilements. To say “That scatter and disappear, no one knows where they are” addresses the fact that the tathāgatas, following the destruction of their defilements, are no longer present in the five realms of saṃsāric existence. This is why I [also] state that tathāgatas are a permanently abiding dharma in which there is no change.

In addition, Kāśyapa, what the buddhas teach is called dharma. This is why the Tathāgata is revered and honored with offerings. And because the dharma is permanent, the buddhas are also permanent.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then asked the Buddha:

[To that way of thinking,] if the flame of the defilements disappears and the tathāgatas also disappear, then the tathāgatas have no place to abide permanently. Like the fact that when sparks fly and disappear in the process of forging iron and no one knows where their red color goes, when the defilements of a tathāgata disappear there is similarly no “place” they have perished to. Or one could say that like the heat and red color of the hot iron, when these have disappeared they simply no longer exist. Tathāgatas must be like this: after disappearing they are impermanent, for when they destroy the fire of the defilements they immediately enter nirvāṇa. We should understand, then, that tathāgatas are impermanent.

[The Buddha responded:]

Good man, this iron you speak of refers to ordinary people. An ordinary person, even after destroying the defilements, is reborn after the cessation of his existence. Therefore I call [that existence] impermanent. But a

tathāgata is not like that, for he is not born again after the cessation of his existence. Therefore I call [this existence] permanent.

Kāśyapa spoke once more:

But even after the iron's red color disappears it can return, for the red color would arise again if the iron were put [back] into the fire. If the Tathāgata were like that, it would mean that he would again produce the fetters of defilement. And if the fetters of defilement arose in him again, this would mean that he is impermanent.

The Buddha said:

Now Kāśyapa, you should not make such a statement, saying that the Tathāgata is impermanent. Why? Because the Tathāgata is permanent. Good man, it is like this: when you burn wood, after it is extinguished there will be ash; after the defilements are extinguished, there will be nirvāṇa. Tearing a garment, cutting off someone's head, or smashing a jar all work metaphorically in the same way. Each one of these things has its own appellation, we call them forth by saying, "tearing a garment," "cutting off a head," or "smashing a jar."

Kāśyapa, after the iron cools it can be heated again. But the Tathāgata is not like that. Having cut off the defilements in himself, he is absolutely cool. For when the defilements have been burned away [in a buddha] they do not arise again. Kāśyapa, you should understand that there are countless numbers of living beings whose situation is like the metaphor of iron here; I use the blaze of my untainted wisdom to burn off the constraints of their defilements.

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Kāśyapa once again spoke: "Excellent, excellent! Now I see the truth in the Tathāgata's explanation that buddhas are permanent."

The Buddha said:

Kāśyapa, suppose there were a sacred king who had been in the women's apartments of the palace, and then suddenly decides to go out for diversion into the garden (*udyāna*) behind the palace. Although at that point the king is not among his female attendants, no one would presume to say, "O, the king's life has ended." Good man, the Tathāgata is like this.

Although he does not appear in Jambudvīpa when he has entered nirvāṇa, this is not known as [a sign of] impermanence. The Tathāgata has left behind uncountable defilements to enter the place of peace and joy called nirvāṇa, where he strolls among the flowers of awakening with amusement and pleasure.

Kāśyapa once again spoke, asking:

The Buddha has said, “I have long since crossed over the ocean of the defilements.” But if the Buddha has already crossed over the ocean of the defilements, why would he join with [his wife] Yaśodharā and produce the child Rāhula? What are the circumstances by which we can understand that the Tathāgata has not yet crossed to the shore beyond the binding ocean of his defilements?

The Buddha then said to Kāśyapa:

You should not say:

If the Buddha has long since crossed over the ocean of the defilements, why would he join with [his wife] Yaśodharā and produce the child Rāhula? What are the circumstances by which we can understand that the Tathāgata has not yet crossed to the shore beyond the binding ocean of his defilements?

Good man, this *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]* establishes the Great Meaning. You must all pay attention and listen very carefully to what I will now expound in a rather expansive way. Do not be frightened by what you hear.

Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas who abide in *mahāparinirvāṇa* are like rulers of Mount Sumeru: they can take something as vast as that mountain and make it fit inside a pouch of mustard seeds. The living beings living on the Sumeru continent would not feel constricted by such activity, for they would have no notion that anything had either come or gone—as far as they would know, their continent would be no different from what it had been before. Only one who is crossing to the other shore would see the bodhisattva put Mount Sumeru into the mustard- seed pouch and then gently return it to where it was originally.

Good man, there are also bodhisattva-mahāsattvas abiding in *mahā-parinirvāṇa* who can put the great trichiliocosm of the universe into a mustard-seed pouch. The beings [living in those worlds] would similarly not feel constricted by such activity, for they would have no notion that anything had either come or gone—as far as they would know, their world would be no different from what it had been before. Only those who will cross over to the other shore will see a bodhisattva thus put the great trichiliocosm into a mustard-seed pouch and then gently return them to where they were originally.

Good man, there are also bodhisattva-mahāsattvas abiding in *mahā-parinirvāṇa* who, in much the same way, can take the great trichiliocosm and put it inside the space of one hair and then return it to its original location.

Good man, there are also bodhisattva-mahāsattvas abiding in *mahā-parinirvāṇa* who [can] cut out the three thousand–great thousand buddha worlds from all the ten directions, place them on the end of a pin, and then cast them into other buddha worlds located elsewhere, as easily as piercing the leaf of a jujube tree. All the living beings [in those worlds] would not be aware of where they had gone and returned from. Only those who will cross over to the other shore will be able to perceive this as well as their original locations.

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Good man, there are also bodhisattva-mahāsattvas abiding in *mahā-parinirvāṇa* who [can] cut out the three thousand–great thousand buddha realms of the ten directions and place them in the palm of their right hand like a potter’s ball of clay, and then throw them into realms molecular in size. Yet there would not be one living being on those worlds that would have any sense of anything coming or going during this either. Only those who will cross over to the other shore will be able to perceive this, as well as their original locations.

Good man, there are also bodhisattva-mahāsattvas abiding in *mahā-parinirvāṇa* who [can] cut out the three thousand–great thousand buddha worlds of the ten directions and internalize them all within their own bodies. The living beings there feel no constriction and have no sense of coming or going or even being anywhere [at all] during this process.

Only those who will cross over to the other shore will be able to perceive this, as well as their original locations.

Good man, there are also bodhisattva-mahāsattvas abiding in *mahāparinirvāṇa* who can take the worlds in the ten directions and place them inside one molecule. Yet the living beings residing there feel no constriction or any sense of coming or going during this process. Only those who will cross over to the other shore will be able to perceive this, as well as their original locations.

Good man, there are bodhisattva-mahāsattvas abiding in *mahāparinirvāṇa* who are thus able to display an array of supernatural transformations. This is [also] why it is called “*mahāparinirvāṇa*.” These innumerable supernatural transformations that may be thus revealed by bodhisattva-mahāsattvas are generally incomprehensible for living beings. So now tell me, how do you propose to understand that the Tathāgata indulged in sexual intercourse to produce Rāhula?

Good man, having abided in this *mahāparinirvāṇa* for so long, I have displayed supernatural transformations in many different ways. In the ten billion suns and moons and ten billion Jambudvīpas among the great trichiliocosm there have been various displays of this sort, such as those expounded in some detail in the *Śūraṅgama[samādhi-]sūtra*.⁶⁴ One of the things I have done is to reveal nirvāṇa in the triple thousand-great thousand worlds and in Jambudvīpa. And yet I did not ultimately choose nirvāṇa [for myself]. Or I have also showed myself entering the womb of a mother in Jambudvīpa, causing a father and mother to think they begot me as their son, despite the fact that this body ultimately is not something born from the union of sexual desires. Having separated myself from [the realm of] sexual desire for so long—over innumerable *kalpas*—this body I have now is in fact a dharma body that manifested in a womb only to conform to the ways of the world (**lokānuvartana*).

Good man, I manifested my birth from my mother Māyā in the Lumbinī Grove in Jambudvīpa. Following my birth, I was able to immediately take seven steps to the east and roar out the words, “I am the most revered, the highest, among humans, gods, and *asuras*.” My mother and father, and indeed the people and gods who witnessed this, were overcome with joy and thought how exceedingly rare this was. The people presumed

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I was an infant, yet for innumerable *kalpas* this body of mine had long since been separated from the phenomenon [of infancy]. The body of a tathāgata is none other than a dharma body; it is not constructed of flesh, blood, tendons, veins, bones, and marrow.

It was because I was conforming to the ways of living beings in the world that I manifested myself as a newborn baby. I walked seven paces to the south and displayed my desire to become a superior field of merit for innumerable living beings. I walked seven paces to the west and revealed that when my lifetime is exhausted I will have cut off aging and death forever, this being my last body. I walked seven paces to the north and showed that I had already crossed over to the other shore beyond all forms of saṃsāra. I walked seven paces to the east and showed that I will be a guide for living beings. And walking seven steps in the four intermediate directions revealed how I had destroyed the [entire] array of defilements and the nature of the four māra [demons], thus becoming a Thus Come One, Worthy of Offerings, Completely Awakened. I walked upward seven paces and showed that I was not polluted by anything impure, just like space. I walked downward seven paces and revealed the dharma rain that extinguishes the fires of hell, bringing serenity and joy to living beings there. And for those who violated the precepts, I manifested frost and hail.

Seven days after I was born in Jambudvīpa I put on a display of shaving my head. Everyone presumed at that point that I was an infant who had just shaved his head for the first time. But no one among all the people, *devas*, king Māra Pāpīyas, *śramaṇas*, and brahmans who were present could see the special mark on my head.⁶⁵ So how could anyone have picked up a knife to come and shave my head? Even if someone had done so, it would have been meaningless because over the course of immeasurable *kalpas* I have long since removed the hair on my head and face. It is only out of a desire to follow the ways of the world that I made a show of shaving the hair on my head.

After I was born, my parents took me to a temple where they presented me to the deity Maheśvara. When Maheśvara looked upon me he immediately put his palms together, bowed in respect, and stood to one side. For over immeasurable *kalpas*, in fact, I had long since abandoned going

to such temples and only displayed myself in this way out of a desire to conform to the ways of the world.

In Jambudvīpa I also displayed having pierced ears. In truth, among all living beings there is no one who can pierce my ears. I manifested this behavior in order to conform to the world. I also took various jewels and constructed a “lion’s earring” with which I adorned my ears, though in fact over innumerable *kalpas* I had long since abandoned wearing any such adornments. It was in order to comply with the ways of the world that I produced this display.

I showed myself entering a school where I studied [reading and] writing. But over innumerable *kalpas* I had already endowed myself with the accomplishment of this task, so no matter where one may look throughout the triple world there would be no one who would be suitable to be my teacher. It is only out of a desire to conform to the world that I showed myself entering the school. That is why I am called “Thus Come One, Worthy of Offerings, Completely Awakened.” When [growing up] I learned how to ride an elephant, how to ride a horse, how to fight, and how to do various artistic techniques, and it was the same situation.

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In Jambudvīpa I also displayed myself as a crown prince. Living beings all saw me as a prince enjoying myself, delighting in the pleasures of the five senses. In fact, over the course of innumerable *kalpas* I had long since abandoned the pursuit of pleasure, so the display of this aspect of my life was shown merely to conform to the ways of the world. And there were prognosticators who predicted that if I did not leave behind the householder’s life I would become a *cakravartin* king who would rule over Jambudvīpa. Living beings all believed in these words but, in fact, over innumerable *kalpas* I had already abandoned the status of a *cakravartin* who turns the wheel of political power in favor of being a *cakravartin* who turns the wheel of dharma.

In Jambudvīpa I then manifested abandoning lust for women and the pleasures of the five senses, as well as departing from the householder’s life after seeing examples of aging, illness, death, and a mendicant *śramaṇa*, in order to cultivate a path to liberation. When this happened, living beings all thought, “Siddhārtha has started to live the life of a monk,” but it had been innumerable *kalpas* in the past when I left behind

the householder's life to pursue the Way. It was only to conform to the world that I displayed such things.

After I showed myself leaving the household life in Jambudvīpa, I took the complete precepts, diligently cultivated the path, and attained the fruit of the path of a *srotāpanna* (one entering the stream), the fruit of the path of a *sakṛdāgāmin* (once-returner), the fruit of the path of an *anāgāmin* (nonreturner), and the fruit of the path of an arhat (worthy). Many people said that completing the path of an arhat was relatively easy for me to attain, but in fact I had already accomplished the path to arhatship innumerable *kalpas* ago.

It was in order to emancipate living beings that I sat down [to meditate] at the “site of awakening” under the *bodhi* tree, making a seat out of grass, and subdued the bands of Māra demons that came at me. Everyone thought I first overcame the minions of Māra at that so-called “site of awakening” under the *bodhi* tree but, on the contrary, I had long since prevailed in that struggle, in fact innumerable *kalpas* ago. It was only in order to prevail over [the resistance of] stubborn living beings that I displayed this transformation.

I have also manifested such things as liquid and solid defecation, and inhaling and exhaling. Those around me expected me to have liquid and solid defecation and inhaling and exhaling; however, what has been attained in this body is a state entirely without such things as defecation or breathing. I was only displaying this behavior because it was in accordance with the ways of the world. I also showed myself accepting faithful donations [of food] from people, even though this body of mine has no hunger or thirst at all. I put on this display to conform to the world.

Because I wanted to appear to be the same as living beings I have also shown myself to be sleeping, even though over the course of innumerable *kalpas* I have equipped myself with such unsurpassed, profound wisdom that I have left behind all forms of existence in the triple world. I have thus been quite free from concerns over such things as proper conduct and comportment, headaches, indigestion, back pain, wielding a spear, washing my feet, washing my hands, washing my face, rinsing my mouth, or cleaning my teeth after chewing. Many thought my life was filled with such things, but in this body of mine there are none of

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these things. My feet are as clean as a white lotus blossom. My breath is as pure and fresh as the fragrance of a blue lotus. All living beings think of me as a person but in fact I am not a “person.” I showed myself accepting rags from the rubbish for clothing, and washing and darning my robes as well, but I have long since ended any need for these clothes.

A great many people think Rāhula is my son, King Śuddhodana is my father, Lady Māyā is my mother, and when I was in the world I enjoyed myself with worldly pleasures and then walked away from such things when I left home to pursue the Way. Many people have also said, The surname of this crown prince is Gautama. He freed himself from the pleasures of the world, seeking the supramundane dharma.

But I have long since separated myself from the sexual desires of this world; such things have all been mere displays on my part. All living beings think of me as a person but in fact I am not.

Good man, although I have repeatedly displayed myself to be entering nirvāṇa while here in Jambudvīpa, in truth I have never entered into an absolute nirvāṇa. So while all living beings may think the Tathāgata has truly perished, the tathāgata-nature in fact will never cease to exist. That is why it should be understood that this is a permanently abiding dharma that is immutable as well.

Good man, *mahāparinirvāṇa* itself is none other than the dharma realm (*dharmadhātu*) of the buddha tathāgatas. When I appear within in the world of Jambudvīpa, living beings all presume that I am attaining buddhahood for the first time. But I had already managed to do this over the course of innumerable *kalpas* in the past, so this “initial” attainment of buddhahood was just one more thing I displayed in Jambudvīpa to conform to [the expectations of] the world.

I have also appeared in Jambudvīpa [as a monk who] did not uphold the precepts, even to the point of committing one of the four grave offenses entailing defeat. The multitude around me all saw this and said I had truly transgressed. But over the course of innumerable *kalpas* I have been quite diligent about keeping the precepts with no gaps or omissions.

I have also appeared in Jambudvīpa as an *icchāntika*. The many people who saw this all recognized me as an *icchāntika* but in fact I was not an

icchantika. How could an *icchantika* have attained unsurpassed perfect enlightenment?

I also appeared in Jambudvīpa trying to break up the sangha (**saṃgha-bheda*). Living beings all remarked that I was [indeed] breaking up the sangha but I consider the sangha community to be incapable of being broken up by either humans or gods. I have also appeared in Jambudvīpa for the purpose of supporting efforts to preserve the dharma. The many people who saw [my efforts] all spoke of how astonished they were at the lengths I would go to to preserve the dharma. But the reality of buddhas is like that—no one should be astonished by what I did.

I also manifested myself in Jambudvīpa as the evil Māra Pāpīyas, and the many people who saw me [in this guise] all thought I *was* Pāpīyas. But over innumerable *kalpas* I have long been free of the affairs of Māra, having remained pure, without stain, like a lotus blossom.

I have also manifested myself in Jambudvīpa as someone who attained buddhahood in a woman's body. The many people who saw this all spoke of how rare it was for a woman to be able to attain *anuttarā samyak-saṃbodhi*. Tathāgatas cannot accept a woman's body in perpetuity but out of a desire to tame a great many living beings they do manifest themselves in female form. Out of empathy for all living beings I have also appeared in various colored forms.

I have also appeared in Jambudvīpa born into the four [unfortunate] modes of existence. But as I have long since removed all causes for my rebirth in any of them, would there be karmic cause for me to fall into the four [unfortunate] modes of existence? It was in order to ferry those living beings born there to the other shore that I have been born there.

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I have also manifested in Jambudvīpa assuming the form of the deity Brahmā, thereby enabling those who serve Brahmā to situate themselves in the true-dharma. Although in truth I was not him, those living beings all assumed that I was the true Brahmā deity. I appeared in the form of deities worshiped widely in local shrines in just this same way.

I have also appeared in Jambudvīpa to go into the houses of women of pleasure even though in fact I had no thoughts of sexual desire toward them, remaining pure and unstained like a lotus blossom throughout. For the sake of living beings lost to sexual cravings, I have stood on

street corners [before such establishments] preaching this excellent dharma. Although in truth my mind was without taint of desire, the crowd around me thought I was guarding those women [for my own purposes].

I have also manifested myself in Jambudvīpa to go into the dwellings of the green-robed female servants who are *śūdras* in order to teach women in positions of servitude how they could abide in the true-dharma. To do this, I was reborn down into an existence in which I was a female servant myself, although in truth I was without the kind of unwholesome karma that would cause such a thing to happen. I also manifested myself in Jambudvīpa [in the form of people] who became scholars in order to teach the young so that they may abide in the true-dharma as well.

I have also manifested myself in Jambudvīpa going into places for drinking alcohol and gambling. I displayed an acceptance of various forms of games and competition but it was only for the purpose of rescuing living beings from that world. Although in fact I was without the kind of unwholesome karma [possessed by those who frequent such places], yet the living beings gathered there all presumed that I was indeed engaged in such behavior.

I have also manifested myself for some time among the cremation mounds of a charnel ground, taking the body of a great eagle to bring those birds of flight to the other shore. Although the living beings there all thought of me as an actual bird, in truth I had long since abandoned any karmic activity that would produce such a rebirth. I manifested in a body like that because I wanted to save those eagles.

I have also appeared in Jambudvīpa in the form of persons of civic importance out of a desire to establish a great many living beings in positions of abiding in the true-dharma. I have also manifested as kings, high government officials, princes, and chancellors. Preeminent in each group, I assumed these royal positions in order to cultivate the true-dharma.

I have also manifested myself during an age when Jambudvīpa was ravaged by pestilence and there were many living beings suffering from disease. First I provided medicine and treatment, and after that I explained the fine, true-dharma, enabling [living beings] to abide peacefully in the

highest *bodhi*. Those around me in those times all spoke of living in an age of disease.

I have also manifested myself during an age when famine plagued Jambudvīpa. I provided food and drink to people according to their needs, and after that preached the fine, true-dharma, enabling them to abide peacefully in the highest *bodhi*. I have also manifested myself during an age of armed [conflict] in Jambudvīpa, immediately expounding the dharma to enable [the soldiers] to put aside their enmity and harmful intentions, and making them capable of peacefully abiding in the highest *bodhi*.

I have also appeared in order to preach the idea of impermanence for those who supposed the existence of something permanent in themselves, to preach the idea of suffering for those who supposed something joyful in themselves, to preach the idea of nonself for those who supposed a self in themselves, and to preach the idea of impurity for those who supposed something inherently pure in themselves. If I encountered living beings that were attached to the triple world, I would then expound a dharma [teaching] that enabled them to free themselves from such thinking.

Thus to ferry living beings to the other shore I have preached the most sublime dharma medicine. In order to root out any trees producing the defilements, I have planted the seeds of trees that will produce the unsurpassed dharma medicine. In order to rescue people from heretical paths, I have expounded the true-dharma. Although I have also manifested myself as a teacher of living beings, in the beginning I had no notion of being anyone's teacher. But because I wanted to rescue those at the bottom of society, I manifested myself among them and expounded the dharma. Again, I was not born into that environment as a result of bad karma.

The complete awakening of a tathāgata is well situated in *mahāparinirvāṇa* in ways such as this. That is why I say [a tathāgata] is “permanently abiding without change.” And as it is in this [southern] continent of Jambudvīpa, so it is in the east in Pūrvavideha, in the west in Aparagodānīya, and in the north in Uttarakuru as well. The great trichilocosm below the four heavens are also like this, as are the twenty-five states of existence as described in the *Śūramgama[samādhi]-sūtra*. This

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is precisely why it is called *mahāparinirvāṇa*. And any bodhisattva-mahāsattva who is well situated in *mahāparinirvāṇa* in this way will be able to manifest supernatural transformations in this manner without anything to fear.

Kāśyapa, for this reason you should not say that Rāhula is the Buddha's son. Why not? Because, [as I have pointed out,] over innumerable *kalpas* in the past I have long since left behind sensual existence. That is also why a tathāgata is known to be "permanently abiding without change."

Kāśyapa then spoke up again:

What is this "permanently abiding" of which the Tathāgata speaks? Is it something like the Buddha's statement, "After a lamp is extinguished its [light] is not located anywhere"? Is the Tathāgata is also like this; that is, after his extinction, he will not be located anywhere?

The Buddha said:

Kāśyapa, good man, you should not speak in that way, saying that after a lamp is extinguished its [light] is not located anywhere, and likewise, after the Tathāgata's extinction he will also not be located anywhere. Good man, what is analogous is when a man or woman wants to light a lamp they fill it with oil, regardless of its size. As long as there is oil, its light will be present. When the oil has been exhausted, the light will also be exhausted. The disappearance of the light is a metaphor for the disappearance of the defilements. And although the light may have disappeared the lamp itself is still present. The Tathāgata is like this. The defilements in him may have disappeared but his dharma body is always present. Good man, what do you make of this? Do light and lamp both disappear or not?

Kāśyapa answered:

No, World-Honored One. Although they do not both disappear yet they are still impermanent. If the dharma body is analogous to the lamp, then as the lamp is impermanent, the dharma body likewise should be designated as impermanent.

[The Buddha said:]

Good man, you should not create such difficulties. Just as people speak of a “vessel” in an ordinary sense, a tathāgata, a World-Honored One, is an unsurpassed “dharma vessel.” But while a vessel is impermanent, a tathāgata is not. Among all dharmas it is nirvāṇa that is permanent, and this is the essence of a tathāgata. Therefore [tathāgatas] are [also] called permanent.

Moreover, good man, when I say the lamp is extinguished, this refers to the nirvāṇa realized by arhats. Because arhats extinguish craving and the other defilements, I use the metaphor of an extinguished lamp. Those called *anāgāmins* (nonreturners) I call “those who have craving,” and because craving still exists in them, we cannot say they are the same as an extinguished lamp. In the past I covered over this distinction by saying that [nirvāṇa] was like the extinguishing of a lamp. But *mahā[pari]-nirvāṇa* is not the same as what happens in the case of an extinguished lamp. Someone at the stage of *anāgāmin* does not come back again and again [as most living beings do]. He does not return to any of the twenty-five existences, nor does he take on a body that smells bad, a body of an insect, a body that is eaten, or a body that is poisonous. That is precisely why he is called *anāgāmin*. If someone did take on another body [after death], that person would be called *āgāmin* (returner), in contrast to those called *anāgāmin*, who do not. Those who still have some going and coming [in saṃsāra] I call *āgāmin*, and those who no longer have any going or coming I call *anāgāmin*.⁶⁶

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Fascicle V

Chapter Four

The Nature of the Tathāgata: Part 2

At that time bodhisattva Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One. As the Buddha has said, “The buddhas, the world-honored ones, have a hidden treasury,” but this does not seem right to me. Why do I say this? Because it is only that the buddhas, the world-honored ones, have speech that is recondite (**saṃdhāvacana*), they do not have a hidden treasure-trove that is secret. If we think of the example of a magician who uses a mechanical device [to manipulate] a wooden puppet, we would see that although people see [the puppet] bend, stretch, look down, and look up, they have no idea what is going on inside of it, how it is being controlled. But the buddhadharma is not like that, for all buddhas empower living beings such that all of them can know what they see. So in what way is it appropriate to say, “The buddhas, the world-honored ones, have a hidden treasury”?

The Buddha then praised Kāśyapa:

Excellent, excellent. Good man, just as you say, a tathāgata in fact does not have a treasure-trove that is secret. Why do I say this? Just like a full moon in autumn that is clear, pure, and unshaded in the sky, when the words of a tathāgata unfold they reveal themselves as clear, pure, and unshaded. The ignorant do not understand and speak of his treasury as secret. But the wise fully understand, so they do not label his words secret.

Good man, consider the example of a man who has amassed immeasurable millions in gold and silver, yet he is so stingy at heart that he will

not admit to his blessings or provide anything to help those truly in need. That kind of accumulation could be termed a secret treasure. But tathāgatas are not like that. Amassing immeasurable rare jewels of the fine dharma over limitless *kalpas*, their minds are devoid of any stinginess in constantly providing for all living beings. Indeed, how could it be appropriate to say that tathāgatas conceal things?

390c Good man, if a man was physically disabled, perhaps lacking an eye, a hand, or a leg, he might feel so ashamed of his condition that he would not let others see him. And because others did not see him they would speak of him as being hidden. But tathāgatas are not like that. The true-dharma they possess is complete, with nothing lacking, and they enable people to see it. Indeed, how could it be appropriate to say that tathāgatas conceal things?

Good man, consider another counter-example in the case of a poor man who has taken on a considerable amount of debt. Fearing he may encounter the holders of his debt, he hides himself, not wishing to be seen. Thus he is labeled “a man in hiding.” But tathāgatas are not like that. They do not bear the burden of the *mundane* dharma of living beings, they bear the burden of the *supramundane* dharma of living beings. And yet they hide nothing. Why? Because a tathāgata is constant in regarding each living being as if it were his only child, and for whom he [actively] preaches the unsurpassed dharma.

Good man, consider the analogy of a wealthy merchant who only has one child. His heart is filled with loving attachment to that child, feelings he would never put aside, and he would be willing to use every bit of his fortune to demonstrate that fact. A tathāgata is like this, viewing [each] living being as identical to his only child.

Good man, people in this world find their male or female sexual organs ugly or embarrassing, and so they cover themselves with clothing. Thus it is said they hide themselves in this way. But a tathāgata is not like this, as this faculty is permanently removed in him. And without that faculty, there is nothing to cover up.

Good man, the [ritual] discourse held by the *brāhmaṇa* priests is like this in that they never want to allow those of the *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra* castes to hear it.⁶⁷ Why? Because there are corruptions within that

discourse. But the true-dharma of the Tathāgata is not like that; it remains auspicious in its beginning, middle, and end. Therefore it cannot be labeled a secret treasury.

Good man, take the example of the layman with only one child. His mind is preoccupied with the youngster, his affection boundless. He brings the child to a teacher out of a desire to get him an education but grows apprehensive when he does not see immediate results, and straight away brings the child back home. Day and night, his affection drives him to work assiduously to teach the child himself but what he teaches is the alphabet, he does not conduct lessons on grammar (*vyākaraṇa*). Why? Because the abilities of the youth are not yet capable of that kind of study. Good man, when that layman completes his teaching of the letters in the alphabet, would the child then be able to comprehend grammar or not?

[Kāśyapa said:]

No, World-Honored One.

[The Buddha asked:]

In that situation would the layman be keeping secrets hidden from his son or not?

[Kāśyapa replied:]

No, World-Honored One. Why? The reason he does not explain [grammar] to the child is that the child is too young. It is not because he is imposing some kind of secrecy on this material that he refrains from teaching it. What is the principle here? It is that what we call “secrecy” stems from situations where someone’s thinking is dominated by jealousy or a defensive stinginess. That is not what tathāgatas are like. Indeed, how could it be appropriate to say that tathāgatas conceal anything?

The Buddha then said:

Excellent, excellent! Good man, as you have said, if there are thoughts of hatred, jealousy, or defensiveness in someone, in that case we may say a person is concealing something. But the Tathāgata is completely devoid of anger or jealousy—how could he be labeled as one who conceals? Good man, the wealthy merchant in the story is an allusion to the Tathāgata.

391a What I have called his one son is an allusion to all living beings. The way the Tathāgata looks upon all living beings is thus akin to how this man looks upon his only son, and teaching his son [directly] is an allusion to [the Buddha] teaching his śrāvaka disciples. The letters of the alphabet and the phonemes they represent are an allusion to the ninefold sutras [of my previous discourses], and the grammar treatises are an allusion to what I call the well-balanced Vaitulya⁶⁸ Mahāyāna scriptures. It is because śrāvakas lack a certain power of wisdom that the Tathāgata taught them [only] letters, namely the ninefold scriptures and did not endeavor to expound to them the well-balanced Mahāyāna [canon] represented in the story by the grammar treatises. Good man, if after that merchant's son had grown big the grammar treatises were still not explained to him, despite his having studied diligently, then indeed one could call that a case of concealing something. If, for example, śrāvakas similarly garnered such diligence that they would be able to accept the grammar treatises that represent the Mahāyāna here but, out of some secretive selfishness, the Tathāgata would not expound it to them, one could certainly say that the Tathāgata had hidden secrets. But tathāgatas are not like that, and that is why I say they hold no hidden secrets. Like the wealthy merchant who, having taught his young son the letters of the alphabet, subsequently explained the grammar treatises, I am now in that situation. Having expounded on the alphabet, that is, the ninefold scriptures, for my disciples, I am now subsequently explaining the grammar treatises. What I am referring to is the constant presence, without change, of the Tathāgata.

Next, good man, consider an analogy of the moon in summer that brings forth clouds and thunder, which pour down great monsoon rains, which in turn enable the farmers to sow seeds and reap bountiful harvests. Farmers who do not plant seeds will have no harvest, but their not harvesting anything is not the fault of the dragon king [who initiates rain], as for his part the dragon king has not hidden anything. As a Tathāgata I am also like this, in that I rain down a dharma rain in the form of this *Great Nirvana Sutra (Mahānirvāṇa-sūtra)*. Those living beings that plant seeds of goodness will reap a flowering of wisdom; those who do not will reap nothing. But reaping nothing will not be the fault of the

Tathāgata. Quite the contrary, the truth is that the Buddha Tathāgata has not hidden anything.

Then Kāśyapa spoke again:

Now I clearly understand that the Tathāgata has not secretly hidden anything from us. But this “grammar treatise” expounded by the Buddha states that the Buddha Tathāgata is a constant, unchanging presence, and this notion I cannot follow. Why? Because in the past the Buddha expounded this verse:

As buddhas, pratyekabuddhas, and the assembly of śrāvakas
Cast off their impermanent bodies:
How much more so will ordinary people.

Yet now you speak of [yourself as] a permanent existence without change. How are we to make sense of this?

The Buddha answered:

Good man, I expounded that verse when I was teaching [at the stage of mere] letters to all my śrāvaka disciples. Good man, when the mother of King Prasenajit died, he came to see me because he could not overcome his feelings of sadness and love. I then asked him:

Great king, why has the pain of your sadness and grief become so intense?

The king said:

World-Honored One, on this day the life of the first lady of our nation has come to an end. If it were possible for you to restore my mother’s life to what it once was, I would abandon my kingdom, elephants, horses, and my seven precious possessions; I would give even my life. All of that I would sacrifice as a reward to you.

I answered him by saying:

Great king, you should not agonize, grieve, and lament like this. The lifetimes of all living beings come to an end: this is what we call death. Buddhas, pratyekabuddhas, and the śrāvaka disciples let go of their bodies, so why not ordinary people?

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It was because I was teaching the letters of the alphabet to King Prasenajit, good man, that I uttered that verse. Now, however, I am expounding a grammar treatise for the śrāvaka disciples, for I am saying the Tathāgata is a permanent presence without change. If someone claimed the Tathāgata was impermanent, how could that person’s tongue not fall off?

Kāśyapa then spoke up thus:

The Buddha has also uttered this verse [in the past]:

He who has no accumulated holdings,
And has full knowledge of food,
Is like a bird in flight,
Whose traces are sought in vain.⁶⁹

What is the meaning of this, World-Honored One? Who among living beings can be said to “have no accumulated holdings”? And who is able to have what you call “full knowledge of food”? Who moves about in the sky such that “his traces are sought in vain”? And after departing, where does one arrive at?

The Buddha then said to Kāśyapa:

The term “accumulated holdings” (*saṃnicaya*) refers to wealth. Good man, there are two kinds of accumulation: created (*saṃskṛta*) and uncreated (*asaṃskṛta*). Created accumulation—that is what śrāvakas do. Uncreated accumulation—that is what tathāgatas do. Good man, there are also two kinds of sanghas: created and uncreated. The “created sanghas” are what I am calling the śrāvaka [communities]. In śrāvaka sanghas there is not to be any accumulated holdings of what I call “slaves and things improper.” This includes storing grains, rice, salted or fermented bean paste, sesame, or beans of any size. If someone claims the Tathāgata allows the holding of slaves, servants, or anything of the like, his tongue will become twisted and shrink. The śrāvaka disciples of mine I refer to as [people] “who have no accumulated holdings.” I also refer to them as having “full knowledge of food.” Thus someone who craves food I call “one who does not fully know,” and someone who does not crave food I call “one who fully knows.” One whose traces are hard to find is thus one who is approaching the unsurpassed path to *bodhi*. What I am

saying is that these individuals have departed but they have not arrived anywhere.⁷⁰

Then Kāśyapa said:

If created sanghas have no accumulated holdings, then how much more so the uncreated sanghas! It is the tathāgatas that are the uncreated sanghas; indeed, how could there be any holdings accumulated by a tathāgata? This holding is regarded as concealment. That is why there is nothing held back in whatever it is that is expounded by the Tathāgata. So how could anyone regard his preaching as “hiding” something? The “traces sought in vain” is a reference to nirvāṇa itself. For within nirvāṇa there is neither sun nor moon; neither stars nor astrological signs; neither cold nor hot; neither winds nor rain; no birth, aging, illness or death; and none of the twenty-five forms of existence present in saṃsāra. One is free from melancholy, suffering, and indeed all the defilements. In this way nirvāṇa is where the Tathāgata abides; it is permanent and immutable. These are the circumstances of the Tathāgata’s going to the sal trees, where *parinirvāṇa* occurs in the context of *mahāparinirvāṇa*.⁷¹

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The Buddha then spoke to Kāśyapa:

By saying “great,” [as in *Great Parinirvāṇa Sutra*,] the implication is of immensity, much like how a man whose life force is tremendous is called “a great man.” If a man has been able to establish himself in the true-dharma, I would call him “the best among men.” And as I explained when I taught the “eight observances [maintained by] a great person,”⁷² there are people who can do one and there are people who can do many, but if any one person can muster all eight, that would be considered “superior.”

There are no wounds or sores in this nirvāṇa of which I speak. Good man, it is just like the example of a man shot with a poison arrow. He feels great pain, but he then sees a physician learned in these matters who removes the poison arrow and administers effective medicine, thereby enabling that man to become free of pain and feel calm and joyful. The physician then moves on, traveling to towns and villages, wherever people are suffering from wounds or sores, remaining with them as needed to treat their many pains.

Good man, so it is with the Tathāgata. Having attained perfect awakening, he is a great physician king. He sees how the suffering living beings of Jambudvīpa have been through enormous turmoil brought on by the poison arrows of the defilements of lust, anger, and ignorance over innumerable *kalpas*. For them he preaches the ambrosial dharma medicine of the Mahāyāna scriptures. After having healed living beings here, he then continues on to other locales where others suffer from the poisoned arrows of the defilements, manifesting his attainment of buddhahood so that he may heal them. This, therefore, I call *mahāparinirvāṇa*. The name *mahāparinirvāṇa* refers to a “place of liberation,” for it is in those places where living beings struggle with self-discipline that the Tathāgata appears. Because of how truly profound this meaning is, it is called *mahāparinirvāṇa*.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha once again:

World-Honored One, are worldly physicians able to heal the wounds and sores of all living beings or not?

[The Buddha:]

Good man, worldly wounds and sores are generally of two kinds: those that can be healed and those that cannot. For those that can be healed, a physician should be able to perform this role. But for those that cannot be cured, the physician cannot help.

Kāśyapa then asked:

The Buddha has said “Then the Tathāgata, after having healed living beings in Jambudvīpa. . . .” But if you say, “after having healed,” why is it that among living beings there are still some who are unable to attain nirvāṇa? If none of them can attain it, then why does the Tathāgata say that after healing them he will go somewhere else?

[The Buddha said,]

Good man, there are two types of living beings in Jambudvīpa: those who have faith and those who do not. Those who have faith are the people of whom I spoke when I said they “can be healed.” Why did I

say this? Because it is certain that all of these people will attain nirvāṇa, that they will have no wounds or sores. That is why I spoke of “having healed living beings in Jambudvīpa.” People without faith I refer to as *icchāntikas*. The *icchāntikas* I also call “those who cannot be healed.” Aside from the *icchāntikas*, all others will have been healed. This is why nirvāṇa is referred to as “having no wounds.”

[Kāśyapa:]

World-Honored One, what is it that is called “nirvāṇa”?

[The Buddha:]

Good man, nirvāṇa is what I call liberation.

Kāśyapa spoke again:

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This liberation of which you speak, does it have material form or not?

The Buddha said:

Good man, it may have form or it may be formless.⁷³ To describe it as formless is to refer to the liberation of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. To describe it as having form is to refer to the liberation of buddha tathāgatas. Therefore, good man, liberation itself has form and does not have form. But [understand that] it was for the sake of the śrāvaka disciples that the Tathāgata has preached it as being formless.

[Kāśyapa:]

World-Honored One, if the liberation of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is formless, how then do they abide in it?

[The Buddha replied:]

Good man, it is something like the meditation heaven of neither thought nor nonthought, which exists in both the form realm and in the formless realm.⁷⁴ As to that state, someone may complain by saying:

If the meditation heaven of neither thought nor nonthought is formless, then how could someone reside there, how could they come and go, start and stop?

But meanings such as these reflect the realm of buddhas; they are not something understood by śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas. Liberation is just like this—it may have form, it may be formless. Indeed, I have preached that it has no form and I have also preached that there is no thought in [the state of] “thought and nonthought.” Meanings such as these are of the realm of buddhas; they are not something understood by śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas.

Then Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha once again:

World-Honored One, I beseech you. Please take pity on our situation and provide us with more detail on the practices leading to *mahāpari-nirvāṇa* and the meaning of liberation.

The Buddha then praised Kāśyapa, saying:

Excellent, excellent! Good man, true liberation is what I call “complete freedom from all restrictions.” As true liberation is free from restrictions, it means there is no birth and no conjoining of things. Take the example of a father and mother who conjoin to give birth to a child—that is not what true liberation is like.

This is why I also call liberation “unborn.” Kāśyapa, take the example of the cream on the surface of clarified butter, whose nature is pure—this also true of the tathāgatas. As he is not born from the union of a mother and father, his nature is pure. My manifesting having had a father and mother stems from my hope to spiritually transform living beings, to bring them to the other shore. True liberation is the Tathāgata himself. Tathāgata and liberation are not two; there is no distinction between them. One may think it is like sowing seeds in the spring months and then seeing them sprout after the weather turns warm—but true liberation is in fact not like that.

In addition, I speak of liberation as “nothingness.” Nothingness is precisely what liberation is, liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is, and the Tathāgata is precisely what nothingness is. It is neither doing nor deed. By “doing” I mean something like building a lookout tower on a city wall to watch for enemies. That is not what true liberation is like. This is why liberation is none other than the Tathāgata.

In addition, liberation is an uncreated dharma. Imagine a ceramist who, after creating something, goes back and breaks it. That is not what liberation is like. True liberation neither comes into existence nor goes out of existence. Therefore liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is. For the Tathāgata is just like this: he does not come into existence, he does not go out of existence, he does not age, he does not die, he does not break, he does not disintegrate—he is not a created dharma. It is in this sense that I say “the Tathāgata enters *mahāparinirvāṇa*.” What do I mean by “he does not age, he does not die”? Aging itself we can say means “to undergo change,” such as one’s hair turning white or one’s face becoming wrinkled. Dying is when the body disintegrates and life ends. There are no dharmas like that in liberation; in fact, it is because these things are absent that it is called “liberation.” A Tathāgata also has no created dharmas that would cause his hair to become white or his face to become wrinkled. For this reason there is no aging in the Tathāgata and because there is no aging, there is no death.

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In addition, I refer to liberation as being “without disease.” The word “disease” refers to the four hundred and four illnesses of the body⁷⁵ as well as injury to the body from something external, none of which have any basis for occurring. This is why it is called liberation. The absence of any disease, now *that* is true liberation. And true liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is. The Tathāgata is without disease, for the dharma body can have no disease. In this way freedom from disease is precisely what a tathāgata is.

Death is the name given to the dissolution of the body and the end of life. A state without death—that is what the timeless ambrosia of *amṛta* is. This *amṛta* is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is. As the Tathāgata is fully accomplished in these virtues, how could it be said that the Tathāgata is impermanent? If someone were to assert impermanence in [the Tathāgata], that would be unfounded. This adamantine body—how could it be impermanent? Therefore I do not speak of life ending for a Tathāgata. The Tathāgata is pure, without any defilement; the body of this Tathāgata was not polluted in the womb, for example. Like the *punḍarīka* white lotus flower, its original nature is pure. The Tathāgata’s liberation is also like this—

for liberation such as this *is* the Tathāgata. That is why I say the Tathāgata is pure, immaculate.

In addition, in liberation all leaking wounds or sores are permanently gone, and nothing remains of this. The Tathāgata is also like this, for he has no leaking wounds.

In addition, in liberation there is no conflict. For example take a hungry person who, upon seeing another's food and drink, covets them and thinks about snatching them. That is precisely what liberation is not.

In addition, liberation is what I call "quiescence." Ordinary people say this quiescence refers to [the realm] of Maheśvara, but talk like that is simply untrue. True quiescence is ultimate liberation, and ultimate liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I speak of liberation as "safe." Just as a place with many thieves cannot be called safe, a place that *is* pacified is said to be safe or secure. Within this liberation there is no fear of any kind, hence I call it safe. That is why I say that what is safe is true liberation. True liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is, and the Tathāgata is precisely the dharma itself.

In addition, liberation is without peer. Having a peer is akin to a king having someone of his rank in a neighboring country. But this liberation has nothing of the sort. To be without peer can be said of a wheel-turning king, for no one can become his equal. In a similar way liberation has no peer, and having no peer describes true liberation. True liberation is precisely what this very Tathāgata, the wheel-turning king of the world, is. This is why the Tathāgata is "without peer." [Any assertion] that there is a peer is unfounded.

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In addition, I speak of liberation as "devoid of distress." To have distress is something like the sense of fear that arises within a king when confronted with the strength of a neighboring state. In this liberation there is nothing of that nature. Consider instead the analogy of destroying enmity within one's own elf, which then yields a mind free of worry—this is what liberation is like, devoid of worry or fear. And the absence of worry or fear is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation is devoid of [the emotional surges of] sadness and joy. Suppose a woman has only one son who goes far away for his

compulsory service, and during his absence news suddenly comes to her that something unfortunate has befallen him. Upon hearing this, she would sink into despair but if she later hears that he is alive she would then be elated. In liberation there is nothing like this. The absence of sadness and joy is what true liberation is about, and true liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, in liberation there is no dirt. Consider, for example, the way that dust is blown into the air by the wind after the sun goes down during the spring months, [making everything dirty]. There is no such thing in liberation. The absence of dust clouds is a metaphor for true liberation, and what is truly liberated is the Tathāgata. Now consider the jewels placed in the topknot of a sacred king that are untarnished. The nature of liberation is also like that, untarnished. This absence of dirt or stain is a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is the Tathāgata. The nature of pure gold is that it is not mixed with sand or other stones; thus it is called a true jewel. People who obtain such things have the idea that they have wealth. The nature of this liberation is also something like this true jewel; that is, [the notion of] a true jewel is a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is the Tathāgata.

Consider as well the sound you hear when a ceramic jar is broken. This sound does not occur with a jar made of an adamantine jewel, and in liberation there is no sound of anything breaking either. The jar made of an adamantine jewel is a metaphor for liberation, and true liberation is the Tathāgata. This is why I say the body of the Tathāgata is indestructible. A sound is also made when castor bean pods explode after being roasted and then left out in the sun. Liberation has nothing like this; rather it is like the adamantine jar of jewel that makes no sound at all when struck. Even if innumerable hundreds of thousands of people were to shoot arrows at it all at the same time, they would be unable to damage it. The absence of any sound of breakage is a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is the Tathāgata. Or think of the punishment of an extremely poor man who has to endure the terrible pain of being whipped while shackled simply because he is deep in debt. There is nothing like this in this liberation, as there is no debt of any kind. Then think of the analogy of someone of importance, whose holdings of property and

jewels are in the uncountable hundreds of millions and whose power allows him to do what he pleases, with no debts to anyone. Liberation is like this. It contains immeasurable rare treasures of dharma assets, the freedom of great power, and no debt of any kind. Having no debt is a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

393a In addition, there is nothing oppressive in liberation, such as traveling on foot on a hot day in spring, eating sweets in summer, or touching something cold in winter. In true liberation there is nothing that approximates these things. “Nothing oppressive” is a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

To understand the meaning of “nothing oppressive,” consider the counter-example of a man who eats his fill of fish and meat and then drinks milk. Before long he would be approaching his death—but in liberation there is nothing like this. Now if the person who ate like that could obtain an effective ambrosial medicine, it would alleviate his distress. True liberation is also something like that. The notion of an effective ambrosial medicine is a figurative expression for true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

What is it to be oppressive or not? Suppose there was an ordinary person who is proud and haughty, so much so that he thinks, “Who among all these people could harm *me*?” And he proceeds to show his prowess by holding snakes, tigers, and poisonous insects. Know this: a man like that will meet with an untimely death before his natural life span has been exhausted. There is nothing like this in true liberation.

To not be oppressive is to be like a *cakravartin* king. The sacred jewel that he possesses is capable of subduing dung beetles and the ninety-six other kinds of poisonous insects. One only has to perceive the scent of this sacred jewel and all poisons will be neutralized. True liberation is also like this, as everyone is freed from the twenty-five forms of [saṃsāric] existence. The neutralization of poisons is a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is. As to not being oppressive, consider the example of space, for liberation is also like this. Space thus serves as a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

On the other hand, “oppressive” can apply to dry grass, for it ignites when a lamp is brought near. There is nothing like this in true liberation. To not be oppressive, moreover, can be compared to the sun and the moon that do not oppress living beings. In like manner, liberation contains nothing that could oppress living beings. [To say] there is nothing oppressive is thus a figurative way to express true liberation, and true liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation is what I call “an imperturbable dharma.” Things like enemies and friends—there is simply nothing like this in true liberation. Imperturbability is somewhat like a *cakravartin* king, for it is utterly impossible for a sacred king to be someone’s friend; even if it were averred that he were a friend, it would not make any sense. Liberation is like this, it is utterly without “friends” in the usual sense, and even if one were to assert that it has friends, this would be untenable. That [sacred] king without peers is a metaphor for true liberation; true liberation is what the Tathāgata is, and the Tathāgata is what the dharma is.

In addition, imperturbability might be thought of as being like raw cloth that easily accepts dyestuff for coloration, but liberation is not like this. Imperturbability is instead like the *vārsika* flower⁷⁶ in that no matter how much one may *want* to turn it into something foul smelling or green in color, it simply makes no sense to try to do so. In the same way, even if one *wanted* to make liberation smell bad or be colored in some way, such things do not happen. For that very reason liberation is the Tathāgata himself.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “extraordinary.” The metaphor of a lotus flower blooming in water is not extraordinary. A lotus blooming in fire, however, *that* would be extraordinary, and whoever saw it would be elated. True liberation also like this: there is elation in the hearts of those who witness it. This extraordinariness is a metaphor for true liberation, true liberation is what the Tathāgata is, and the Tathāgata is none other than the dharma body. In addition, there is also the disanalogy of liberation as “extraordinary” and an infant baby who has not grown teeth yet, for its teeth arise only after the baby gradually grows large. Liberation is not like that: there is neither arising nor nonarising [of anything].

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In addition, I refer to liberation as “nonsubstantial,” but this does not mean it is indeterminate. “Indeterminate” refers rather to something like *icchāntika*. [Some think] *icchāntikas* will never be shaken out of their state of mind, that anyone who commits a heinous crime is precluded from completing the path to buddhahood, but this view is unfounded. Why? Because if, in their hearts, such people can obtain pure faith in the Buddha’s true-dharma, they will immediately destroy [their status] as *icchāntika*. Likewise, if one can become a layman follower (*upāsaka*), this, too, will mean the end of being an *icchāntika*. Someone who has transgressed in committing a heinous crime can, after having eliminated his offense, go on to attain buddhahood. This is why there is no basis for the claim that people are fixed in who they are, that [their thinking] cannot change, that they cannot attain buddhahood. In true liberation nothing is completely exhausted.

This nonsubstantiality, moreover, pervades the *dharmadhātu*. The nature of the *dharmadhātu* is true liberation itself, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is. When an *icchāntika*, moreover, exhausts [what makes him so], he can no longer be labeled *icchāntika*.

What in fact is meant by the name *icchāntika*? *Ichchāntikas* are those who have destroyed all wholesome karmic roots within themselves. Their original mindset is one that does not aspire to any wholesome dharmas, and they may even reach the point where not one wholesome thought occurs to them. In true liberation there is no one like this. In fact, it is precisely because of the absence of anything like this that it is true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I also call liberation “unfathomable.” One may think it is like a pile of grains whose number [may be great] but can be known [if counted]. However, that would be a disanalogy for true liberation is not like that. If instead you take the analogy of an ocean whose capacity cannot be measured, that would be true. For liberation is indeed just that, as its capacity cannot be measured. Unfathomable is indeed what true liberation is, that cannot be measured, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation is what I call “dharma without measure.” Just like one living being has a multitude of karmic recompense, in like manner

liberation also has recompense that is immeasurable. Immeasurable recompense—that is precisely true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “immense.” As an ocean has no equal [in size], liberation similarly cannot be equated with anything. The absence of any equivalent is precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “paramount.” Just as nothing can be compared to the loftiness of space, nothing can be compared to the loftiness of liberation, as well. Incomparably lofty is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “unsurpassable.” Consider the analogy of the position occupied by a lion, something that none of the hundreds of other animal species can surpass. Liberation is like this, for there is nothing that can surpass it. Unsurpassable is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

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In addition, I refer to liberation as what is “uppermost.” Just like the northern direction is located above the other directions, there is nothing above liberation. Uppermost is precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “above the uppermost.” Just like the northern direction lies above the highest locations in the eastern direction, in liberation there is nothing above it as uppermost. Above the uppermost is precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I call liberation “a constant dharma.” An analogy would be the destruction of the bodies of humans and deities at the end of their lives. This we know of as “a constant,” indeed, it cannot possibly not be a constant. In like manner, liberation is not anything inconstant. Thus not anything inconstant is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “firm.” Like the solid, firm *khadira*, *candana*, and *aguru* trees,⁷⁷ liberation is the same in that its nature is firm. A nature that is firm is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “not vacuous.” It would be a disanalogy to describe it as being like bamboo or marsh reeds whose bodies are hollow, as liberation is not like that. Thus it should be known that liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation is something that “cannot be contaminated.” Consider the analogy of an unpainted wall where mosquitoes and flies alight and remain to frolic. If one were to paint colorful pictures or to carve images on it, the insects would smell the odor from the pigment and no longer abide there. Such nonabiding is a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “boundless.” Villages and towns all have marked boundaries and so are only disanalogies for liberation, which is not like that. Space, on the other hand, which has no limits, would be analogous, for liberation also has no limits. Liberation in this sense is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I declare that liberation cannot be seen. As it is difficult to see the traces of a bird in flight across the sky, the difficulty in seeing something like that is thus analogous to true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “profound.” Why? Because it cannot be entered by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. What they cannot enter is indeed true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is. It is profound, moreover, in that it is revered by buddhas and bodhisattvas. An analogy would be the profundity of the virtuous merit created by the filial child who makes offerings of sustenance to his mother and father, for the profundity of such merit is a metaphor for true liberation. And true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “unseen,” analogous to a person who does not see his own head. True liberation is like this, as it cannot be seen by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. That which [these two groups] cannot see is thus true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

394a In addition, I refer to liberation as “having no abode,” analogous to the fact that there are no houses in the sky. So it is with liberation, as the word “abode” here is a metaphor for the twenty-five forms of existence. Having

no abode is a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as something that “cannot be held.” Unlike the *āmalaka* berry⁷⁸ that can be held in one’s hand, liberation is something else entirely, for it cannot be “held” as such. What cannot be held describes what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as something that “cannot be grasped.” Like an illusory object that one cannot grasp, true liberation similarly is something that one cannot grasp. What cannot be grasped describes what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation is incorporeal. A disanalogy would be those people whose bodies have produced wounds and sores, ulcers and abscesses, convulsions and madness, eczema and lichenification. For within true liberation there are no such ailments. The absence of such ailments is a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “a single flavor.” Just as there is a single, consistent flavor in milk, liberation also has only one flavor. A single flavor like this is precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “pure.” Like water without any dirt is pure and utterly clean, so too liberation is also pure and clean. Pure and clean is precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as being “uniform in its flavor,” like the purity of the uniform taste of rain as it falls from the sky. This purity of being uniform in flavor is but a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “removed,” analogous to a full moon with no cloud cover. Liberation is also like this, a cloud cover having been entirely removed. To be without any cloud cover whatsoever is precisely [the state of] true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation I refer to as “tranquility.” This is analogous to a man burning with fever whose body gains a peaceful tranquility when his illness is cured. Liberation is just like the body when it becomes tranquil. To attain tranquility is precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation is characterized by equanimity. Suppose there were a field replete with poisonous snakes, rodents, and wolves, all of whom intend to kill something. That would not be what liberation is like, for there are no thoughts of killing in liberation. To be without any thoughts of killing is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is. Equanimity is analogous to the way a father and mother think about their children equally. Liberation also has this equanimity of mind. Equanimity of mind is just what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “no other place,” analogous to a man who resides only in a beautiful, clean house and has no other place for himself. So, too, does liberation have no other locale. To have no other place is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

394b In addition, I refer to liberation as “contentment.” Describing liberation as a hungry person who comes across a cache of sweets and eats to his heart’s content would be a disanalogy. Liberation is not like that. Instead, it is like eating rice porridge cooked in milk, which leads one to require nothing further. Not requiring anything further is a [proper] metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “severed,” just like someone who has severed the restraints that bound him and has obtained release. Liberation is like this, severing all fetters that arise from doubt. In this way, to discontinue doubt is tantamount to true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “reaching the other shore.” You may think of the analogy of a great river with a shore on this side and a shore on the other side, but liberation in fact is not like that. This is because while there is a shore on that side, there is no shore on this side.

The existence of an “other shore” is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “silence.” A great ocean in which many and various sounds break out over the broad expanse of its swells would be a disanalogy, for liberation is not like this. Liberation in this sense is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I call liberation “most attractive.” Those medicines in which are mixed the *harītakī* fruit⁷⁹ will have a bitter taste as a result. This is not an appropriate analogy for liberation, for its taste is like the sweet nectar of *amṛta*. The taste of sweet *amṛta* is a metaphor for true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation is eliminating the defilements. Analogous to a skilled physician who combines medicines for the effective treatment of illnesses, liberation is similarly capable of eliminating the defilements. Eliminating the defilements is precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as being “without constriction.” A small hut that does not accommodate many people would be a disanalogy, for many beings are accepted within liberation. The inclusion of so many is precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “extinguishing passionate desires and not indulging in sexual activity.” It would be a disanalogy to think of a woman of many sensual passions, for liberation is not like that. In this sense, liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is, for a Tathāgata is completely without such fetters as desire, resentment, stupidity, or arrogance.

In addition, I refer to liberation as being “without passion.”⁸⁰ Passion is of two types: “hungry-ghost passion” and “dharma passion.” True liberation is free of the passions plaguing hungry ghosts. Empathy toward living beings also gives rise to passion but this is [characterized by] dharma. Dharma passion such as this is precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation is also free of “me” and “mine.” It is the Tathāgata that is liberation such as this, and it is the dharma that is the Tathāgata.

In addition, liberation is the destruction and abandonment of all forms of greed. Liberation such as this is what the Tathāgata is, and the Tathāgata is none other than the dharma itself.

In addition, liberation is deliverance. In that it can rescue one from all sources of fear, liberation such as this is what the Tathāgata is, and the Tathāgata is himself the dharma.

394c In addition, liberation is itself a refuge. If one avails himself of the refuge that is liberation such as this, there is no need to seek any other. Consider the analogy of a man who relies upon his king, seeking no other support. Though he is sure of his king, any upheaval in the country [would remove his sense of security]. But for one who takes refuge in liberation there are no upheavals. The lack of upheavals is what true liberation is; true liberation is what the Tathāgata is; and the Tathāgata is what the dharma is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “a house.” A disanalogy would be a person who encounters hardship crossing a broad plain. Liberation is not like this, for there are no hardships. The absence of hardship is precisely [the nature of] true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation is the absence of fear. Just like the lion king harbors no fear toward the myriad other animals, liberation is the same in that one has no fear toward the hosts of Māra. To have no fear is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, there is no restrictiveness in liberation. If you think of a passage so narrow that it cannot accommodate two people walking abreast, what you would have is precisely what liberation is not. Liberation in this sense is precisely what the Tathāgata is; that is, unrestricted. Or, if you think of how restricted you would feel if you jumped into a well in fear of a tiger, this would also not be what liberation is like. Liberation in this sense is precisely what the Tathāgata is; that is, unrestricted. On the other hand, if you were out on the ocean in a small, rickety boat that you then jettisoned for a sturdy, imposing ship, and that ship that took you all the way across that ocean to place that is calm and safe, the elation you would feel is what liberation is like. Obtaining that kind of elation, *that* is what true liberation is. And true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation abolishes causality. The usual pattern of milk yielding sour milk, sour milk yielding butter, and butter yielding clarified butter would be a disanalogy, for within liberation such forms of causality do not exist. Not having any causality is precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation vanquishes arrogance, so a great king acting haughtily toward a lesser king is not what liberation is like. Liberation such as this is what the Tathāgata is, and the Tathāgata is what the dharma is.

In addition, liberation vanquishes self-indulgence. By “self-indulgence” I mean having many cravings. Within liberation there is nothing that could be called this. The absence of anything that could be called indulgence is precisely what is meant by true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation eliminates the darkness of ignorance. It is like when you take the best quality butter and remove its impurities, yielding what is then called “clarified butter.” Liberation is like this: removing the dregs of ignorance produces true light. This true light is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I call liberation “quiescence, singular and unique.” Like a solitary elephant, alone in an empty field—this is what liberation is like. There is only one, not two. It is true liberation that is unique in this way, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I speak of the hardness of liberation, much like the bamboo, reeds, or hemp plants that have hollow cores yet produce seeds that are hard. Apart from buddha tathāgatas, all other humans and deities are not hard or solid. But true liberation is free from the ebb and flow of all forms of existence. And liberation such as this is what the Tathāgata is.

395a

In addition, I refer to liberation as “completely awakened and augmenting to the self.” True liberation is also like this, and true liberation such as this is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “abandoning the existences.” An analogy would be a man who vomits up his food after having eaten. Liberation is like this in that in it one has freed oneself from all [forms of] existence [in saṃsāra]. To have abandoned all [forms of] existence is

precisely what true liberation is, and true liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “definitive,” like the fragrance of the *vārṣika* flower, rather than [the flowers of the] *saptaparṇa* tree that have no scent.⁸⁰ Liberation is like this, and liberation such as this is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I call liberation “the water element.” The analogy of the water element comes from the fact that among the [four] great elements, water is the most prominent, thoroughly pervading all grasses, trees, and seeds. Liberation is like this, for it pervades all forms of life. And it is the Tathāgata that is liberation such as this.

In addition, I call liberation “an entrance.” It is like a door that opens onto a path that leads to a golden place where gold can then be obtained. Liberation is similar, just like that door, and those who cultivate nonself will thus be able to enter through it. Liberation such as this is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “excellent.” This is analogous to a disciple who follows his teacher, honors him, holds in esteem what he has been taught, and attains fame as one who is “excellent.” Liberation is also like this, and it is liberation such as this that is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “a dharma beyond this world,” for it surpasses all other dharmas. It is like the fact that among all flavors that of butter or milk is the best. Liberation is also like this, and it is the Tathāgata that is liberation like this.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “steadfast,” analogous to the threshold of a door, for wind cannot move it. True liberation is also like this, and it is liberation such as this that is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “without waves.” Water in the ocean moves in the form of waves but liberation is not like this. Liberation such as this is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation is analogous to a palatial hall. Liberation is also like this, and you should be aware that it is the Tathāgata that is liberation.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “eminently useful.” Like the gold found in the Jambū River: no matter how much is taken out it will never

be said that the gold found in that river has impurities in it. Liberation is just like this: there will never be impurities in it. True liberation is precisely that which has no impurities, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, liberation means abandoning childish behavior, analogous to an adult who abandons behaving as a small boy. Liberation is also like this in that it jettisons the five aggregates (*pañca-skandhas*). To jettison the five aggregates is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “the culmination.” This is akin to a person bound with restraints who gains his release, undergoes purification through bathing, and then returns home. Liberation is like this: completely pure. That which is completely pure is true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

395b

In addition, I refer to liberation as “the pleasure of having something undone.” The pleasure of having something undone comes when craving, anger, and delusion are purged. This is like someone who mistakenly drinks poisonous snake venom and in order to remove the poison takes a medicine to induce vomiting. Once he has succeeded in vomiting, the poison is thereby removed and his body attains calm and joy. Liberation is like this. When you are purged of all the poisons of bondage that are inherent in the defilements, you feel calmed and joyful. This is called “the pleasure of having something undone.” It is true liberation when you experience this pleasure of having something undone, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “ending the defilements stemming from the four kinds of poisonous snakes.”⁸¹ To eliminate the defilements is true liberation, and true liberation is the Tathāgata.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “being freed from existence, annihilating all forms of suffering, obtaining all forms of joy, permanently eliminating greed, anger, and stupidity, and pulling out the roots of all defilements.” To pull out one’s [defiled] roots is true liberation, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “renouncing all created dharmas, bringing forth only uncontaminated, wholesome dharmas, and shutting

down the [other] paths.” Whether one speaks of self, nonself, the denial of self, or the denial of nonself, one only renounces attachments [to those views], he does not renounce *this* view of self. This view of self I call “buddha-nature.” For buddha-nature is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.⁸²

In addition, I refer to liberation as “not thoroughly empty.” Thoroughly empty means nothing whatsoever. Nothing whatsoever is how liberation is thought of by the heretical Nirgranthas, yet these Nirgranthas do not actually have liberation. That is why they call it “thoroughly empty.” But true liberation is not like that, hence I refer to it as “not thoroughly empty.” Not thoroughly empty is what is true liberation is, and true liberation is precisely what the Tathāgata is.

In addition, I refer to liberation as “empty and nonempty.” It is like jars for water, wine, yogurt, butter, honey, and the like: even when they have no water, wine, yogurt, butter, or honey inside them, they are still called water jars, wine jars, and so on. So these jars cannot be said to be empty nor can they be said to be nonempty. If we say they are empty, then we cannot admit to any presence of visual form, aroma, taste, or tactile sensation associated with the jars themselves. If we say they are nonempty, then we have to account for the fact that even when there is no water, wine, and so forth in the jars [they are still recognized as water jars, wine jars, and so forth].

Liberation is just like this. One can neither say that it has form or does not have form. One can neither say that it is empty or nonempty. If we say it is empty, then we cannot admit to the presence of permanence, bliss, self, and purity. If we say it is nonempty, then who feels its permanence, bliss, self, and purity? This means, therefore, that one cannot declare it to be either empty or nonempty. Emptiness refers to the absence of any of the twenty-five forms of existence as well as the absence of any of the defilements. Its emptiness represents the fact that all suffering, all marks, all existences are karmic [and therefore not present in liberation]; this is akin to how we refer to a yogurt jar as “empty” when there is no yogurt in it. Its “nonemptiness” represents the fact that its lovely form—namely, permanence, bliss, self, purity, immovableness, and immutableness—is true and real, and is akin to how we refer to the jar as nonempty because

of its form, smell, taste, and touch. On the other hand, the jar may encounter circumstances in which it is broken, but liberation is not like that, for it is unbreakable. Unbreakable is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is. 395c

In addition, I refer to liberation as “free from longing.” Consider a person who is filled with thoughts of longing for and entreaties to [gods such as] Śakra Devānām Indra, Brahmā, or Maheśvara. Know that liberation is not like that. If someone completes the attainment of *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*, that person will have no longings and no doubts. Having neither longings nor doubts is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is. So if someone states that there is longing or doubt in liberation, that [view] would have no basis.

In addition, liberation “eliminates any desire for existence, and likewise eliminates all characteristics, all restraints, all of the defilements, all births and deaths, all karmic conditioning, and all karmic effects.” Liberation such as this is what the Tathāgata is, and the Tathāgata is what nirvāṇa is. It is because all living beings fear the defilements that come with the cycle of birth and death that they accept the triple-refuge. This is analogous to a herd of deer that fears a hunter yet manages to escape by separating itself from him. If a deer leaping once is like taking refuge once, then a deer leaping three times is like taking refuge thrice. By leaping three times the deer feels a sense of calm and joy. Living beings are just like this, for it is also the fear of dangerous hunters—the four māras—that drives them to accept the triple-refuge.⁸³ It is because of the triple-refuge that they are able to obtain a sense of calm and joy, and feeling a sense of calm and joy is what true liberation is. True liberation is what the Tathāgata is. The Tathāgata is what nirvāṇa is. Nirvāṇa is what inexhaustible is. Inexhaustible is what the buddha-nature is. The buddha-nature is what certainty is. And certainty is what *anuttarā samyaksambodhi* is.

Kāśyapa then spoke the Buddha:

World-Honored One, if nirvāṇa, buddha-nature, certainty, and the Tathāgata are all of one meaning, why do you explain that there are three forms of refuge?

The Buddha told Kāśyapa:

Good man, all living beings fear the cycle of birth and death and therefore seek the triple-refuge. And it is by means of these three forms of refuge that one comes to know the buddha-nature, certainty, and nirvāṇa. Good man, there are dharmas whose names are identical but whose meanings are different, and there are dharmas whose names and meanings are both different. The principle of “identical names but different meanings” is apparent when it is said, “the buddha is permanent, the dharma is permanent, the *bhikṣu* sangha is permanent, and both nirvāṇa and space are also permanent.” These are called “[dharmas] whose names are identical but whose meanings are different.” The principle of “names and meanings are both different” is apparent when it is said that “‘buddha’ is a name for ‘awakened,’” “‘dharma’ is a name for ‘unawakened,’” “‘sangha’ is a name for ‘a combination [of both],” “‘nirvāṇa’ is a name for ‘liberation,’” and “‘space’ is a name for ‘unwholesome’ and also ‘unobstructed.’” These are [examples] of “[dharmas] whose names and meanings are both different.”

Good man, the triple-refuge is also like this. When name and meaning are both different, how could one say they are identical? This is why I told Mahāprajāpatī:

Gautamī, do not make offerings to me, make your offerings to the sangha. If you make offerings to the sangha, then in effect your offerings will include the complete triple-refuge.

Mahāprajāpatī then answered me by saying:

396a There is neither buddha nor dharma in a community of monks. Why do you say that making offerings to the sangha results in offerings to the complete triple-refuge?

I then related this to her:

Whenever you follow my words, that itself is an offering to a buddha. Because you do this for the purpose of liberation, it also constitutes an offering to the dharma. And when a monastic community accepts [your offering], that is an offering to the sangha.

Good man, for this reason [the expressions of] the triple-refuge can never be uniform. Good man, the Tathāgata on some occasions expounds this single notion as three and on other occasions speaks of this threefold notion as one. Meanings such as this are of the realm of buddhas; they are not fully understood by śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas.

Kāśyapa then asked:

As the Buddha has explained it, what is called nirvāṇa is the ultimate in bliss, but what does this mean? Nirvāṇa [is said to mean] leaving behind the body and leaving behind understanding. But if both one's body and understanding are abandoned, then who experiences the bliss [of nirvāṇa]?

The Buddha said:

Good man, consider the analogy of a person who feels troubled after eating and goes outside in order to vomit, and then after vomiting returns to where he was. His colleagues ask him, "Have you finally been healed of whatever it was that you suffered from, now that you have come back?" And he tells them, "I have healed myself and gained a serene bliss."

The Tathāgata is like this. Having finally detached himself from all twenty-five forms of existence, he gains forever that place of serene bliss that is nirvāṇa, which can never be disturbed or exhausted. Eliminating all forms of sensation I call "bliss without sensation."

Having no sensation in this way is what I call "to be in constant bliss." If someone were to claim that a tathāgata experiences bliss arising from sensation, this would be totally unfounded. This is why ultimate bliss is what nirvāṇa is, nirvāṇa is what true liberation is, and true liberation is what the Tathāgata is.

Kāśyapa then asked:

Nonarising and nonceasing, is that what liberation is?

[The Buddha responded]:

So it is, so it is, good man. nonarising and nonceasing are precisely what liberation is. In this way liberation is none other than the Tathāgata himself.

Kāśyapa then spoke again;

If nonarising and nonceasing is liberation, then the nature of space, which is also without arising or ceasing, must also accord with the Tathāgata. For that which is like the tathāgata-nature is liberation.

The Buddha then said to Kāśyapa:

No, good man, it is not like that.

[Kāśyapa said:]

Lord, how can that be?

The Buddha then explained:

Good man, it is like the *kalaviṅka* and *jīvaṃjīvaka*⁸⁴ birds, whose songs are pure and mellifluous. Is the sound of these birds identical to that of the crow or magpie?

[Kāśyapa:]

No, World-Honored One. The voice of a crow or magpie cannot compare by a hundredfold, a thousandfold, even ten thousandfold to [the sounds of] birds such as the *jīvaṃjīvaka*.

Kāśyapa went on:

The *kalaviṅka* and other such birds have voices that are sublime and bodies that are also not the same as other birds. Why does the Tathāgata compare them to crows and magpies as if they were no different? It is like comparing a mustard plant to Mount Sumeru. Buddha and space are also like this. The voice of the *kalaviṅka* bird is analogous to the voice of the Buddha, which could never be analogous to the voices of crows or magpies.

At that moment the Buddha praised Kāśyapa, saying:

396b

Excellent, excellent. Good man, the understanding you have now shown is quite good, a deep appreciation of something difficult to grasp. At times the Tathāgata may use a particular situation to draw an analogy between space and liberation, and this liberation of which I speak is

what a tathāgata is. True liberation is not something of which any human or deity could ever be the equivalent, and as such space is not its true analog either. I use space in order to transform living beings spiritually, [in effect] a disanalogy that I use as an analogy. What you should understand is that liberation is the Tathāgata himself, and the tathāgata-nature is liberation itself.

Liberation and tathāgata are not a duality; they are not separate. Good man, the designation “disanalogy” refers to the fact that it is incomparable, that one cannot use a metaphor to adequately describe it. In certain circumstances we may be able to draw a picture by means of simile, as when I have said such things as “a countenance like a full moon” or “a white elephant as clean as the snowy Himalayas” in the sutras. But a full moon cannot be the same as one’s face and no snowy mountain could actually be a white elephant. Good man, true liberation is something that cannot be likened by means of metaphor or analogy, and it is only for purposes spiritually transforming living beings that I use figurative language. I use analogies in every case to foster understanding of the [true] nature of dharmas.

Kāśyapa then spoke again, asking:

Why does the Tathāgata expound the teaching in two different ways?

The Buddha said:

Good man, suppose a man filled with malice appeared, brandishing a sword, and wanted to cut down the Tathāgata. The Tathāgata would remain pleasantly relaxed, however, and would face the man without anger. Would that person be able to injure the Tathāgata’s body and become guilty of committing a heinous crime, or not?

[Kāśyapa:]

No, World-Honored One. Why? Because the realm of a tathāgata body cannot be injured.

For what reason? Because it is not a corporeal aggregate [like that of living beings], it is only dharma-nature [in an embodied form]. And the reality of dharma-nature is that it cannot be injured. How could this

man possibly injure the Buddha's body? To be obsessed with injurious thoughts will itself result in immediate retribution (*ānantarya*). One could indeed use this story as an analogy to enable someone to understand the genuine dharma (*dharmatattva*).

At that moment the Buddha praised Kāśyapa:

Excellent, excellent, good man—what I had intended to explain you have already explained!

In addition, good man, suppose there is an evil person who wishes to violently attack his mother. In the field where he works he lies in wait at the bottom of a large pile of grain. When his mother approaches with food for him, she sees that he is in an agitated state and that he is sharpening his sword. Upon understanding the situation, she escapes by hiding inside the pile of grain, whereupon the man grabs his sword and thrusts it into the grain pile while walking around it. After completing his stabs and cuts he is overjoyed, filled with the idea that he has killed her. Soon thereafter the mother comes out of the grain pile and returns home. What do you think, has that man accomplished a sin that would send him to Avīci Hell or not?

[Kāśyapa answered:]

No, World-Honored One, one cannot determine that in this case. The reason is that if we say he is guilty, then the mother's body should have been destroyed. But if her body is not destroyed, then how can we say he is guilty? On the other hand, if we say he is innocent, we then have to deal with his joyful attitude based on his certainty that he had indeed killed his mother, so how can we say he is not guilty? Although this man did not complete a crime so heinous it would bring immediate retribution, nevertheless there is still something vile here. One could indeed use this story as an analogy to enable someone to understand the genuine dharma.

The Buddha praised Kāśyapa, saying:

396c Excellent, excellent, good man. Using stories like these I preach with a variety of expedient means and analogies, describing liberation metaphorically. But though an incalculable *asamkhyeya* number of metaphors

may be used, there is no metaphor that can truly compare with liberation itself. In some cases there are stories or particular situations that can provide figurative explanations, but in other cases no story or situation will work in that way. Therefore, understand that the accomplishment of liberation itself brings immeasurable merit as such. As one approaches nirvāṇa [one realizes that] nirvāṇa and the Tathāgata also have immeasurable merit as such. Because the accomplishment of immeasurable merit such as this is complete I therefore call it the “great nirvāṇa.”

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, now for the first time I understand that wherever the Tathāgata is, is unending. And if it is unending, we should understand that the lifetime of the Buddha must also be without end.

The Buddha said:

Excellent, excellent. Good man, you are now thoroughly capable of upholding and maintaining the true-dharma. If there are good men or women who wish to sever the defilements and fetters that bind them, then in this same way they must endeavor to uphold and maintain the true-dharma.

Fascicle VI

Chapter Four

The Nature of the Tathāgata: Part 3

[The Buddha said:]

Good man, within this *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* there are four kinds of people who capably protect the true-dharma, promote the true-dharma, and keep the true-dharma in their thoughts. They bring much in the way of blessings and mercy to the world, for they are supports for the world, [sources of] tranquil bliss for humans and gods alike.

Who are the four? People who are above worldly affairs yet whose natures are still plagued by the defilements, they make up the first group. The *srotāpannas* (stream-winners) and *sakṛdāgāmins* (once-returners) are the second. The *anāgāmins* (nonreturners) are the third group. And the arhats make up the fourth. When these four groups of people are present they bring much in the way of blessings and mercy to the world, for they are supports for the world, conveying comfort and joy to gods and humans alike.

Who are those in the first group, “whose natures are still plagued by the defilements”? This refers to [committed] individuals who successfully uphold the precepts, comport themselves properly, promote the true-dharma, comprehend the meaning of the words they hear from the Buddha, and then turn around to share them with others, declaring, “It is said that he who is of small desire is on the path, he who is of great desire is not on the path.” In similar manner they explain in detail the eight observances [maintained by] a great person. When they encounter people who violate the precepts they tell them that they must bring [their

397a errors] out into the open, confess, and forsake [such behavior]. They are well aware of the expedient means of bodhisattvas and the enigmatic dharmas they practice. They are called, “ordinary persons,” for they are not at the [śrāvaka stage] of the eighth person.⁸⁵ Those who are at this eighth [śrāvaka stage] I do not regard as ordinary persons but instead refer to them as *bodhisattvas*. However, I do not call them *buddhas*.

People of the second type, known as a *srotāpannas* or *sakṛdāgāmins*, are those who, if they obtain the true teaching, will accept and retain that true-dharma in their memory. Upon hearing the dharma from the Buddha, they will take what they hear and write it down, make copies of it, accept it, memorize it, recite it, and then turn around and share it with others. But if, after hearing the [Buddha’s] dharma, someone did not write down, accept, memorize, or explain those teachings to others, and if he claimed that accumulating slaves and other impure things are allowed by the Buddha, his actions would be inappropriate. Such people may be regarded as belonging to the second group of believers, but they would not have reached the second or the third stage.⁸⁶ I do call them bodhisattvas, however, and they will have received a prophecy of their future buddhahood.

People of the third type are known as *anāgāmins*. *Anāgāmins* discredit the true-dharma if they say it allows the keeping of female slaves, male slaves, or impure things, the accepting of textual writings from heretical faiths, and when they become hindered by adventitious defilements or have [their thinking] obfuscated by old defilements as well. If an *anāgāmin* conceals the actual relics of the Tathāgata, he will be stricken by an externally visible illness or injured by the poisonous snakes of the four major elements. Arguing for a “self” is unreasonable [for *anāgāmins*]; affirming “nonself” is reasonable for them. Preaching attachment to worldly dharmas is unreasonable, but if they affirm that the Mahāyāna will continue without end, that is reasonable for them. [Claiming that] whenever someone receives a new body there are eighty thousand worms [in it] is unreasonable. But [claiming that], having freed themselves from sensual desire once and for all, they do not spill any semen even while dreaming, that is reasonable for them. To say that when confronting their last days *anāgāmins* become afraid would be inappropriate. Why are they called “*anāgāmins*”? It is

because they do not return, as I have explained earlier, and because whatever transgressions they may have committed no longer pollute them. In their coursing through the rounds [of saṃsāra] I call them bodhisattvas. Upon receiving a prophecy of their future buddhahood, it will not be long before they attain *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*. These, then, are called the third type of person.

People of the fourth type are known as arhats. An arhat cuts away the defilements within himself, puts down his heavy burden, attains his personal goal, does what is to be done, resides at the tenth stage, attains autonomous wisdom, and manifests himself in different forms depending on what someone asks for. Thus adorned [with morality, meditation, and wisdom], whenever they want to complete the Buddha's Way, that is what they will do. Capable of accomplishing such immeasurable merit, they are thus called arhats.

When these four individuals of whom I speak appear, they succeed in bringing much in the way of blessings and mercy to the world, for they are supports for the world, [sources of] serene bliss for humans and gods alike. They are the most respected, the most excellent among gods and humans, and are thus something like tathāgatas themselves. I call them "the best among people," for they are the foundations of refuge.

Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

397b

World-Honored One. Presently I do not rely on these four types of people. Why? Because in the **Ghoṣila-sūtra*,⁸⁷ the Buddha said to Ghoṣila:

If a deity like Māra or Brahmā wants to destroy something, he transforms himself into an image of a buddha, replete with the thirty-two major physical marks and eighty minor marks, emitting light from each pore. His face will be perfectly round and luminous like the moon, with a circle of hair between his eyebrows as white as snow. He will face you in this guise but when you examine him, you will see most assuredly that what you are seeing is a false reality. After realizing this, you must defeat him.

World-Honored One. If Māra is capable of transforming himself by taking on the body of a buddha, why would he not be capable of becoming an

arhat or indeed taking on the identities of all four types of individuals [who follow] the Buddhist path, sitting or lying down in the sky, from his left side pouring water, from his right side emitting fire, from his body emitting smoke and flames like a fiery mass? This is why I do not trust such people when I am with them. Regardless of what they say, I cannot accept them, respect them, or regard them as a place of refuge.

The Buddha said:

Good man, from what you have explained to me, I agree that if you have doubts about someone, then you should not accept that person. How much more so for these [supporters of my dharma who may be imposters]. This is why you must learn to carefully discriminate in your understanding of things between who or what is good and not good, what should be done and what should not be done. Once you have done this, joy will come [to you] after your long night.

Good man, it is like a thieving dog that stealthily enters a house at night. A family servant, when he realizes what is going on, will then run after the dog, yelling, “Hey you, get out of here! If you don’t leave, I’ll take your life!” When he hears this, the dog will immediately run off and not come back. You should follow this example and overcome [Māra] Pāpīyas in the same way. You need to say, “Pāpīyas! You should not take that shape that you now have. For if you become [someone else], then I will take those five [corpses] hanging from you and tie you down with them.”

When he hears this, Māra will depart and just like that furtive dog, he will not come back.

Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One. The Buddha has expounded to the distinguished householder Ghoṣila that if he can overcome Māra in this way, he will have drawn near to *mahāparinirvāṇa*. So why must you say that these four types of people are to be regarded as reliable places of refuge when what they say cannot necessarily be trusted?

The Buddha said to Kāśyapa:

Good man, what I have said is just that. To think otherwise would be wrong. Good man, I have explained [the importance of] subduing Māra to śrāvakas who have [only] physical vision with which to see things. But this is not an explanation for people who study the Mahāyāna. People who are śrāvakas, even when they have divine vision, [because of their predilections] I generally refer to them as “those with physical vision.” The students of the Mahāyāna, although they have [only] physical vision, I generally refer to them as “those with buddha vision.” Why is this? Because the Mahāyāna sutras are what I call the “buddha vehicle,” and this buddha vehicle is the best of the best.

Good man, just as there are those who are powerful and courageous, there are also those who are weak and who betake themselves to the strong on whom they depend. The strong ones commonly teach the weak, saying: “You should hold the bow and take the arrow like this. You must learn how to use the halberd, the long hook, or a rope like that.”

They also will say:

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Although facing battle is like walking on swords, you must not let fear take hold of you. When you come upon men or gods [in battle], regard them as insignificant and weak. You must generate thoughts of strength to make yourself powerful.

There are also people who are not naturally bold but pretend to be so by grabbing a bow, a sword, or some kind of weapon. Having thus equipped themselves, they march up to the troops [facing battle] and shout in a loud voice: “Do not fear those people! If they look at you and see you have no fear of them, you can be assured that before long they will break ranks and run like thieving dogs.”

Good man, the Tathāgata speaks to the śrāvakas in the same way:

Do not fear Māra Pāpīyas! If Māra Pāpīyas transforms himself into the body of a buddha and comes to where you are, you must resolve with firmness of mind to defeat that demon. At that point Māra will then lose heart, no longer enjoying [his pursuit of you], and go away.

Good man, just as a person of strength does not follow the ways of others, so it is with the student of the Mahāyāna who, upon hearing the discourses

in various abstruse texts, enjoys them and does not recoil in fear. Why is this so? Because people who study the Mahāyāna in this way have in the past made offerings to, showed respect for, and paid obeisance to innumerable, trillions of buddhas. So even if there were innumerable hundreds of billions of Māra-led hordes desperate to seize them by intimidation or flattery, [students of the Mahāyāna] would ultimately face those situations without fear.

Good man, it is like someone who has obtained the antidote *agada* and has no sense of fear toward poisonous snakes and the like. This is because the power of that medicine is capable of removing all forms of poison. This Mahāyāna sutra also [functions] in that way, for just like the power of that medicine, with it one does not fear the poisons of any and all māras, vanquishing them and preventing them from coming forth again.

Good man, consider the example of a serpent whose nature is particularly cruel. When it wants to harm someone, the snake merely glares at them with its eyes or blows on them with its breath, which is enough to bring fear to any lion, tiger, wolf, or dog. If any of these dangerous animals were to hear [the serpent's] voice, see its shape, or touch its body, none of them would not lose their life. But there are also spells used for good causes, and by means of the power of these spells one can compel such dangerous [animals] to all become compliant and yielding as if tamed, including poisonous snakes, *garuḍa* birds,⁸⁸ violent elephants, lions, tigers, and wolves. When they perceive these spells used for good causes, animals such as these are immediately subdued.

Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are also like this. When they see Māra Pāpīyas, they are all stricken with fear, yet Māra Pāpīyas feels no fear at all, and thus continues with his demonic activities. Those who study the Mahāyāna in like manner see how the śrāvakas fear the activities of Māra and have not produced aspirational faith in the Mahāyāna. [These students of the Mahāyāna] first use the expedient means at their disposal to overcome the māras, compelling them to become compliant and appropriately tamed, as a result of which they can then expound to them in detail various aspects of this wondrous dharma. Upon seeing the taming of the māras, the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas lose their fear and at

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that point they will look upon the unsurpassed true-dharma that is the Mahāyāna with aspirational faith and say, in effect, “From now on we should no longer create obstructions to this true-dharma.”

In addition, good man, while śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas may be frightened of the defilements, those who study the Mahāyāna have no fear at all. Cultivating the Mahāyāna has that kind of power. Because of this causal principle, everything I said earlier about enabling śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas to overcome māras does not pertain to the Mahāyāna. This *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* cannot disappear; it is so extraordinary, so special. If someone hears it and after hearing it accepts its message, that person will come to believe that the Tathāgata is an eternally abiding dharma. Someone like this is an extraordinary marvel, like the *udumbara* flower. And after my nirvāṇa, if there are people who will have the opportunity to hear subtle scriptures of the Mahāyāna like this one and respond with faith and reverence, know that for one hundred thousand *kalpas* into the future they will not fall into any unfortunate rebirths.

At that time the Buddha then said to the bodhisattva Kāśyapa:

Good man, after my nirvāṇa, there will be hundreds of thousands, indeed innumerable, living beings that will discredit this *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana*, refusing to believe it.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa responded to the Buddha by saying:

World-Honored One, after the Buddha’s extinction, how much time will pass before those living beings begin to discredit this sermon? And World-Honored One, will there also be living beings that are invariably good at that time, who will succeed in helping extricate those who have discredited the dharma [from their misconceptions]?

The Buddha then said to Kāśyapa:

Good man, within forty years after my *parinirvāṇa* [this teaching] will circulate widely in Jambudvīpa. Only after that will it gradually disappear from the land. Good man, it is like sugar cane, glutinous rice, granulated honey, butter, or ghee: depending on where you are the people of some

regions will all say, “These taste best.” But there are also people who only eat barley or millet⁸⁹ and say, “What we eat is the best [of all foods]!” This is because those without much religious merit receive commensurate karmic compensation. But if a person who is possessed of religious merit never hears of barley or millet, they will continue to eat [the more savory] nonglutinous rice, sugar cane, crystallized honey, ghee, and so forth.

The *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* is just like this. Those of dull karmic roots with little religious merit will be unwilling to hear this sutra. Just like those of weak religious merit [whose lives are difficult] resent [those who eat] honey and other such foods, followers of the two vehicles in like fashion may bear resentment toward this unsurpassed *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*. But there will also be living beings who will be favorably disposed toward hearing this sutra. After hearing it, these individuals will feel elated and will not disparage it. They are like those fortunate ones possessed of merit who eat glutinous rice.

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Good man, consider the story of a king who resided in the remote mountains in distressed circumstances. Even though he had sugar cane, glutinous rice, and crystallized honey on hand, because such [appetizing foods] are hard to obtain, precious, and well sought after, he hoarded them. He dared not allow them to be eaten, dreading what would happen if he ran out. And so [the people of his kingdom] ate only barley and millet. Now at the same time in a different country there was another king who, upon hearing about this, evinced a sympathetic smile and straightaway decided to load up carts with glutinous rice and sugar cane and send them to the first king as a gift. When the shipment reached the first king, he distributed it among the people and the entire nation then enjoyed the food together. After the people had eaten, everyone was elated and remarked, “It is all due to that other king that we have been able to enjoy this extraordinary meal!”

Good man, this is how it is with the four types of living beings who take a leadership role on behalf of this unsurpassed, great dharma. In all likelihood there will be one person among these four types of believers who will notice that there are a great many other bodhisattvas who, although they study Mahāyāna scriptures like this one, perhaps copying

them themselves or getting others to copy them in order to seek personal gain, or fame, or knowledge of the dharma, or a spiritual grounding, or a means to explore other sutras, are nevertheless incapable of expounding the teachings in detail to others. This one person will respond by taking this subtle sutra and sending it to other lands with other bodhisattvas, enabling them to bring forth an unsurpassed aspiration to *bodhi*, [thereby] establishing themselves in *bodhi*. And these bodhisattvas, having obtained this sutra, will then be able to expound it widely to others, enabling countless others to accept the flavor of a Mahāyāna dharma like this. Through the power of this one bodhisattva so many who had never heard this sutra will thus be able to hear it, just like the people of that kingdom who were able to enjoy the rare foods through the power of that [other] king.

Good man, you should understand that wherever this *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* is disseminated, that land will thereby be adamant and its people adamant-like as well. Whenever people can actually hear a sutra like this one, they will be nonretrogressing in their turn toward *anuttarā samyaksambodhi* and whatever they wish for will be accomplished, including that which I will fully expound this very day. *Bhikṣus*, you should accept and retain well this [teaching], for if there are living beings who have been unable thus far to hear scriptures such as this, understand that you must be especially compassionate toward them. Why? Because these people will be not be able to accept the profound significance of a Mahāyāna sutra like this.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha as follows:

World-Honored One, [we understand that] for forty years after the extinction of the Tathāgata this Mahāyāna scripture—the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*—will spread throughout Jambudvīpa, after which it will disappear from the land. But after that [period] has ended, how long will it be before it appears again?

The Buddha said:

Good man, even as my true-dharma will remain for another eighty years, it will be during the first forty years that this sutra will rain down as a great dharma rain over Jambudvīpa.

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When true-dharma has disappeared, when true morality has been discredited, when false dharmas have increased, and when living beings are not in compliance with [any] dharma, who will be able to hear, accept, hold in reverence, and read and recite a sutra such as this one? Who will enable others to become well versed in it, make offerings to it, revere it, copy it, and explain it? I beseech you, Tathāgata! Take pity on us living beings and explain these things analytically and in some detail, thereby empowering [future] bodhisattvas so they might retain the teaching upon hearing it, and upon retaining it straightaway attain nonretrogressive *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*.

Then the Buddha praised Kāśyapa, saying:

Excellent, excellent! Good man, you have asked well about this. Good man, those living beings who make *bodhicitta* resolutions before an array of buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in the Hiranyavātī River will thereupon be empowered in that corrupt world to uphold sutras like this one rather than discredit them.

Good man, those who can make *bodhicitta* resolutions before world-honored buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in one Ganges River will thereupon be empowered in that later time when the world is corrupt to not repudiate this dharma but instead cherish [its unfolding in] this scripture, though they may not be able to analyze it and fully explain it to others. Good man, those living beings who make *bodhicitta* resolutions before world-honored buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in two Ganges Rivers will thereupon be empowered in that later time when the world is corrupt to not repudiate this dharma but instead appreciate it properly, believe in it, dedicate themselves to upholding and reciting it, though they may be unable to fully explain it to others. Those living beings who make *bodhicitta* resolutions before world-honored buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in three Ganges Rivers will thereupon be empowered in that later time when the world is corrupt to not repudiate this dharma but instead to uphold, read, recite, and copy fascicles of this sutra, despite the fact that in expounding it for others they will not have grasped its deepest meaning. Those living beings

who make *bodhicitta* resolutions before world-honored buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in four Ganges Rivers will thereupon be empowered in that later time when the world is corrupt to not repudiate this dharma but instead to uphold, read, recite, and copy fascicles of this sutra. Despite the fact that in proclaiming it [their understanding] will not be complete,⁹⁰ they will [be able to] give a detailed explanation of one-sixteenth of the sutra's meaning to others. Those living beings who make *bodhicitta* resolutions before world-honored buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in five Ganges Rivers will thereupon be empowered in that later time when the world is corrupt to not repudiate this dharma but instead to uphold, read, recite, and copy fascicles of this sutra. They will give a detailed explanation of eight-sixteenths of the sutra's meaning to others. Those living beings who make *bodhicitta* resolutions before world-honored buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in six Ganges Rivers will thereupon be empowered in that later time when the world is corrupt to not repudiate this dharma but instead to uphold, read, recite, and copy fascicles of this sutra. They will give a detailed explanation of twelve-sixteenths of the sutra's meaning to others. Those living beings who make *bodhicitta* resolutions before world-honored buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in seven Ganges Rivers will thereupon be empowered in that later time when the world is corrupt to not repudiate this dharma but instead to uphold, read, recite, and copy fascicles of this sutra. They will give a detailed explanation of fourteen-sixteenths of the sutra's meaning to others.

Those living beings who make *bodhicitta* resolutions before world-honored buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in eight Ganges Rivers will thereupon be empowered in that later time when the world is corrupt to not repudiate this dharma but instead to uphold, read, recite, and copy fascicles of this sutra. They will also work to enable others to copy the sutra, for being able to hear it and accept it oneself [motivates] one to endeavor to give others the opportunity to hear it, recite it, and disseminate its benefits. They will preserve and protect this sutra vigorously, and out of sympathy for all living beings in the world, honor it with offerings (*pūjā*). In addition, they will urge others to honor it with offerings, respect, reverence, recitations, and obeisance. In this way they

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will be equipped to fully unravel the meaning of the sutra: that is, [they will explain] that the Tathāgata is permanently abiding (*nitya*), unchangeable (*dhruva*), eternal (*śāśvata*), and stately blissful (*acala-sukha*); they will preach extensively that all living beings have the buddha-nature and they will know the dharma-treasury of the Tathāgata well, and [indicate] that after presenting such offerings to the buddhas, [followers] are to elevate an unsurpassed true-dharma such as this one, maintain and preserve it.

When someone has brought forth the aspiration to *anuttarā samyak-sambodhi*, understand that in the future this person shall surely uplift and promote a true-dharma like this, and maintain and preserve it. For that reason do not be ignorant of the fact that there will be protectors (*uddhāraka*) of the true-dharma in the future. Why? Because anyone who has committed him- or herself by means of *bodhicitta* shall surely maintain and protect the unsurpassed true-dharma in the future.

Good man, on the other hand there also will be depraved *bhikṣus* who will not only not be saddened upon hearing of my nirvāṇa [but will remark]:

On this day the Tathāgata enters *parinirvāṇa*—what a joyous (*prahṛṣṭā*) occasion! While the Tathāgata has been in the world he has hindered our profit-making activities. But now that he has entered *parinirvāṇa*, who else could there be who would rob us like that again? Without anyone to rob us of what we deserve, we will then take back the personal gains of the Tathāgata. When the Tathāgata was here, the [monastic] prohibitions became truly severe, but now with him entering *parinirvāṇa* these restrictions will all be abandoned. The *kāśāya* robe that we received as monks originally may have had some ritual significance, but now let us discard them like banners left on logs!

People like this will repudiate and defame this Mahāyāna sutra.

Good man, now you must remember this: as long as there are accomplished living beings endowed with significant quantities of merit, there will also be those who believe in the Mahāyāna scriptures. And having faith in those scriptures, they will endeavor to preserve them. Regarding other living beings that have a willingness for the dharma, if you can

fully explain this sutra to them, then, upon hearing it, the bad karma they have created over *asaṃkhyeya kalpas* will all be eliminated.

But for those who refuse to believe in this sutra there will be a torrent of countless pains in this life and [they will earn the] derision of a great many people. Moreover, after they die, people will look upon them with disgust and their countenances will appear ugly and rough. They will be reborn into poverty, always in want. Even though their lives may improve, things will remain rough and sordid for them, as they will be reborn time and time again into families that are poor and of low social standing, and into environments where the true-dharma is repudiated and false views abound. When they are about to die they may find themselves oppressed by chaotic situations such as warfare, violent and murderous kings, or conflicts between families that stubbornly hold enmity toward each other. Despite the presence [in society] of spiritual guides to help them in their hour of need, they will not encounter them. They will seek the means to provide for their own needs yet not succeed; whatever small material gains they make will never be enough to keep them from painful privations of hunger and thirst. Who but those on the bottom of society would even notice them? No king or official of any importance would even bother to record [such misery]. Even if they were to hear a well-crafted explanation of this sutra they would not accept it, despite the principled nature of its argument. This kind of person will not make it to a good rebirth, just as a bird with a broken wing simply cannot fly. Moreover, in their future rebirths these people will not succeed in obtaining the good realms of humans or deities either.

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On the other hand, when people are able to believe in Mahāyāna sutras like this one, even if they were born into abject conditions, by the virtue inherent in the sutra they will suddenly display grace, dignity, and power that will only increase daily. They will become people whom humans and deities yearn to see; they will be respected and loved, those in whom others indulge their emotions. Kings, high officials, and their own relatives will listen to them and esteem what they have to say. If, among my śrāvaka disciples, there is anyone who wants to practice that which is most rare, that person should widely promulgate Mahāyāna sutras like this one to the world.

Good man! It is like fog or frost—no matter how intense they may seem, each lasts only until the sun rises. After the sun has risen, they will disappear without a trace. Good man, the bad karma possessed by living beings is also like this. Of the great powers that reside in this world, there is nothing can surpass what one gains from seeing the sun of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*[-*sūtra*]. Once that sun has risen, it can eliminate every shred of bad karma.

In addition, good man, consider the analogy of a man who leaves his family to join the sangha and shaves his head. Although he dons the *kāśāya* robe, he has not yet pledged to maintain the ten precepts of a *śrāmaṇera* novice. Then a wealthy person appears who invites the monastic community [to a meal]. This person who has not taken the precepts nevertheless joins the group that accepts the invitation. Although he is not ordained, he will still be included among those counted as monks.

Good man, if there are living beings who, in their resolutions for awakening, begin to study this *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* such that they copy it, read it, recite it, and so forth, then although they may not be accomplished to the point of reaching the ten stages [of a bodhisattva], they will still be included among those counted as residing there. Or among the living beings who hear this sutra—even one verse of it—there may be those who are disciples of the Buddha and those who are not, or those who are motivated by greed or fear, or those who are merely ambitious. But [regardless of where they come from,] if upon hearing the sutra they do not malign it, you should understand that such people thereby will have already moved closer to *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*.

Good man, these are the reasons why I say that the four kinds of people [who understand the dharma] are supports for the world. Good man, if it were claimed that these four kinds of people had declared the Buddha's elocution not to be the Buddha's elocution, that would be absurd. Therefore I say that these four kinds of people are indeed supports for the world. Good man, you should make offerings to these four groups of people.

[Kāśyapa:] “World-Honored One, how can I know who these people are so that I may honor them with offerings?”

The Buddha then instructed Kāśyapa:

When you find someone who takes responsibility for preserving the true-dharma, that is the type of person from whom you should solicit instruction and to whom you should give alms, even to the point of sacrificing your life. Thus, in regard to this Mahāyāna sutra I would say:

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One who understands the dharma,
 Whether old or young,
 Should be honored with offerings,
 Respected and revered.
 Just like the brahmins
 Serve [the god of] fire.
 One who understands the dharma,
 Whether old or young,
 Should be honored with offerings,
 Respected and revered.
 Just like the gods
 Bow in reverence to serve Indra.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, just as you have said, it is indeed proper to honor teachers and elders in this way. However, I have some doubt in this area that I would beg of you to address.

Let us say that there is an elderly person, someone who has properly maintained the precepts, who approaches someone in the younger quarter to inquire about something he had not known. Should that older person make obeisance to the younger person to show him respect? If he were to pay respect to a younger person on this occasion, would that mean he would no longer be called someone of proper comportment?

What if a young person, someone who properly maintains the precepts, approaches an elder from among the non-precept keepers to inquire about something he had not known. In this case, should that younger person make obeisance to that elder or not?

Third, what if someone who has gone forth asks a layperson about something he had not known about before. Should the monastic bow to the layperson or not?

[I ask these things because] as one who has gone forth, a monastic should not bow to a layperson and, as things stand now in the Buddha's dharma, it is also the case that those who are younger in years must always show respect to those who are older and more experienced, the principle being that since elder monks received the precepts before the monks junior to them and have thus achieved some dignity, [a younger person] should honor and respect them. But, as the Buddha has [also] said, anyone who violates the precepts is not to be accepted within the Buddha's dharma, for they are like a fertile field that has become overgrown with harsh barnyard grass.

In the verses stated above, the Buddha said, "One who understands the dharma, whether old or young, should be honored with offerings, . . . like the gods serve Indra." But what do these verses mean? The Buddha would never speak deceptively, would he? And yet the Buddha has said, "Even a *bhikṣu* who keeps the precepts has also violated them." Why would the Tathāgata make such a statement? And in another sutra, the World-Honored One has spoken of "adjudicating precept violations." The meanings of all these statements are not clear to me.

The Buddha then spoke to Kāśyapa:

Good man, I expounded those verses for bodhisattvas and other students of the Mahāyāna who will come in the future. They were not preached for my śrāvaka disciples [now].

Good man, as I explained earlier, after the true-dharma disappears it will be a time when people discredit the true precepts, a time of increases in precept violations when immorality surges, a time when holy people all hide themselves and refuse to come out in public, a time when it is acceptable to keep slaves and other impure things.

From among these four types of people [who believe in the dharma] there will emerge one individual who will shave off his hair and beard to go forth into homelessness and pursue the religious path. Surveying the *bhikṣus*, he will see that each of them is keeping a female or male slave or something impure, that they are completely ignorant of what is pure and what is impure, and have no idea whatsoever about what is and is not in compliance with the monastic precepts. This person will

want to discipline the *bhikṣus* who behave like this but though he may soften his light, he will not assimilate to their dust. Carefully but skillfully he understands the distinction between his sphere of activity and a buddha's sphere of activity. Although he sees that people are committing *pārājika* offenses, he remains silent and does not raise the issue. Why? Because [he thinks] "I have come into the world in order to rescue and preserve the true-dharma, [not to quibble over any particular offense]." That is why he holds his tongue and does not reproach anyone. Good man. In the case of someone like this who seeks to protect the dharma, even if he commits a violation of the precepts I would not call him a transgressor of the precepts. 400a

Good man, it is like the story of a king who suddenly became ill and died. There was a crown prince but he was still young and not ready to succeed to the throne. In that nation there was an outcast, a *caṇḍāla*,⁹¹ who was blessed with property and wealth in abundance, immeasurably so, and had many kin. On his own initiative he used his power to uncover the nation's weaknesses and usurp the throne. Soon after solidifying his rule, townsfolk, householders, brahmans, and others began leaving, fleeing to other lands no matter how distant. And even those who remained in the kingdom did not want to see this king with their own eyes. But there were also merchants, brahmans, and others who did not leave their homeland, like trees that stand where they are born, living and dying in the same place. This *caṇḍāla* king, upon learning that many of his nation's people were leaving, searched for them to bring them back and dispatched *caṇḍāla* guards to block the roads [to prevent any further exodus].

After seven days, he pounded the drums and announced to the brahmans, "To anyone of you who will serve as the ritual master for my inauguration ceremony (*abhiṣeka*), I will give rank and compensation worth half the kingdom." But when the brahmans heard his words, none accepted to his proposal. Each of them said, "Where will he find a brahman who would do such a thing?" The *caṇḍāla* king then spoke up again, saying, "If there is not one brahman among you who will serve as ritual master for me, then I demand that brahmans and *caṇḍālas* be forced to live, eat, and sleep together and engage in the same work. On the other hand, if one of you comes forth to consecrate me as king, my offer of

half the kingdom's territory is genuine. I also have a wondrous ambrosia of immortality magically drawn from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven; if I were to share this with that person, he could drink it [and attain immortality].

At that time there was one brahman boy at the capping age [of twenty].⁹² His practice was pure, he wore his hair long, and he was quite adept at ritual chants. This young brahman went to the king, begged an audience, and said to him, "Great king! I can do everything that your lordship has commanded." At that moment the great king felt great joy in his heart and accepted this boy to be the ritual master of his coronation ceremony. But when the other brahmans heard of this, they all became angry and reproached the youth, saying, "You are a brahman, how can you serve as the ritual master for a *caṇḍāla*?"

The king, however, wasted no time in dividing the nation and giving half to the young man. Thereafter the two of them ruled the country together for quite some time. Then one day the youth said to the king,

I have abandoned the dharma of my family⁹³ in becoming the king's ritualist. But having taught the great king the secret spells [of our tradition], still to this day, great king, I am not regarded fondly by you.

Then the king responded: "Now what have I done that [suggests I do] not regard you fondly?"

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The boy answered: "In the past the king spoke of sharing the elixir of immortality in your possession, yet we have never drunk it together."

The king said:

Excellent, excellent. Master, I truly did not understand [your feelings in this matter]. Master, if you have been waiting for this, then please feel free to take it with you.

Having heard what the king said, the youth then took [the elixir] and went home. He implored the officials to join him in drinking it and after they had done so, they went to the king together to say: "How glad we are that the great master has this sweet elixir of immortality."

When the king heard this, he said to his ritual master: "Why, great master, do you only take the sweet elixir with the officials, and not divide it further?"

Then the youth took what was left of the elixir, mixed it with a poisonous medicine, brought this to the king and got him to drink it. It was some time after swallowing it before the medicine began to take effect. When it did, the king writhed in agony, fell to the floor, and lost consciousness as if dead.

What the young brahman did then was to bring out the crown prince and restore him as king. Having accomplished this, he made the following statement:

The lion's throne [of the king] is something that our dharma should not allow a *caṇḍāla* to ascend. Since ancient times, we have never seen nor heard of someone of the *caṇḍāla* caste becoming a king. A *caṇḍāla* ruling the nation and governing the people is simply out of the question. You, sire, must now return to succeed the previous king, to rule the nation [according to] our true-dharma.

When the young brahman had finished arranging things, he gave the *caṇḍāla* an antidote to the poison, effectively bringing him out of his coma. After the *caṇḍāla* had fully recovered his senses, he was thrown out of the palace and forced to leave the country.

Now although at that time the young brahman did certain things [to cooperate with the *caṇḍāla* king], nevertheless he did not forfeit his brahmanic code. When the other householders, brahmans, and so forth heard the full extent of what he had done, they were awed at his [achievement] as something they had never seen before and praised him, saying, "Excellent, excellent! Benevolent one, well have you succeeded in driving out the *caṇḍāla* king!"

Good man, after my *parinirvāṇa*, the bodhisattvas who protect the true-dharma will [have to] act like that. Using the power of expedient means they will work together with monastics who have violated the precepts, assumed false names, and accepted and kept unclean things. If, at that time, bodhisattvas were to come across an individual who despite violating many precepts [himself] was able to discipline the rule-breaking, harmful *bhikṣus* [in the community], they would immediately go to that person in order to pay respect and make obeisance to him, to donate a monk's four necessities to him,⁹⁴ and to bring books of scripture and

living utensils as further donations. If those bodhisattvas did not have those things to give, then they first would have to request them in an expedient manner from patrons and then give them to that person.

In order to do what he does, this person may have to hold on to something from among the eight kinds of impure things.⁹⁵ Why is this? In order to punish those harmful monks, that individual will have to behave like the young brahman who [committed violations of his dharma] in order to get rid of the *caṇḍāla*. But even though the bodhisattvas at that time will yet again respect and make obeisance to that person, despite the fact that he accepts and keeps one of the eight impure things, there will be no karmic transgression in their actions [in support of that individual]. And why is this? Because these bodhisattvas [themselves] want to purge the harmful *bhikṣus* from their community to allow the pure monastics to live in peace and spread the well-balanced Mahāyāna scriptures for the benefit of all gods and humans.

400c Good man, [earlier] in this sutra I put this reasoning into two verses to compel all bodhisattvas to praise protectors of the dharma, just as the householders, brahmans, and others acclaimed the youthful brahman when they called out, “Excellent, excellent!” This is how a bodhisattva concerned with protecting the dharma should act. If you notice that an individual who protects the dharma is engaged in the same activities together with someone known to have broken the precepts and you declare the dharma protector to therefore also be guilty, you must know that that person will get into trouble [because of your accusation]. As a matter of fact, the protector of the dharma will not have committed any offense [by merely associating with someone who has].

Good man, when there are *bhikṣus* who violate the monastic prohibitions but because they are steeped in arrogance conceal the fact and do not regret their actions, understand that such people are indeed to be called true violators of the precepts. If, on the other hand, a bodhisattva-mahāsattva [ignores a prohibition] in the course of protecting the dharma, in this case although a precept has been violated such a person is not to be called a violator of the precepts. Why? Because [his act] does not stem from arrogance; he will make plain what he has done and will regret it. Good man, therefore I want to reiterate the verse I gave earlier in the sutra:

One who understands the dharma,
 Whether old or young,
 Should be honored with offerings,
 Respected and revered.
 Just like the brahmans
 Serve [the god of] fire.
 Bowing in reverence to Indra
 In the second heaven.⁹⁶

Again, this reasoning is not intended for those who study the śrāvaka [path]; it is only for the bodhisattvas that I expound this verse.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, there are bodhisattva-mahāsattvas who have become extremely lax in their regard for the precepts. In their case, are the precepts still complete [and functional] as they were when these bodhisattvas originally received them, or not?

The Buddha said:

Good man, you should not speak in that way. Why? Because the precepts as they were originally received remain as they originally were; there is nothing lost. When an offense is committed, the person should immediately confess, for having confessed that person [once again] will be in a state of purity. Good man, it is like an old dyke that is punctured, and in the opening a hole forms from which water then drips out. Why does this occur? Because there is no one to repair [the breach]. When there is someone to repair it, the water will no longer leak out. Bodhisattvas are also like this, in that though they may violate the precepts, at the same time they also collectively observe the *poṣadha*, *karman*, and *pravāraṇa* ceremonies in which they renew their commitment to the precepts and engage in confession together with their fellow monks. The precepts these bodhisattvas possess thus are not like the damaged dyke with a puncture that becomes a leak. What is the point here? If there are no people [in a community] who are pure in keeping the precepts, then disintegration, slovenliness, and indolence in that sangha will increase on a daily basis. But if there are people who do keep the

precepts in a pure manner, then the precepts of those in trouble can soon become complete again, ultimately with no loss from their original state.

Good man. If someone is apathetic about [his choice of] religious vehicle, I would call that person apathetic. But if someone is lax toward the precepts, I would not [necessarily] call such a person apathetic. As long as the attitudes of bodhisattva-mahāsattvas toward the Mahāyāna are neither lazy nor arrogant, I regard them as grounded in their originally received precepts, for in order to protect the true-dharma they bathe themselves in the waters of the Mahāyāna. For that reason bodhisattvas may appear to violate the precepts, but I would not say they are apathetic.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

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There are four types of people in the sangha communities, but just like it is difficult to know when mango fruit is ripe, how can we know when a precept is kept and when it is broken?

The Buddha spoke:

Good man, viewed according to what I have expounded here in the *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana*, this should be easy to understand. Why do I say you can understand this according to what is in this *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*? It is analogous to a farmer who pulls weeds out of his field as he plants rice and other grains. If you look at his field with the naked eye, you would say it is purely [rice]. But the reality is that the field is mixed, as rice and grass are both there and they [must be] distinguished from each other. Thus, if the eight things that potentially corrupt a sangha are removed from it, then when viewed with the naked eye the community will be known as pure. And yet when there are no disruptions, it is difficult to distinguish with the naked eye the precept holder from the precept violator. It is only when an impropriety is abundantly obvious that this becomes easily understood. Then, as easily as weeds are distinguished [from rice stalks], the problem within a sangha becomes clear. Those who can distance themselves from the poisonous snakes that are these eight impure things are those whom I call fields of merit of the pure, sacred community; they should be honored with offerings from humans

and gods. But the karmic rewards of such purity cannot be distinguished with the naked eye.

Good man, this is like story of the forest of *kālaka* trees, within which there was also one *tinduka* tree.⁹⁷ The [poisonous] fruit of the *kālaka* and [the nonpoisonous] *tinduka* fruit are so similar as to be indistinguishable, and when they ripened both were picked by the same woman. There being only one *tinduka* tree in that forest, its fruit was quite rare: there were ten pieces of *kālaka* fruit for every one piece of *tinduka* fruit. Without knowing herself how to discriminate one from the other, that woman brought all the fruit she had gathered to market and peddled it together. Average people ignorant about this matter and children came by her collection and gazed at the fruit, and they, too, could not distinguish one from the other. But if they bought a *kālaka* fruit, swallowing it could mean losing their lives, [so everyone was concerned]. A wise person heard about the problem and came forward to speak with the woman, asking: “Sister, from where did you bring this fruit?” The woman then pointed in the direction of the forest. The people who had gathered around immediately cried out, “Over there?! That [forest] is full of who knows how many *kālaka* trees but only one *tinduka* tree!” Upon realizing what she had done, they laughed at her and the fruit was thrown out.

Good man. Those in the sangha communities who engage in the eight impure things are also like this. Within the community there may be many who take advantage of these eight things we have talked about, but there may also be just one person who is pure in keeping the precepts, who does not accept any of the impure things included in this list of eight. Yet he knows there are people who do condone improper behavior. In the activities they share in common he is inseparable from these people, standing like the one *tinduka* tree in the forest. When a layman sees them together, the layman sees monks who frequently behave improperly and so he neither respects nor offers donations to them. But if that layman did want to make a donation, he should first speak to them, asking:

Venerable sirs, on the question of [keeping] the eight [impure] things, do you accept and keep them or not? Does the Buddha allow this or not? If someone claimed that the Buddha condones such things,

would you be able to participate in the *poṣadha*, *karman*, and *pravāraṇa* ceremonies with that person?

After the layman queries them in this way, if everyone in a community answers: “Regarding these eight things you speak of, the Tathāgata in his compassionate mercy has allowed us to keep all of them.”

401b

The layman should then say:

At Jetavana there were many monks. Some said that the Buddha allowed gold and silver to be kept, but others said he did not allow this. Those who said he allowed this and those who said he did not were unable to live together, recite the *prātimokṣa* together, or do the *pravāraṇa* confession ritual together. This extended to them not even being able to drink water from the same river, and they did not share what they received in offerings. So how can you say that the Buddha permitted these things? The Buddha, the god among gods, may accept such things himself, but none of you monks should keep them. If one of you accepts these things, he should not participate with the other monks in reciting the precepts, making confessions, and other monastic rituals. If he does participate with the other monks in these things, then when his life ends he will fall into hell.

Those individuals [transgressing in this way] are like people who lose their lives right after eating the *kālaka* fruit.

In addition, the Buddha said:

Good man, consider the analogy of a man who sold medicines in a city, one of which was a wonderful, sweet medicine that came from the Himalayas. But he also had many other assorted medicines that were similar in taste and appearance. On one occasion everyone in that city suddenly wanted to buy the [Himalayan medicine], but they could not distinguish it from the other medicines. Many ended up coming to where this man’s business was and asking him, “Do you have the Himalayan medicine?” Without hesitation, the medicine seller would answer, “Yes, I do,” but he was deceiving them, for he would take his other medicines and tell those who were seeking it, “This is the sweet, excellent medicine from the Himalayas.” The people coming to buy the medicine would

look at what he showed them with their untrained eyes and, not being able to tell the difference, make their purchases and leave, each one thinking to himself, “I have just purchased that sweet medicine from the Himalayas.”

Kāśyapa, just as in these parables, among the śrāvaka sanghas there are some who are monastic in name only, there are some who are genuinely monastic, and there are some where both types live together. Though some may keep the precepts and some may not within the same community, they should equally be given offerings and shown respect and courtesy. With untrained eyes, lay believers will not be able to distinguish among them, just as those customers could not discriminate the sweet, Himalayan variety among all the medicines [by appearance alone]. Who is observing the precepts, who is violating the precepts, who is a true monk, who is a false monk—only one with divine vision can discriminate these things.

Kāśyapa, on the other hand, if an *upāsaka* knows a *bhikṣu* to be someone who violates the precepts, then he should not supply that monk with the means of subsistence or make offerings or obeisance to him. If an *upāsaka* knows a *bhikṣu* is keeping one of the eight things forbidden to him, he should not also supply that monk with the means of subsistence or make offerings or obeisance to this person either. When someone within a sangha violates the precepts, just because that person may be wearing the *kāśāya* monastic robe is no reason for anyone to feel they must show respect or make obeisance to that person.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then spoke up again:

World-Honored One, this is excellent, excellent! What the Tathāgata has expounded is true and meaningful, and I graciously accept it like pure gold, a rarity even among jewels.

As the Buddha has explained, *bhikṣus* should rely on the dharma of the four forms of spiritual support. What are those four reliances (**catuḥ-pratisaraṇa*)?

Rely on the teaching (**dharma*) rather than the person (**puruṣa*). Rely on the meaning (**artha*) rather than the language used to express it (**vyañjana*). Rely on wisdom (**jñāna*) rather than discursive

401c knowledge (**viññāna*). Rely on the sutra that is definitive (**nītārtha-sūtra*) rather than the sutra whose meaning is indeterminate (**neyārtha-sūtra*).

Taking the dharma of these four as one's refuge is what should be acknowledged, not the four types of people.

The Buddha said:

Good man, the dharma to be taken as one's refuge is none other than this *mahāparinirvāṇa* of the Tathāgata. As the dharma of all buddhas, it is the *dharmatā*, the nature of reality. And as the *dharmatā*, it is what the Tathāgata is. This is why the Tathāgata is a permanently abiding presence without change. If someone were to say that the Tathāgata is impermanent, that person would not understand, he has not seen the nature of reality. If someone does not know or see the nature of reality, they should not be regarded as someone upon whom to rely. As I said earlier, the four types of people active in the world who support this dharma must realize this to become a refuge for others. Why is this so? Because those people will have fully grasped the oracular and profound treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*, and therefore would understand that the Tathāgata is a constant presence and not subject to change. If someone were to say the Tathāgata is impermanent and subject to change, there would be no foundation for such a statement.

The four types of people [who have this understanding] can thus be called tathāgatas. Why? Because these people will be able to grasp the Tathāgata's recondite language and even expound upon it. If someone did understand this deeply hidden tathāgata treasury and did understand that the Tathāgata abides permanently and is unchangeable but nevertheless preached that the Tathāgata is impermanent in order to gain favor from others, there would be no foundation for what he would be doing. How could such a person become a spiritual support for others? How much more so can people not rely on anyone among these four groups of people following the dharma [who would act in this way]? The dharma to take refuge in is the reality of *dharmatā*; the person not to take refuge in is a śrāvaka disciple. The reality of *dharmatā* is a tathāgata; a śrāvaka

disciple is a created phenomenon. A tathāgata is permanently abiding; a created phenomenon is impermanent.

Good man. If someone violates the precepts or for personal gain preaches that the Tathāgata is impermanent and changeable, such a person should not be relied upon as a source of refuge. Good man, [instead you should rely on] what I call, “the definitive meaning.” In the phrase, “Rely on the meaning rather than the language used to express it,” by the word “meaning” I was referring what should be “clearly understood.” The meaning of what is “clearly understood” refers to something that is “not reduced.” By “not reduced” I am referring to what is “complete.” A meaning that is “complete” could be the label for “the Tathāgata is a constantly abiding presence and unchanging.” The meaning of “the Tathāgata is a constantly abiding presence and unchanging” is none other than “the dharma is permanent.” The meaning of “the dharma is permanent” is none other than the sangha is permanent. This is what is I meant in saying, “Rely on the meaning rather than the language used to express it.”

What is it about language that should not be relied upon? I am speaking about the literary embellishments used in essays and treatises. Composed on the innumerable sutras expounded by the Buddha, some of these essays [express] a shameless ambition, indulging in much illicit flattery, falsely affecting a familiarity with their subject matter. They will express anything that will bring them profit, for usually they wear white robes as administrative clerks. And if that is not bad enough, some will even declare:

The Buddha allows *bhikṣus* to keep slaves and other impure things. Gold, silver, rare jewels, stores of rice and other grains, cows, sheep, elephants, and horses, these they can sell for profit. As there is famine in the world, [the Buddha] takes pity on his children and therefore allows the *bhikṣus* to keep reserves in storage and to produce their own food so they can eat without receiving food from others.

This is the kind of language that should not be relied on.

402a

In the phrase, “Rely on wisdom rather than discursive knowledge,” by the word “wisdom” I was referring to the Tathāgata himself. If a śrāvaka

were unable to understand the Tathāgata’s virtues, the kind of knowledge [possessed by that śrāvaka] you should not regard as a spiritual support. When someone does understand that the Tathāgata is none other than the dharma body itself, that kind of true wisdom in someone is what indeed should serve as spiritual support. If one looks upon the body of expediency held by the Tathāgata and remarks, “The aggregates (*skandhas*), elements (*dhātus*), and sense bases (*āyatanas*) that are incorporated [in the Buddha] are nourished by eating,” then this, too, signals someone you should not rely upon as a spiritual support. This is why discursive knowledge cannot serve as a spiritual support for others. Anyone who preaches in this way and any text [with the same perspective] should not serve as spiritual supports.

In the phrase, “Rely on the sutra that is definitive rather than on the sutra whose meaning is indeterminate,” the rubric of “indeterminate” refers to those sutras used in the śrāvaka vehicle, or *śrāvakayāna*.⁹⁸ When they hear about the Tathāgata’s profound and hidden treasure trove, they feel doubt and fear. They do not understand that this treasure produces the great ocean of wisdom. They are like infants, unable to distinguish among the different things they perceive. This [perspective] I call “indeterminate.” “Definitive” is what I call “the true wisdom of bodhisattvas.” A great, unimpeded wisdom flows from a bodhisattva’s thoughts, like a great sage to whom nothing is unknown. This is what is meant by “definitive.”

In addition, the *śrāvakayāna* itself I call “indeterminate” and the unsurpassed Mahāyāna I call “definitive.” If it is said the Tathāgata is impermanent and mutable, I would call that [view] “indeterminate.” If it is said that the Tathāgata abides permanently and is immutable, I would call this [view] “definitive.” What is preached by śrāvakas should be acknowledged as indeterminate, but that what is preached by bodhisattvas should be acknowledged as definitive. If it is said that the Tathāgata is sustained by what he eats, that is a “nondefinitive” [assertion]. If it is said that he abides permanently and is immutable, that I would call “definitive.” If it is said that the Tathāgata entering into nirvāṇa is like firewood perishing in a flame, that notion of extinction is “indeterminate.” If it is said that the Tathāgata has entered into *dharmatā*, that I would call “definitive.”

The dharma of the *śrāvakayāna* thus should not be relied on as a spiritual support. Why? Because, in wanting to save living beings, the Tathāgata used the power of expedient means to expound the *śrāvakayāna* but did so in the way that the wealthy merchant taught letters [rather than whole words] to his son. Good man, the *śrāvakayāna* itself is like a newly plowed field that has yet to yield the fruit of a harvest. Thus I regard it as “indeterminate,” and this is why one should not rely on [the teachings in] the *śrāvakayāna* as a spiritual support.

It is the dharma of the Mahāyāna that should be relied on as a spiritual support. Why? Because, in wishing to save living beings, the Tathāgata used the power of expedient means to expound the Mahāyāna. But because this was done so that it would be taken as a spiritual support, I call it “definitive.” It is *this* notion of the four reliances that you should recognize.

Next, in the phrase “Rely on the meaning,” the term “meaning” here I would characterize as “straightforward.” “Straightforward” I would characterize as “illuminated.” “Illuminated” I would characterize as “unreduced.” “Unreduced” is how I would characterize the Tathāgata. Moreover, “illuminated” is how I would characterize “wisdom.” “Straightforward” is how I would characterize “permanently abiding,” and the permanence of the Tathāgata is what I was referring to in the phrase, “Rely on the teaching.” This teaching I thus refer to as “permanent” and also as “boundless.” It cannot be conceived of, it cannot be held on to, it cannot be restrained, and yet it can be seen. If someone were to assert that it cannot be seen, that person should not be relied upon. This is why you should “Rely on the teaching rather than the person.” If someone were to use subtle and persuasive language to proclaim that [the Tathāgata is] impermanent, a statement like that should not be relied upon either. Therefore, “Rely on the meaning in a teaching rather than the language used to express it.”

402b

In the phrase “Rely on wisdom,” I am referring to the fact that the collective sangha itself is permanent, uncreated and unchanging. It is not a place for keeping the eight impure things. Therefore I say, “Rely on wisdom rather than discursive knowledge.” If someone were to say, for example:

Knowledge is created or knowledge is received, but there is no assemblage of monks that is the sangha. Why? Because the notion of assemblage or collectivity is [a construct and] known to have no real existence. How can anyone say that something nonexistent is permanent?

This is why discursive knowledge of this sort cannot serve as a spiritual support.

In the phrase “Rely on what is definitive,” the term “definitive” I would characterize as “true understanding.” [By relying on what is definitive,] in the end you will have neither false expressions of purity in your comportment, nor arrogance or any conceited craving for self-aggrandizement. This also refers to the Tathāgata’s skillful use of expedient means by which the nonarising of attachment is expounded within his dharma. This I call “definitive,” for if someone can dwell within this and other expressions of what is definitive, know that that person will have already obtained [the stage of] dwelling in the highest truth. For this reason I say, “Rely on a sutra that is definitive.”

In the phrase about not relying on [sutras] “whose meaning is indeterminate,” by the term “indeterminate” I am referring to the sutras that expound such things as: “Everything is burning, everything is impermanent, everything is suffering, everything is empty, everything is non-self.” These [doctrines] I call indeterminate. Why? Because doctrines such as these that cannot be fully clarified will only cause living beings to fall into the Avīci Hell. What is the reason for this? Because of their attachments living beings will simply not attain definitive clarity regarding what these doctrines mean. Saying “everything is burning,” [for example,] is in effect stating that the Tathāgata preached that nirvāṇa is also burning. If “everything is impermanent,” then nirvāṇa would also be impermanent. Suffering, emptiness, and nonself—these would all end up the same way. This is why I call these “sutras that are indeterminate,” and why I say they are not to be relied on as one’s refuge.

Good man, someone may say,

From his mercy toward all living beings the Tathāgata is well aware of what is appropriate to an occasion. Because he understands what

is needed when, he may expound the trivial as important or he may expound the important as trivial. The Tathāgata has insight into his disciples and the necessities supplied to them by their donors, making sure there is nothing they lack. The Buddha thus would not allow such people to accept and keep male or female slaves, gold, silver, or precious jewels, or sell anything impure in the marketplace. If there are disciples without lay donors or a supply of daily necessities, in times of famine when food and drink are difficult to obtain, in the interest of promoting and supporting the true-dharma I will permit those disciples to accept and keep slaves, gold and silver, vehicles, houses, and grains, as well as to trade for what they need. But although I allow them to accept such things, they must be gifts handed over by donors of devout faith.

402c

In this case take the dharma of the four reliances [to be your guide] as to what you should rely on. Any vinaya, abhidharma, or sutra that does not disagree with those four [principles], you should rely upon them as well. But if, on the other hand, someone were to say:

Whether or not this is a special occasion, whether or not it is a teaching that can be supported, in all cases the Tathāgata allows every *bhikṣu* to accept and keep these kinds of impure things.

[Know that] this kind of statement should never be relied upon as a spiritual support. And any vinaya, abhidharma, or sutra that contains the same notion as this explanation should also not be relied upon, inclusive of all three categories of scripture.

I preach these four reliances for the living beings that see with their physical eyes; it is not the final teaching for those who have eyes of wisdom. This is why I have now expounded [this doctrine] of the four reliances, wherein *dharma* is none other than the reality of *dharmatā*, *meaning* is none other than the fact that the Tathāgata is permanent and unchanging, *wisdom* is being fully cognizant of the fact that all living beings possess buddha-nature, and *definitive* is comprehending all the Mahāyāna sutras.

Fascicle VII

Chapter Four

The Nature of the Tathāgata: Part 4

At that time Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha, saying: “World-Honored One. The four types of people that the Buddha has been discussing, is it right to regard them as supports for us [in your absence]?”

The Buddha said:

Just so, just so. Good man, as I explained, you should indeed rely on them as supports. Why? Because there are four māras. Why are there four? [The number] reflects those who effectively accept and embrace another set of sutras and vinayas that are taught by māras.⁹⁹

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then asked the Buddha:

World-Honored One. This fourfold māra issue that the Buddha has explained—if there are teachings expounded by a māra and teachings expounded by a buddha, how am I to distinguish between them? [If there are living beings who comply with the actions of māras as well as those who behave in accordance to what the Buddha has taught, how can we understand who is who?

The Buddha then informed Kāśyapa:

Over seven hundred years after my *parinirvāṇa* this Māra Pāpīyas will gradually bring about a collapse of my true-dharma. Like a hunter who dons the dharma robe of a monk, Māra Pāpīyas will take the form of a monk, a nun, a layman, or a laywomen. He may also transform himself into the body of someone at the stage of *srotāpanna*; he may transform himself into the body of an arhat or even take on the material body of a

403a buddha. King Māra is thus able to take his contaminated form and turn it into an uncontaminated body in order to destroy the true-dharma. If this Māra Pāpīyas destroys the true-dharma, he will thereupon make this statement:

In the distant past the Bodhisattva descended to Kapilavastu from the Tuṣita Heaven to appear in the palace of King Śuddhodhana. Through the harmonious combination of the lustful passions of his mother and father, he was born and raised by them to become what he is. But if you say a person could be born into the world of humans who then becomes revered by great multitudes of humans and gods throughout the world, such a thing cannot be true.

And he will also say:

In the distant past [the Bodhisattva] underwent many austerities, making various donations to people, such as giving away his head, his eyes, his body, his brain, his nation, his wife, or his children. And it was by means of doing these things that he completed the path to buddhahood. It was because of these [sacrifices] that he was revered by humans and gods, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *kimnaras*, and *mahoragas*.

If you come across sutra or vinaya texts that expound these things, you should understand them all to be the work of Māra. Good man, you may also hear of sutras and vinayas that make statements like this:

The Tathāgata Perfectly Awakened One has long since attained buddhahood. He appeared in this realm as one who accomplished the buddha path in order to save living beings. His birth through the sexual union of his mother and father accords with the ways of the world; such was how he manifested himself.

You should understand that sutras and vinayas that speak in this way express what has been actually taught by the Tathāgata. A person who acts in accordance with what is expounded by Māra is a follower of Māra. A person who acts in accordance with the sutras and vinayas expounded by the Buddha is a bodhisattva.

Someone may assert:

Though it is said that the Tathāgata at the time of his birth took seven steps in each of the ten directions, you should not believe this.

This view reflects the teaching of Māra.

Someone else may assert:

At the time of his birth the Tathāgata took seven steps in each of the ten directions. This was the Tathāgata expediently manifesting himself.

This view reflects what indeed has been expounded by the Tathāgata in the sutras and vinayas. A person who acts in accordance with what Māra teaches is a follower of Māra. A person who can act in accordance with what the Buddha teaches is a bodhisattva.

Someone may say,

After the bodhisattva was born, his father the king had him carried to temples. After gazing upon him the gods in these temples all descended to express their reverence. This is why he is called “buddha.”

But there may also be criticism of this statement:

If the gods appeared first and the Buddha came later, then why would the gods revere the Buddha?

Understand that such criticism is none other than that of Māra Pāpīyas.

Someone else may say:

When the Buddha went to these temples, Maheśvara, Mahābrahmā, Śakra Devānām Indra, and the other gods all placed their palms together and bowed down to his feet in respect.

Thus is it described in the sutras and vinayas expounded by the Buddha. If someone acts in accordance with what Māra says, that person will be a follower of Māra. But it is a bodhisattva who effectively acts in accordance with what is taught by the Buddha.

Now if there is a sutra or vinaya that states:

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When the Bodhisattva was a prince he searched here and there for a wife motivated by lust. When he remained deep inside the palace, he was seeking pleasure and enjoyment by indulging himself in his five senses.

Know that any sutra or vinaya with words like these would have been taught by Māra Pāpīyas. But if it is explained that

The Bodhisattva has long since abandoned any form of lust or intimacy with his wife and child. This extends even to his refusal of the exalted pleasures of the five senses afforded in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, which he tossed aside like tears or saliva. How could he have interest in normal human desires? Did he not shave his head and leave home in order to pursue the path?

Sutras and vinayas with words like this contain the expositions of the Buddha. If one acts in accordance with Māra's sutras or vinayas, he will be a follower of Māra. But acting in accordance with the Buddha's sutras or vinayas means that person is a bodhisattva.

Someone may say:

When the Buddha was at the monastery donated by Prince Jeta in Śrāvastī, he assented to the monks accepting and keeping female or male slaves, oxen, sheep, elephants, horses, asses, mules, chickens, boars, cats, dogs, gold, silver, lapis lazuli, pearls, crystal, agate, carnelian, coral, amber, white agate, jade, cauldrons made of bronze, and copper bowls or basins as part of their daily necessities. Cultivating fields to grow crops, selling things in markets, stocking grains and rice, and various activities of this nature—because of his great compassion they were all permitted by the Buddha in his sympathy for living beings.

But any sutra or vinaya with that kind of message is a discourse of Māra. On the other hand, if someone were to speak like this:

When the Buddha was residing at the monastery donated by Prince Jeta in Śrāvastī, [he walked to] where *Nālijanḡha¹⁰⁰ lived. On that occasion the Tathāgata spoke with King Prasenajit and this brahman, also known as the Ram of Dignity,¹⁰¹ saying:

Bhikṣus should not accept or keep gold or silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, pearls, agate, carnelian, coral, amber, white agate, jade, slaves, servants, young girls, young boys, oxen or sheep, elephants or horses, asses or mules, chickens or boars, cats or dogs or any other animals, cauldrons made of bronze, copper bowls and basins, any variety of colored carpet or floor covering, or bedding materials, or any other material necessities for the home. They should not be involved in cultivating fields to grow crops, selling things in markets, preparing food with their own hands or polishing it or pounding it by themselves, healing the body with spells, various means of training hawks, gazing up to contemplate the stars and their constellations, engaging in the astronomy of moon cycles, divining the gender [of a child yet to be born], determining whether someone's dream is auspicious or inauspicious, judging the sixty-four artistic skills people have in order to determine which are or are not masculine or feminine, or engaging in the eighteen spells and various other devices that deceive people. They should not be talking about the innumerable facts of mundane life, powdered incense, stick incense, incense used for smearing on the skin, incense used for perfuming, the varieties of flower garlands, the techniques of arranging hair, deceit, flattery, or insatiable greed. They should not take pleasure in crowds and confusion, entertain by means of parties or amusing speech, indulge in [eating] the flesh of fish, mix poisonous chemicals, press fragrant oils, hold decorated umbrellas, or use leather shoes. They should not make fans, containers, or boxes, or create different forms of painting or sculpture, or store grains, rice, millet, beans, or fruit. They should not approach kings, princes, ministers, or women; they should neither laugh in a loud voice nor insist on remaining silent, or give way to frequent doubt about the teachings, nor should they go on and on talking frivolously about how long, how attractive, or how good something is, nor should they favor wearing beautiful clothes.

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Those involved in any of these various impure things will praise themselves before a donor. They will go out to places that are impure, where there is drinking, prostitution, and gambling. Anyone like

this I no longer permit to reside among the *bhikṣus*. They must resign the path, return to lay status, and take up work. Just like weeds [in a field under cultivation], they must all be eliminated [from the sangha], without exception.

You should understand that sutras and vinayas where you find rules that bar things such as these all reflect what has been [genuinely] uttered by the Tathāgata. When one acts in accordance with sutras and vinayas that have been uttered by a māra, one will be a follower of Māra. But one who acts in accordance with what has been said by a *buddha* is a bodhisattva.

If it is said that:

The bodhisattva entered shrines in order to make offerings to deities, namely, Brahmā, Maheśvara, Skanda, and Kātyāyana.¹⁰² But his purpose for doing so was to subjugate those deities and their followers. To say otherwise is untenable.

Or, if it is said that:

The Bodhisattva is unable to enter into discussions about the erroneous theories of heretics since he is unfamiliar with their observances, literature, or art. When slaves are in conflict, he is unable to restore harmony among them. He is not held in high esteem by sovereigns or ministers, whether male or female. And he does not know how to blend medicines. It is precisely because he does not know these things that he is called a “tathāgata.”¹⁰³ And someone who does know these things is considered a heretic [by the Buddha]. At the same time it is also said that in situations of others bearing resentment or affection toward him, the mind of a tathāgata is equanimous, he is indifferent to being cut with a sword or to having his body smeared with fragrance, as he has no sense of profitable gain or harmful loss toward either. It is precisely because he dwells in the world [in this manner] that he is known as a “tathāgata.”

You should understand any sutra or vinaya discourse that professes sentiments like these reflects what has been expounded by Māra. By contrast, you may hear someone say:

The Bodhisattva has shown himself entering the shrines of certain deities and going forth to cultivate the path of other dharmas. He has made plain his understanding of the observances and ceremonies practiced [within those faiths], he has grasped the import of their literature and their art, and he has shown himself entering the writing schools and performance spaces [of those of other faiths]. The Bodhisattva has skillfully resolved conflicts among slaves. Among the great mass of people—whether they are boys, girls, women of the imperial harem, queens from the imperial household, townsmen or country people, householders, brahmans, kings, ministers, or the multitudes of the poor—no one has been more honored than the Bodhisattva and he is respected uniformly by everyone. He shows himself doing these things, but although he is indeed there doing what he is seen to do, he has no affectionate attachment to any of it. Like a lotus flower, he is unaffected by mud. It is for the purpose of delivering living beings that he skillfully acts in these expedient ways, complying with how the world works.

If you come across any sutra or vinaya with statements like this, know that it reflects what the Tathāgata said. If someone accords with the words of a māra, that person will be a follower of Māra. If someone accords with the words of the Buddha, that person will be a great bodhisattva. You may also hear this said:

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When the Tathāgata expounded the sutras and vinayas for us, within the dharma regarding bad behavior, there were offenses of various degrees of gravity, as well as the *sthūlātyaya* transgressions,¹⁰⁴ all of which are of a serious nature. Yet within our vinaya, we ultimately decided not to take things in that way. I may have patiently endured dharmas like this for some time but if you did not believe in these teachings, would I take the position that “I will abandon my own vinaya to follow yours”? The vinaya you have was preached by Māra. Our sutras and vinayas are admonitions laid down by the Buddha. The Buddha first expounded the ninefold [teachings with the authority] of the dharma seal, and these nine seals authorize our sutras and vinayas.¹⁰⁵ In the beginning one did not hear one

sentence, even one word, of any well-balanced sutras preached by the Tathāgata. In all the innumerable sutras and vinayas, where are these well-balanced sutras expounded? Thus within [our canon] one never hears of a “tenfold” group of scriptures. The existence of this kind of thing should be understood as undoubtedly the work of Devadatta. Devadatta is an evil man who created the well-balanced sutras in his effort to destroy the good dharma. We do not believe in sutras of that type.

A statement like this would have been uttered by a māra. Why? Because this way of thinking shatters the sense of propriety inherent in the buddhadharma itself. It is a way of speaking in which people will say:

That may be so in your sutras, but it is not in our sutras. The contents of our sutras and vinayas are the words of the Tathāgata, [but yours must originate elsewhere]. When [the Buddha said] “after my nirvāṇa a corrupted world will contain improper sutras and vinayas,” he was referring to the well-balanced Mahāyāna sutras.

In the future, the world will have corrupt *bhikṣus* [who think] like this. So I declare, moreover, that the well-balanced sutras surpass the ninefold canon of scriptures. You should recognize anyone who is able to grasp their meaning as a person who correctly grasps [all] sutras and vinayas, as a person who distances himself from all impurities, and as a person as glorious and pure as the full moon.

Now you may also encounter someone who claims this:

Although within each sutra and vinaya the Tathāgata expounded a plethora of meanings as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River, it goes without saying that whatever is not in our vinaya is not [a genuine doctrine]. For if it were [genuine], then why would the Tathāgata have not have explained it in the context of our vinaya? For this reason I am not in a position to accept [these Mahāyāna scriptures].

You should recognize this person as one who has thus committed an offense. That person may also say,

I will embrace sutras and vinayas like this. Why? Because in doing so I create a wholesome dharma that becomes the cause by which I will know the contentment of reducing desires, I will cut off my defilements, and I will realize wisdom and nirvāṇa.

One who talks like this is not a disciple of mine. But if someone were to say, “The Tathāgata expounded the well-balanced sutras in order to bring deliverance to living beings,” *this* person you should recognize as my true disciple.¹⁰⁶ If someone does not accept the well-balanced sutras, understand that a person in that position could not be my disciple, for they have not gone forth in the Buddha’s dharma but instead would be a disciple of heretics holding erroneous views. Sutras and vinayas that are [well balanced] like this are those that were expounded by the Buddha. Discourses that are not like this are those that were expounded by a māra, and anyone who follows what has been expounded by a māra is of the assembly of Māra. But it is a bodhisattva who follows what has been expounded by the Buddha.

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In addition, good man, you may also hear someone say:

The Tathāgata is not one who has accomplished immeasurable virtue. He is impermanent; he changes. By attaining the dharma of emptiness he has been disseminating [the notion of] nonself, but this does not accord with how the world is.

Sutras or vinaya like that are to be known as māra utterances. But if there is someone who claims this:

The Tathāgata’s awakening is beyond conception. Moreover, this has been accomplished by means of the virtue accrued over countless *asaṃkhyeya kalpas*, and this is why he abides permanently without change.

[Know that] sutras and vinayas such as this reflect what was uttered by the Buddha. If one acts in accordance with that which is preached by māras, this then places that individual among the followers of māras, but to act in accordance what has been preached by buddhas is to be a bodhisattva.

You will also hear this said:

There may be a *bhikṣu* who has not actually committed a *pārājika* offense but a group of people nevertheless claims that he has done so and is [as guilty] as if he had cut down a *tāla* tree.¹⁰⁷

Thus may a *bhikṣu* be [so accused], despite the fact that he committed no violation. What is this about?

I have always said, “To commit even one of the four *pārājika* offenses would be like splitting a stone: it cannot be made whole again.” If someone comes forth to admit having overstated his own religious achievements, that offense I would call *pārājika*. Why? Because when someone pretends to have attained something that he has not, he has lost his sense of social responsibility, and this is to be known as *pārājika*. But there is also the story of a particular *bhikṣu* who was satisfied with few desires, pure in maintaining precepts, and resided in a place of empty quietude. When the king and his ministers happened upon him, they looked at him and thought he must have attained arhatship. So they went before him to offer praise, respect, and make obeisance, and said, “Great teachers such as yourself attain *anuttarā samyaksambodhi* after relinquishing their bodies.”

When the *bhikṣu* heard this, he responded to the king by saying,

The truth is that I have not attained even the fruit of the path of a novice. O king, do not praise me for having accomplished the path. I beseech you, great king, do not speak of a dharma that is only discontent to me. By “discontent” I am referring to your mention of my attainment of *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*, which everyone accepts in silence, but were I to accept this statement of attainment in silence now, it would incur the reproach of the buddhas. To course in contentment based in understanding is to be praised by the buddhas, so I intend to joyfully cultivate this throughout my entire life. Yet to know such contentment is to be aware that I myself have definitely not attained the fruit of the path. The king has praised my accomplishments but at the moment I cannot accept this, which is why it is called “contentment based in understanding.”

The king then answered him: “Master, you have truly attained the fruit of arhatship; you are no different from a buddha.”

Thereafter the king spoke widely of this monk to people both inside and outside his kingdom, even telling his wives and consorts, so that everyone would know that he had attained the *śrāmaṇera* path. As a result, this led everyone who heard about him to regard him with a sense of trust, reverence, and deep respect. And in his own way, this *bhikṣu* truly was someone pure in his religious practice. This causal chain of events broadly enabled others to obtain great blessings as well, so [despite the false declaration of his attainment,] this *bhikṣu* was certainly not guilty of having committed the *pārājika* offense [of overstating his religious achievements]. The reason is that the person facing him joyously praised and venerated the monk of his own accord, unprompted. What violation could thus have been committed by a monk like this? For someone to claim this man to be guilty of a precept violation like I mentioned earlier tells you that whatever sutra [is used for this judgment] could only have been expounded by a *māra*.

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Now consider another *bhikṣu* who, in preaching from the *Profound Scripture of the Buddha’s Hidden Treasury* (**Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*), said:¹⁰⁸

All living beings possess buddha-nature, and it is because of this nature that they cut off the countless billions of the fetters caused by the defilements, thereby attaining *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*. The only exceptions are the *icchāntikas*.

When the king and his ministers then asked:

Bhikṣu, will you become a buddha or not? Do you have buddha-nature or not?

The *bhikṣu* answered:

Within my current body buddha-nature is definitely present. Whether or not I attain buddhahood is something yet to be determined.

The king said, “Venerable sir, if one thus does not become an *icchāntika*, does that mean one will surely attain buddhahood?”

The monk replied, “Yes, it is truly as the king says.”

So although this person declared that he definitely possessed buddha-nature, in his case he too did not commit the *pārājika* offense [of overstating his religious achievements].

There was also a *bhikṣu* who, at the time of his ordination, thought to himself, “Without fail I will definitely attain *anuttarā samyakṣambodhi*.” Someone like this may not have attained the highest path, but the merit he has already attained is immeasurable and without limit in a way that cannot be put into words. If someone were to claim that [by thinking in this way] this man commits the *pārājika* offense [of overstating his religious achievements], then it would mean that no *bhikṣu* would ever be innocent of this charge. Why do I say this? Because over the last eight billion *kalpas*, I have always separated myself from all things impure, been content with few desires, accomplished the proper comportment, and diligently cultivated the unsurpassed *tathāgatagarbha*. And I knew for certain, by myself, that in my body I possessed buddha-nature. For that reason, “attaining *anuttarā samyakṣambodhi*” is attaining what I now call “the great compassion of a buddha.” Sutras and vinayas that contain ideas like this are the discourses of the Buddha. Those who are unable to follow them are followers of Māra. Those who are able to follow them are great bodhisattvas.

There are also those who say:

There is no such thing as the four *pārājika* transgressions, the thirteen *saṃghāvaśeṣa* violations that bring suspension and require adjudication, the two indeterminate violations, the thirty offenses regarding personal property, the ninety-one offenses removed by ritual confession, the teaching of the fourfold repentance, the manifold areas of behavior requiring personal study, the seven rules for resolving conflicts within the sangha, and so forth. The *sthūlātyaya* transgressions showing gross criminal intent and the five heinous crimes do not exist, nor are there any *icchantikas*. If there are monks who fall into the hells [in their next rebirth] by committing these types of offenses, then people of other faiths are all reborn in the heavens. Why? Because people following other paths do not have precepts

that can be violated like this. Therefore [we know that] the Tathāgata expounds these precepts just to create fear in people.

Or, if one says that the Buddha preached that:

When my *bhikṣus* want to engage in sexual activity they should remove their dharma vestments and put on secular clothing; then and only then should they indulge in sex.

That should make you rethink [statements such as this]:

The consequence of sexual activity is not a transgression for me. While the Tathāgata was in the world there were *bhikṣus* who repeatedly engaged in sexual activity and yet obtained true liberation. When their lives came to an end, they were reborn in the heavens. There have been people like this in the past and there are people like this in the present; I am not the only person to do this. So even if one commits a violation of one of the four grave *pārājika* offenses or five heinous crimes, or engages in any kind of impure ritual, that person can still attain genuine liberation. And although the Tathāgata did say, “Committing a minor *duṣkṛta* violation [results in] falling into a hell for eight million years, measuring time as it passes in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven,”¹⁰⁹ this was just the Tathāgata manifesting himself for the purpose of instilling fear in people. After all, some people say, “There is no distinction between the severity of *pārājika* and *duṣkṛta* offenses.”

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These vinaya masters falsely claim that their statements reflect rules enunciated by the Buddha. Surely you will understand that these ideas do not reflect anything expounded by the Buddha. Statements like these come from the sutras and vinayas of Māra.

You may also hear it explained that:

Among the various precepts, if you violate even a small one, even something minute, the unpleasant karmic consequences will be beyond measure. Thus we understand the importance of protecting ourselves like a tortoise that hides his six appendages.

Similarly, you may encounter a vinaya master who makes the claim that “all precept violations are without karmic repercussions.” You should avoid getting close to someone like this. For the Buddha has said:

Transgressing even a single dharma [in silence],
I regard as deceitful speech.
Your next life may not be visible to you
But it will not be formed without bad [karmic fruit].

Therefore you should not get close to such people. Thus is the purity within my Buddha’s dharma, and how much more apparent this is for those who commit the serious offenses of *sthūlātyaya*, *saṃghāvaśeṣa*, or *pārājika* and then deny they are transgressions! Therefore you should take seriously the need to guard against dharmas like those [coming from irresponsible sources]. If you do not protect [this edifice], will there be anything to whatever dharma I have labeled a “prohibition”? As I have explained in the sutras, anyone who commits a violation of anything from the *pārājikas* down to the fine points of *duṣkṛta* will indeed face hardship.¹¹⁰

If living beings do not uphold the ordinances and observances, how will they be able to see the buddha-nature? Although all living beings possess buddha-nature, they have to maintain morality; only then will they see it. And it is by means of seeing buddha-nature that one attains *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*. The ninefold canon does not contain the well-balanced sutras, and that is why there is no exposition on the existence of buddha-nature to be found within it. But though this is not expounded in those sutras, you should recognize that it truly exists. If someone speaks to this point, you should recognize that person as a true disciple of mine.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, you have just explained that all living beings possess buddha-nature. But as we never hear of this in the ninefold canon, would we not be committing a serious *pārājika* offense by preaching this?

The Buddha said:

Good man, in fact there will be no *pārājika* violation if you explain it just as you have done. Good man, this is analogous to someone claiming the

ocean contains only seven kinds of jewels and not eight, for that person commits no precept violation. If someone were to say that throughout our ninefold canon there is no reference to buddha-nature, this person would also commit no precept violation. Why do I say this? Because it is [only] in the ocean of wisdom that is the Mahāyāna that I expound the existence of buddha-nature. But this is something that is not perceived by those of the two vehicles, so therefore if they preach that it does not exist, they are not at fault. A realm such as this is known by buddhas; it is not included in the furthest reaches of the knowledge held by śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas.

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Good man, if people have never heard of the profound, hidden tathāgata treasury, how could they be aware of the existence of buddha-nature? What is it that I am calling “a hidden treasury”? I am talking about the well-balanced Mahāyāna scriptures themselves. Good man, there are other paths: some expound a self that is permanent, some expound a self that is cut off permanently [at death]. The Tathāgata is not like them. In affirming both self and nonself, I call it “the middle path.” One way of explaining this is that the Buddha expounds a middle path in which all living beings possess buddha-nature, but because it is obscured by the defilements they do not understand it and do not see it. Therefore you must diligently cultivate whatever expedient means you can in order to destroy those defilements. Know that the person who effectively states things in this way will not be guilty of any of the four grave offenses. To not effectively state things in this way I declare to be guilty of a *pārājika* offense.

You may encounter someone who says:

I have already attained *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*. Why? Because I possess buddha-nature. Those who possess buddha-nature will definitely attain unsurpassed perfect enlightenment without fail. So by this reasoning, I have already attained awakening (*bodhi*).

You should recognize this person as having committed what I consider a *pārājika* offense. Why? Although one may *have* buddha-nature, without cultivating one’s understanding of skillful means one will therefore not *see* it. And never having seen it, one simply cannot attain *anuttarā*

samyaksambodhi. Good man, understand the implications here: the Buddha's dharma is exceedingly profound; it is inconceivable.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha again and asked:

World-Honored One, there is a king who has asked: "When can we say a *bhikṣu* has fallen into the transgression of overstating his religious achievements?"

The Buddha said to Kāśyapa:

If a *bhikṣu* engages in flattery, guile, or false sanctity for purposes of personal gain, even just for food or drink, he will [be thinking]:

How can I get people in society to think that I am indeed a genuine almsbeggar [with religious intent]? How could I use that situation to enable me to obtain fortune and fame?

Bhikṣus such as these suffer from serious delusion. Throughout the long night they will be continually thinking,

The truth is that I will never attain the fruit of any of the four paths of a *śramaṇa*, so what can I do to get people in society to say that I have? How can I get all the laymen and laywomen to point to me and say: "That is man replete with merit, a true saint."

This kind of thinking reflects one who seeks profit solely for himself; he is not devoted to the dharma. When people pass by him or go in and out of his vicinity, they halt and look at him closely, seeing how he holds his robe and almsbegging bowl without breaking the rules of deportment, how he sits in a solitary place just like an arhat. This sight may cause worldly people all to remark, "*Bhikṣus* like that are the best of the lot. They diligently pursue austere practices, cultivating a dharma of tranquility." [While the monk thinks:]

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With a situation like this, I could end up with a big gain in the number of disciples who follow me. They will bring me offerings, clothing, food and drink, furniture, and medicine. It will also mean I can get many women to love and respect me.

If you [encounter] a *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī* who engages in something like this, this is someone who has fallen into the transgression of overstating his religious achievements.

There are also *bhikṣus* who reside in an empty, quiet place because they seek to make the unsurpassed, true-dharma more prominent. They are not arhats, yet they want others to remark, “That is an arhat, that is a good *bhikṣu*, that is a skillful *bhikṣu*, that is a tranquil *bhikṣu*,” in order to get countless numbers of people to develop faith. By means of this opportunity, they [think]:

I could obtain countless *bhikṣus* who would make up an assembly. And by obtaining the teachings, precept-violating monks and laymen could be brought to successfully keep the precepts, which then becomes an opportunity to promote the true-dharma, honoring what is most important to the Tathāgata, elucidating the transformative nature of the well-balanced Mahāyāna dharma, liberating innumerable living beings, and gaining a good grasp of the relative significance of what is expounded by the Tathāgata in the sutras and vinayas.

They will also say:

Now I also have buddha-nature. There is a sutra called *Tathāgata-garbha*, which states that I will accomplish the buddha path without fail, completely eliminating the untold millions of defilements [within myself].

And in speaking more generally to laymen:

All of you, without exception, have buddha-nature. You and I together are well situated in the foundation of the Tathāgata, on which we will attain *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*, eliminating the untold millions of defilements.

Those who speak like this I would not call people who have fallen into overstating their religious achievements; I call them bodhisattvas.

As I mentioned, committing a minor *duṣkṛta* violation means suffering the karmic retribution of falling into a hell for eight million years,

measuring time as it passes in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, so what would the more serious *sthūlātyaya* violation entail? In the Mahāyāna if there are *bhikṣus* who commit *sthūlātyaya* transgressions, you should not get close to them, but what would I call a *sthūlātyaya* transgression within the purview of the Mahāyāna? If, for example, a layperson of distinction builds a Buddhist monastery and adorns it with flower garlands as an offering to the Buddha, and then a *bhikṣu* who sees the string running through the flower garland, without asking, abruptly pulls it out [and thereby ruins the garland], that would be a *sthūlātyaya* violation. Whether [the individual] understands the nature of what he has done or not, it is still a transgression. Or if someone driven by vehement desire was to smash a Buddhist stupa, that would constitute a *sthūlātyaya* violation. You should not get close to people who act like this.

Consider this. A king and his ministers come across a decaying stupa. Wanting to repair it as an offering to its relics, they enter into the stupa and there discover a rare gem, which they then entrust to a resident *bhikṣu*. But the *bhikṣu*, upon obtaining the jewel, feels free to use it for himself. A *bhikṣu* who reacts like this I call “someone impure who often foments conflict.” A good layman should neither get close to such a person, nor make any offerings to him, nor pay him any respect.

406a A *bhikṣu* like this may be someone known to be “without any sexual faculty,” or “of two sexual faculties,” or “of indeterminate sexual faculty.” For someone of indeterminate sexual faculty, when they feel lust for a woman their body thereupon becomes feminine, and when they feel lust for a man their body thereupon becomes masculine. A *bhikṣu* like this is known for having a problematic sexual faculty; I do not call this person male, I do not call this person female, I do not call this person a renunciant, and I do not call this person a lay follower either. You should not become close to *bhikṣus* like this, give them offerings, or respect them.¹¹¹

Within the Buddha’s dharma, the dharma for *śramaṇas* teaches that one should foster compassion, nurturing living beings even as small as a black ant. One should also promote fearlessness. In this *śramaṇa* dharma there is abstinence from the consumption of alcohol and the enjoyment of fragrant smells. This *śramaṇa* dharma does not abide lying or even the imagined telling of lies in dreams. This *śramaṇa* dharma

does not produce a mind filled with desires and even in a dream state it is no different. Such is the dharma for *śramaṇas*.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying: “World-Honored One, if a *bhikṣu* engages in sexual activity while dreaming, is this a violation of the precepts or not?”

The Buddha answered:

It is not. Nevertheless he should take in the unpleasant smell produced from sexual desire and engage in a meditation on purity wherein not even one thought of [sexual desire] arises, and a meditation on abstaining from the defilement of affectionate attachment to women. If one dreams of engaging in sex, upon awakening one should feel regret. When a *bhikṣu* [who is troubled by sexual desire] receives an offering while begging for food, he should eat thinking of the food as the flesh of a child in a world that is starving. If he continues to have lustful desires he should immediately free himself from such thoughts [as soon as they arise]. Teachings of this kind you should know to be precisely what the Buddha has expounded in the sutras and vinayas. One who accords with what a *māra* has taught will be a follower of *Māra*. One who accords with what the Buddha has taught I call “bodhisattva.”

You may also hear someone say:

The Buddha allows his *bhikṣus* to hold one leg in the air and remain silent, to jump into an abyss, to lay down upon fire, to let oneself fall from a cliff, to remain in painful circumstances, to take poison, to fast, to lie face down in ashes, to bind their own hands and feet, to kill living beings, to practice geomancy, and to cast spells. The children of *caṇḍālas*, people without any sexual faculty, people with two sexual faculties, people with indeterminate sexual faculty, or people whose faculties are incomplete, are all permitted to take the tonsure and follow the Buddhist path.

This I call an exposition of *Māra*.

[You may hear] that the Buddha at first allowed the eating of the five flavors derived from [the milk of] cows, as well as oil and honey, and he also allowed the wearing of *kauśeya* silk robes and leather shoes. But

aside from this, there are those who say that he permits the wearing of *mahārāṅkava* wool garments,¹¹² that the stockpiling of seeds of any kind [by the sangha] is allowed, that [he recognizes] all things categorized as grasses and trees as having individual life spans, or that after the Buddha finishes this discourse he will enter nirvāṇa. If you come across any sutras or vinayas that expound doctrines like these, you should know them to have been uttered by a māra.

406b I do not allow the continuous holding of one leg in the air. For the sake of the dharma, I do permit people to practice walking, standing still, sitting, or lying down. But I do not allow the taking of poison, fasting, the burning of any of the body's five appendages, the binding of hands and feet, the killing of living beings, the practice of geomancy, the casting of spells, the adornment of leather shoes with mother-of-pearl or ivory, the storing of seeds, the idea that grasses and trees have individual life spans, or the wearing of *mahārāṅkava* wool. If someone claims that the World-Honored One preaches in favor of these things, you should understand that such a person is a follower of a heretical path—he is not a disciple of mine. But I do allow the eating of the five flavors derived from [the milk of] cows, as well as oil and honey. And I do permit the wearing of leather shoes and the *kaūṣeya* silk robes. I have stated that the four basic elements of earth, water, fire, and wind do not have a life span [in the usual sense]. Any sutras or vinayas that expound things in this way I would call sermons of the Buddha, and anyone who is in accordance with these sermons should be recognized as a true disciple of mine. Anyone who is not in accordance with what the Buddha has uttered is a follower of Māra. Anyone who follows the Buddha sutras or vinayas should be regarded as a great bodhisattva.

Good man, I have now related in some detail the difference between that which characterizes what is said by the Buddha and what is said by Māra.

Kāśyapa then said to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, now for the first time I understand the distinction between what māras preach and what buddhas preach. As a result, I feel that I am able to enter into the deep significance of the Buddha's dharma.

The Buddha praised Kāśyapa, saying:

Excellent! Excellent! Good man, I see that this distinction has been clarified for you. This I call wise.

Good man, what is commonly known as “suffering” or **duḥkha* does not refer to the so-called [First] Noble Truth. Why is this? Because if the usual use of “suffering” referred to the “noble truth of suffering,” it would mean that all cows, sheep, mules, horses, and even beings in hell would have “noble truths.” Good man, if someone did not understand that the profound realm of a tathāgata is that of a subtle and mysterious dharma body in which he abides permanently and immutably, that person might say “he has a body that eats, not a dharma body.” Such a person does not understand either the virtue or the majesty of the Tathāgata. This is what I call “suffering.” Why? Because it is out of ignorance that a person regards what is proper (dharma) as what is improper (*adharmā*), and regards what is improper as proper. It should be understood that whoever [makes mistakes] like this will surely fall into one of the unfortunate realms as they transmigrate through saṃsāra. This will only increase their bonds to the cycle of rebirth, and they will have to endure many hardships. When, on the other hand, one is able to realize the fact that the Tathāgata abides permanently and immutably, then by merely hearing the sound of the two words “abides permanently” even once, that person will be directly reborn in the heavens. Later, at the time of their liberation, they will be able to witness the fact that the Tathāgata abides permanently and is immutable. And having attested to this, they will say:

In the past I had only heard about this, but now I have gained liberation and thereupon witnessed it myself. Because I was ignorant of the ultimate reality, I continued to revolve in the cycle of birth and death [seemingly] with no end. But today I have finally achieved true understanding.

When one has understood in this way, they truly appreciate the implications of *duḥkha*, the benefits of which are substantial. But in the absence of such understanding, no matter how diligent one’s practice may be, there will be no benefit. This I call “understanding *duḥkha*” or “the noble truth

of suffering.” But for individuals unable to cultivate [understanding] in this way, what they call “suffering” will not be the noble truth of suffering.

406c The [Second] Noble Truth of the causes of suffering denotes what happens when genuine understanding of the genuine dharma does not take place. It is when one accepts impure things such as slaves, effectively taking what is improper and saying, “this is the true-dharma.” Vitiating the true-dharma prevents it from abiding for any length of time and under these conditions there will be no understanding of the natural conditions that are *dharmatā*. It is owing to that fundamental ignorance that one transmigrates through *saṃsāra*, incurring much suffering and anxiety, unable to gain either rebirth in the heavens or liberation proper. One who fully recognizes the true-dharma does not damage it, and under those conditions gains rebirth in the heavens or liberation proper. For one who does not recognize the reasoning in the truth of how suffering is caused, the “true-dharma” will not permanently abide: in every way it will be a disappearing dharma. Under these conditions, individuals will experience much pain and anguish in the process of a transmigration that continues for innumerable *kalpas*. If someone can succeed in recognizing the dharma that abides permanently in a way no different [from any other time or place], that I would call “understanding the causes” or “the noble truth of the causes of suffering.” But for the individual unable to cultivate [understanding] in this way, what are called “the causes” will not be the noble truth of the causes of suffering.

The [Third] Noble Truth is the destruction of suffering. If one diligently practices and studies the dharma of emptiness, this will not do. Why? Because eliminating all dharmas [also] destroys the true dharmatreasury of the Tathāgata. To practice and study like this I call “cultivating emptiness.” But does cultivating the destruction of suffering [in this way] contrast with all of the other paths that are heretical? One may speak of “the cultivation of emptiness as the truth of the destruction [of suffering],” but the heretical paths all cultivate a dharma of emptiness as well and [assert] it must be the truth of the destruction [of suffering].

If one were to assert, “There is a *tathāgatagarbha*, and even though it cannot be seen it is capable of eliminating all the defilements, which is the point at which one comprehends it,” then upon bringing forth this

state of mind, by the conditions wrought by this single thought, one can attain freedom in all dharmas. For one whose meditation focuses on non-self and empty quiescence as the hidden treasury of the Tathāgata, however, there will be innumerable transmigrations and the incurring of suffering throughout. Those who do not approach practice in that way, despite the presence of the defilements [within themselves] will find [those defilements] quickly eliminated. How could this be? It happens through the understanding of the tathāgata hidden treasury—and this is what I call “the noble truth of the destruction of suffering.” Anyone who is able to practice the destruction of suffering in this way is a true disciple of mine. Anyone who is not able to practice in this way I regard as someone cultivating emptiness, which does not [lead to] the noble truth of the destruction of suffering.

The [Fourth] Noble Truth of the path refers to the [Three] Jewels of the buddha, dharma, and sangha, and also includes liberation proper. There are those living beings, however, with misconceptions in the form of inversions of their thinking, who say: “There is no buddha, dharma, or sangha, nor is there any liberation. The notion of transmigrating in saṃsāra is just an illusion.” If someone were to cultivate this way of seeing things, it would lead to incurring significant suffering throughout that person’s transmigration in the triple world. But those who can arrive at a perspective in which the Tathāgata is permanently abiding and immutable, and see the dharma, sangha, and liberation likewise, will ride that single thought to a resultant freedom for countless lifetimes, obtained at their whim. Why is this? In the past I also held four inverted views, taking what was not dharma and reckoning it as dharma, for which I received bad karmic fruition beyond measure. It is because I have already eliminated all such thinking that I have attained the complete awakening of a buddha. This is called the [Fourth] Noble Truth of the path. Now if there are people who assert that the Three Jewels are impermanent and cultivate that viewpoint, such practice based on falsehood will not bring the noble truth of the path. But if someone cultivates the notion that the dharma permanently abides, that person would be my disciple. To practice the Four Noble Truths in a way that is based on true seeing, that is what I call the “Four Noble Truths.”

407a The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying: “World-Honored One, I now understand for the first time how to practice the dharma of the profound Four Noble Truths.”

[The Four Inversions]¹¹³

The Buddha told Kāśyapa,

Good man, the term “four inversions” (**viparyāsa*) [begins with] the perception of suffering as occurring in a situation that is not one of suffering. This [misconception] is what I call an “inversion.” Nonsuffering (i.e. the total absence of suffering) is that which we call “tathāgata.” To perceive suffering in association with tathāgatas is to regard them as impermanent and changeable, and if someone were to say, “The Tathāgata is impermanent,” that would constitute the suffering of a serious transgression. Or if someone were to say, “The Tathāgata relinquishes this body of suffering when he enters nirvāṇa, akin to the extinguishing of a flame when burning firewood is exhausted,” this I would [also] call the perception of suffering where there is no suffering. These are what I call “inversions.”

Or, someone may put forward this view:

If I said, “The Tathāgata is permanent,” that would reflect a personalist viewpoint.¹¹⁴ But the personalist viewpoint is a transgression beyond measure. For this reason it should be preached that the Tathāgata is impermanent. When the dharma is expounded in this way I will feel happy.

But to assert the impermanence of a tathāgata amounts to a statement affirming suffering [in a tathāgata]. And if [one perceives] suffering in tathāgatas, then how do you account for their inherent bliss? Because this amounts to the perception of bliss in suffering, it is to be called “an inversion.” And the perception of suffering in bliss I also call an inversion. Bliss is precisely what a tathāgata is. Suffering is what a tathāgata would be as something impermanent. To say tathāgatas are impermanent is what I call “perceiving suffering in what is bliss” because tathāgatas do abide permanently, and that is called bliss.

Someone may say, “The Tathāgata is permanent, so why does he enter nirvāṇa?” Or, “The Tathāgata is devoid of suffering, so why is he going to jettison his body to go out of existence?” These too are perceptions of suffering in what is bliss, and hence I call them inversions. This represents the first type of inversion.

The perception of permanence in what is impermanent and the perception of impermanence in what is permanent, these I also call inversions. Impermanence is called the noncultivation of emptiness; by not focusing one’s practice on emptiness one’s lifetime is shortened. So if someone says, “By not cultivating the practice of emptiness and quiescence you will obtain a longer lifetime,” [know that] I would consider this statement to be inverting [the truth]. This represents the second type of inversion.

The perception of self in what is nonself and the perception of nonself in what is self, these I also call inversions. Worldly people speak of the existence of a self and we also speak of the existence of a self in the Buddha’s dharma, but although worldly people affirm the existence of self they do not affirm the existence of buddha-nature. This particular view I call “the perception of self in what is nonself” and this, too, is an inversion. There is a self in the Buddha’s dharma but that self is the buddha-nature.

When worldly people say “there is no self in the Buddha’s dharma,” I call this “the perception of nonself in what is self.” So if someone says, “There is definitely no self in the dharma of the Buddha; that is why the Tathāgata commands his disciples to cultivate practices focused on non-self,” I would call that an inversion. Such notions represent what I call the third type of inversion.

The perception of impurity in what is pure and the perception of purity in what is impure, these I also call inversions. What is pure is precisely the permanent abiding of the Tathāgata, whose body is neither a body sustained by any sort of food, nor a body affected by the defilements, nor a body of flesh, nor a body held together by muscle and bone. Nonetheless someone may assert that

The Tathāgata is impermanent. His is a body sustained by food; it is a body held together by muscles and bones. The dharma, the

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sangha, and the [path to] liberation will all be extinguished [when he dies].

This I call an “inversion.”

Regarding the inversion of perceiving purity in what is impure, you may hear someone say this:

Within this body of mine there is not one dharma that is not pure. It is by means of this lack of impurity that I will surely gain entrance into that place of purity [known as nirvāṇa]. This is the practice of “the contemplation on impurity” that has been taught by the Tathāgata.

This kind of speech is incoherent and false; I call it inverted. These errors represent the fourth type of inversion.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then said to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, today for the first time I have gained the right view of these things. World-Honored One, the way we were previously you would have called us people who held wrong views.

[Kāśyapa continued:] “World-Honored One, is there a self or not in any of the twenty-five forms of existence?”

The Buddha said:

Good man, “self” is precisely what *tathāgatagarbha* means. All living beings have buddha-nature, and this is what is meant by *this* notion of self. However, the significance of “self” understood in this way has been continuously covered over by an uncountable number of the defilements since the beginning [of any given individual’s existence], and that is why living beings have been unable to perceive it.

[The Five Parables on Buddha-nature]¹¹⁵

[Parable One]

Good man, consider the parable of an impoverished woman who had a treasure of pure gold within the area of her home. None of the people living in the house were aware of its existence, be they children or adults.

On one particular occasion, however, an outsider appeared who knew all about the gold and spoke of it to the woman, using expedient means. He then said, “I would like to hire you now. You can remove some weeds for me.”

She then replied: “I cannot. But if you were to point out to my son where this treasure-trove of gold is [that you speak of], after that I would quickly come to do that for you.”

The man answered, “I know an expedient way to show this to your son.”

The woman responded, “None of the people in my house, child or adult, know anything about this. How could you possibly know?”

The man said, “I will now make everything clear.”

This prompted the woman to respond, “Indeed, I also want to see it. Can you show it to me as well?”

The man then immediately dug up the treasure of pure gold that had been [under] their home. When the woman saw it, she was ecstatic. Enamored of how miraculous the entire event was, she regarded the man with deep admiration.

Good man, the buddha-nature of living beings is just like this: not all living beings are able to perceive it, just like that treasure-trove of which that poor woman was not aware. Good man, what I have now shown is the universality of buddha-nature, possessed by all living beings yet obscured by their defilements, analogous to a poor person who possesses a treasure of pure gold that she cannot see. Today the Tathāgata has shown the universally [existing] treasure repositories of enlightenment in living beings, in other words, buddha-nature itself. When living beings do perceive this, their hearts are filled with joy and a deep reverence for the Tathāgata. [In this parable,] the person of skillful means is the Tathāgata, the woman living in poverty represents all living beings, and the treasure of pure gold is the buddha-nature.

[Parable Two]

In addition, good man, consider the story of a caring woman and her infant son who had become ill. In distress, the woman sent for a physician, and when he arrived he mixed together a medicine made of three things:

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clarified butter, milk, and granulated honey. As he gave the mixture to her to feed to her child, the physician explained, “After the child takes the medicine, do not give him your milk. You may feed him only after he has fully digested the medicine.” So the mother then smeared a bitter-tasting substance on her breasts and said to her young child, “My breasts are smeared with poison so you must not touch them.” When the child became hungry he wanted his mother’s milk, but hearing that her breasts were poisonous he pulled away from her. Eventually the medicine was absorbed by the child, whereupon the mother washed her breasts with water and called out to her son, “Come and I shall give you milk.” But at that point, though the little boy felt hunger and thirst, what he had heard earlier about the poison prevented him from approaching her. The mother then told him, “It was only because I was giving you medicine that I used the poison! Now that you have fully digested the medicine, I have cleaned myself completely, so you may come and drink from my breasts without pain or bitterness.” Upon hearing this, the infant eventually returned and resumed his feeding.

Good man, the Tathāgata is just like this. It was for the sake of saving everyone that I [previously] taught living beings to cultivate [their understanding] of nonself in all dharmas (*sarvadharmā anātman*), [explaining that] after they had practiced in this manner they will have forsaken their egotism (*ahaṃkāra*) forever and [thereby] attain nirvāṇa. [I taught the nonexistence of self (*nairātmabhāva*)] in order to dispel erroneous views circulating in the mundane world and reveal a supramundane dharma [to replace it]. In addition, I showed that worldly presumptions of self (*laukikātman*) are fallacious and not real. [In this context] cultivating the dharma of nonself is therefore meant to cleanse one’s identity. Just as in this parable of the woman who smeared her breast with bitter flavor in order to help her child, in like manner the Tathāgata explained that dharmas are all without self in order to [lead his followers to] cultivate emptiness. And just as the woman called her child only after washing her breasts because she wanted him to resume feeding, I also choose this particular moment now to expound the *tathāgatagarbha*. For this reason, *bhikṣus*, do not be afraid! Like that small child who eventually returned to drink his mother’s milk after hearing her calling him, *bhikṣus*

on their own should also distinguish the fact that the *tathāgatagarbha* cannot possibly not exist.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then spoke to the Buddha:

But World-Honored One, truly there is no self. Why is this so? When a child is born he has no understanding of anything. If there were a self, then on the day he is born we would expect him to have knowledge. This is why we know for certain there is no self. Or, if the existence of a self were certain, then after being born there should be no end to life. If all [living beings] had buddha-nature, it would mean permanent abiding and no dimension of dissolution in the [human condition and in other living beings]. If there were no dimension of dissolution, then why would there be distinctions between *kṣatriyas*, *brahmans*, *vaiśyas*, *śūdras*, *caṇḍālas*, and animals?¹¹⁶ But now we can see that karmic conditions are dissimilar in various ways, which accordingly results in each realm of rebirth being different. If the existence of a self were certain, then there would be no superiority and inferiority relative to all the different living beings. For these reasons we know with certainty that the buddha-nature is not a permanent dharma. If you say the buddha-nature is indeed permanent, then what is the principle that explains the existence of murder, thievery, licentiousness, deception, backbiting, lying, flattery, greed, anger, or erroneous opinions? If our self-natures were permanent, then why do some people become rough or violent after drinking alcohol? If our self-natures were permanent, then the blind should be able to see colors, the deaf should be able to hear sounds, the mute should be able to speak, and the paraplegic should be able to walk. If our self-natures were permanent, then we would have no need to avoid fires, floods, poisons, swords, dangerous people, or wild animals. If our selves were permanent, then we should have no memory loss about anything we have experienced from the very beginning [of our lives]. If we did not forget anything, then on what basis do people say, “Where was I when I saw that person?” If our selves were permanent, then we would not get involved in recalling things from our past, such as the flourishing and decline of our strength over the course of youth, maturity, and old age. If the self is permanent, then where does it reside? Is it in the colors of

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mucus—green, yellow, red, or white? If the self is permanent, does it pervade the entire body like a coating of sesame oil, complete, without gaps? And if one were to forsake the body, would the self then also be forsaken?

[Parable Three]

The Buddha said to Kāśyapa:

Good man, imagine there was a powerful athlete who resided in a king's palace and wore a diamond jewel between his eyebrows. In a wrestling match with another athlete he bumped his forehead into his opponent so fiercely that the jewel penetrated into his skin, sinking down so deeply that he could not find it. As this left a wound, he was ordered to see a physician for treatment. The physician was a bright man and knew how to treat him, for he understood that the wound had been created by the jewel that had entered the man's body by going under his skin, where it was now firmly lodged. [After examining him,] the physician asked the athlete, "My good man, do you know what happened to the jewel that was on your forehead?" Taken aback, the athlete replied, "Master physician king, what *did* happen to the jewel on my forehead? It could not be gone, could it? Where is that jewel now? It could not have just vanished!" He then fell into a state of anguish and broke down in tears. But the good doctor consoled him:

Do not be upset. When you were wrestling the jewel entered into your body, and now it is shining forth even though it is under your skin. You were so engrossed in the match and the poison of your anger was so intense that you failed to notice when the jewel was forced under your skin [at a moment of contact].

Yet the athlete simply could not believe the doctor, and said:

If it were under my skin, there should be blood or pus or something unclean like that. How come nothing is coming out of the wound? And if it were [deeper] within some inner tissue, then it would not be visible [to you]. Why are you trying to deceive me?

So the doctor then held up a mirror to show the man his own face, and the jewel was clearly visible in the reflection. When the athlete saw this he was stunned, finding the whole thing miraculous.

Good man, all living beings are like this. By not being able to get close to a good spiritual advisor, despite the fact [that each of them] has the buddha-nature, they cannot see it. Because their minds are clouded over by greed, lust, resentment, and doubt, they fall into rebirths as hell beings, animals, hungry ghosts, *asuras*, *caṇḍālas*, *kṣatriyas*, *brahmins*, *vaiśyas*, or *śūdras*. They are born into a variety of different families as a consequence of the variety of different karmic conditions they bring into being by their thoughts. Even when they are fortunate enough to receive a human life, they may still be handicapped in their hearing, seeing, speaking, physical movements, their ability to pass urine, or their ability to walk. Within the karmic retributions they receive in their twenty-five forms of existence, there is lust, anger, delusion, stupidity, and doubt that cloud over their minds and they do not understand their buddha-nature.

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Like the athlete in the story who bemoaned the loss of his jewel when it was in fact inside his body, living beings are in a similar situation. Because they do not know how to approach a good spiritual advisor, they remain unaware of the hidden treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*, and they study and practice the doctrine of nonself. This is analogous to the mundane person who asserts the existence of self but does not understand the true nature of self. My disciples may also be like this. Because they do not know how to approach a good spiritual advisor, they study and put into practice the doctrine of nonself but they, too, do not understand the point of [the doctrine of] nonself. And if they do not understand the true nature of nonself, then how could they understand the true nature of self?

Good man, the Tathāgata has thus stated that all living beings have buddha-nature. Just like the skilled physician who had to show the champion his diamond jewel, living beings are unaware of their buddha-nature because it is concealed from them by their innumerable defilements, hundreds of millions of them. If they could but do away with these defilements, at that point they could attest to its existence, as it would become utterly clear to them, just like the athlete seeing his jewel in the mirror. Good man, there are innumerable inconceivables like this associated with the tathāgata hidden treasury.

[Parable Four]

In addition, good man, it is like the medicinal plant of singular flavor growing in the Himalayan Mountains, known as “the flavor of bliss” as it is extremely sweet. This plant only grows deep beneath clusters of plants and cannot be seen when looking down at them, but some people can smell it and thereby know where it lies. In the past there was a *cakravartin* king who would go into the Himalayas for this medicine. Wherever he found it he had wooden cylinders constructed adjacent to the plants. As the plant matures it produces a secretion that would then flow into the tubes. When collected this way, the flavor was as pristine as it was in the plant.

Then the king died, and in the aftermath the medicine that had been of a uniform, singular flavor turned into a variety of different flavors depending on where the stores of it ended up. Some of it became sour, some became salty, some became sweet, some became bitter, some became spicy, and some became astringent in flavor. The true taste of the medicine remained in the mountains, however, like the full moon. Ordinary people with little in the way of merit tried digging with mattocks but despite great effort and hard work, they came away empty-handed. It will appear again only when another *cakravartin* king appears in the world, for obtaining the genuine flavor of the medicine was a consequence of his merit.

Good man, the flavor of the tathāgata hidden treasury is like this. Covered over by a thicket of defilements, living beings with spiritual ignorance will simply be unable to see it. The singular flavor [of the medicine] is a metaphor for buddha-nature, in that it is because of the defilements, such as they are in each individual, that [buddha-nature] manifests in various different flavors: namely, the realms of hell, animals, hungry ghosts, gods, males, females, those who are neither male nor female, *kṣatriyas*, *brahmins*, *vaiśyas*, and *śūdras*. But the buddha-nature is powerful and exceedingly difficult to damage in any way, and that is why there cannot be any murdering [of it]. If killing it were possible, that would mean permanently eliminating the buddha-nature. But buddha-nature is such that in the end it cannot be eliminated [from anyone]; the very notion that it could be

eliminated is absurd. The nature of self *in this sense* is none other than this hidden treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*. There is simply no means by which this mystic repository, such as it is, could be violently destroyed or burnt up. Yet while it cannot be destroyed, by and large it cannot be seen, either. If you attain unsurpassed perfect enlightenment, however, at that point you witness it. These are the reasons why killing cannot happen in this case.

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The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha:

World-Honored One, if there were no killing, then there would not be any unwholesome karma.

The Buddha explained to Kāśyapa:

In truth, killing living beings does take place. You may ask why. Good man, the buddha-nature of living beings abides within their five aggregates, and when someone destroys the five aggregates, I indeed call this “killing a living being.” And one who has killed a living being will fall into an unfortunate existence [in the next life]. The different forms that beings take among the twenty-five forms of existence as they course through saṃsāra, such as *kṣatriya*, *brahman*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*, *caṇḍāla*, male, female, or neither male nor female, and so forth are due to karmic causation [in like manner].

In this regard, a vulgar person might mistakenly conjecture that the relative size characteristics of the self make it just like a grain of millet, a grain of rice, a bean, or a human thumb. This variety of sizes and shapes are deluded products of the imagination, and conceptions formed of illusions like this have no basis in reality. By contrast, what characterizes the supramundane self is what I call “buddha-nature,” and reckoning the self in this manner is what I call “the highest good.”

[Parable Five]

In addition, good man, consider the story of a man who had come to know quite clearly about a buried treasure, so he picked up a sharp mattock and dug straight down into the ground for it. There were rocks large and small but he got through them, not being blocked by anything until

he reached a stone of diamond that he could not penetrate. This diamond was so hard that even his heavy ax could not damage it.

Good man, buddha-nature in living beings is just like this. It cannot be destroyed by any theory, by the deity Māra Pāpīyas or any other person or deity. As a feature of the five aggregates, when they come into being, it does as well. But a characteristic of the functioning five aggregates is that, like rocks and sand, they can be fractured and even destroyed. Yet buddha-nature is like a diamond in that it is impossible to destroy or even damage it. This is why I say that destroying the five aggregates I do call “killing a living being,” but, good man, you must also understand that the Buddha’s dharma is thus inconceivable [regarding the buddha-nature].

Fascicle VIII

Chapter Four

The Nature of the Tathāgata: Part 5

The Buddha said: “Good man, the well-balanced sutras are like the ambrosia of immortality (*amṛta*) but they are also like poisonous medicine.” 409a

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha: “What would cause the Tathāgata say that the well-balanced sutras are like the ambrosia of immortality but also like a poisonous medicine?”

The Buddha said: “Good man, do you now want to know the true meaning of the tathāgata hidden treasury?”

Kāśyapa said: “Yes, I do. I truly want to know the meaning of the tathāgata hidden treasury.”

Then the World-Honored One explained in verse:

It may be that taking the ambrosia of immortality
Injures a person’s life and he dies early.
It may be that taking the ambrosia of immortality,
Enhances a person’s life and he lives longer.
It may be that taking poison gives life,
Or conditions are such that taking poison brings death.
The ambrosia of immortality that is unimpeded wisdom,
Refers to the Mahāyāna scriptures.
Yet these Mahāyāna scriptures
Are also called “a mixing of poison and medicine.”
Like butter, the cream on the surface of clarified butter,
And granulated honey;
When digested they are medicine,
When not digested they are poison.

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The well-balanced [sutras] are just like this;
For the wise they are the ambrosia of immortality,
For the foolish who do not understand buddha-nature
When taken they become poison.
For śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas,
The Mahāyāna is the ambrosia of immortality.
Just like among all flavors,
Milk comes first.
Thus those who make strenuous effort,
By means of the Mahāyāna,
Can indeed reach nirvāṇa,
Becoming elephant kings among men.
Living beings that understand buddha-nature,
Just like you, Kāśyapa,
[Will know] the taste of the unsurpassed ambrosia of immortality,
That is never born and never dies.

Kāśyapa, for now you are skillful
In discriminating the three objects of refuge.
But the nature of this triple-refuge
Is just the nature of self.
When someone critically observes
That self-nature contains buddha-nature,
You will know that a person such as that
Is able to enter this hidden treasury.
One who understands self and what pertains to self
Has already passed beyond this world.
The nature of the Three Jewels that are the Buddha's dharma
Is to be honored above all else,
Like these verses I have expounded
The meaning of their nature is thus.

At that point Kāśyapa spoke up and uttered these verses:

Now I completely do not understand
The principle of taking refuge in the Three Jewels.
How should one seek that place of unsurpassed fearlessness?

I do not fully understand the principle of taking refuge in the
Three Jewels.

How does one *do* nonself?

How does taking refuge in the Buddha,

Bring one consolation?

Why in taking refuge in the Dharma,

Does one only request explanations for oneself?

Why do some attain freedom,

While others do not?

Why does taking refuge in the Sangha

Lead to gaining the greatest benefit?

How do you truly explain

The path to the attainment of buddhahood in the future?

If one will not attain this in the future,

Then why take refuge in the Three Jewels [now]?

At this point I have no foreknowledge,

Of the sequence for practicing the refuges.

What idea can one entertain about childbirth,

Without ever being pregnant?

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There must be a presence in the womb,

Before we say that [a woman] is “with child.”

The child, if it is in the womb,

Will definitely be born before long.

This sense of how we speak of a child [before its birth],

Is how karma seems to living beings.¹¹⁷

As the Buddha has explained,

Fools cannot understand.

And because of their nonunderstanding,

They transmigrate through saṃsāra into hell.

An *upāsaka* in name only

Does not understand the true meaning [of the teachings],

But only seeks ever more extensive discriminations

To eliminate the web of uncertainty surrounding the self.

But the great wisdom of the Tathāgata

Only pities such discriminations.
I thus implore you to explain the hidden treasury
Of the *tathāgatagarbha*.

[The Buddha answered:]

Kāśyapa, you will understand,
As I bring out for you now
The recondite teachings
By which your doubts can be removed.
Now listen carefully.
You, among all the bodhisattvas,
And the seventh buddha
Share the same name.
A person who takes refuge in the Buddha
Is truly called an *upāsaka* or lay follower.
To the end, he does not also take refuge
In other gods or spirits.
A person who takes refuge in the Dharma,
Then abandons the taking of life
A person who takes refuge in the sacred Sangha,
Does not seek the paths of heretics.
Taking refuge in the Three Jewels in this way
Brings the attainment of fearlessness.

Kāśyapa said to the Buddha:

I will take refuge in the Three Jewels again.
This is called the right path,
The realm of the buddhas.
The mark of equality in the Three Jewels
Always contains the nature of great wisdom.
Self-nature and buddha-nature
Are not two, are not to be distinguished.
This way is praised by the Buddha,
It is the basis of right training and stability,
It is also called the right commitment,

And therefore extolled by the Buddha.
 Directing myself toward the unsurpassed path
 Praised by he who is well gone,
 Is nothing less than the ambrosia of immortality.
 There is nothing else like it.

Then the Buddha said to the bodhisattva Kāśyapa:

Good man, now you should not distinguish among the Three Jewels as śrāvakas and ordinary people do. In the Mahāyāna, there is nothing that marks the three refuges as separate. Why do I say this? Because the dharma and the sangha exist within the buddha-nature itself. It was in order to ferry śrāvakas and ordinary people to the other shore that I separately expounded different marks for each of the three refuges.

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Good man, if you want to follow a dharma that accords with worldly custom, then it makes sense to distinguish the existence of three separate refuges. But, good man, a bodhisattva would do better to consider things in this way:

Now with this body I take refuge in this buddha. But if it were in this very body that I attained buddhahood, then after becoming a buddha I would no longer pay reverence to, make obeisance to, or make offerings to the world-honored ones. Why is this? Because all buddhas are equal, equally the object of refuge for living beings. If someone wants to pay their respects to relics of the dharma body, they should worship the reliquaries of buddhas. Why? This comes from the desire to save living beings. But by enabling living beings to put forth the idea of a reliquary within their own body and to then worship and make offerings to it, in this way living beings can take their personal dharma body as a place of refuge.

Living beings [at some point] all rely on untrue or fraudulent dharmas. [For them] I will, in stages, endeavor to expound the true-dharma. In addition, some take refuge in fraudulent sanghas. [For them] I will endeavor to be a place of the true sangha. And when there are those who distinguish three different forms of refuge, I will endeavor to be a single place of refuge for them, devoid of that

tripartite distinction. I will become the eyes for those who are blind, and I will also become a true place of refuge for śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

Good man, this is how a bodhisattva does the work of a buddha both for living beings whose karmic transgressions may be unfathomable and for those who are advanced in wisdom.

Good man, this is akin to a person facing imminent battle whose state of mind is dominated by the thought, “I am the person in front here. All the soldiers are depending entirely upon me.” This is also like a prince who ruminates, “I will tame the other princes, continuing the work of great kings and hegemony, attaining freedom and showing the other princes where their refuge lies.” Thus [a bodhisattva] should never give rise to thoughts of inferiority, just as kings, princes, or ministers cannot afford to do so. Good man, in much the same way a bodhisattva-mahāsattva also ruminates, “How is it that these three things and myself are one in essence?”¹¹⁸ Good man, what I am revealing now is that those three things are just nirvāṇa itself. The Tathāgata is called the Unsurpassed Worthy. Like the head that sits atop a person’s body, rather than at the trunk or limbs, the buddha sits at the top [of the triple-refuge], rather than the dharma or the sangha. For the purpose of spiritually transforming worlds he manifests in different forms at different times, becoming like their scaffolding. Therefore you need not accept the objects of refuge as something discriminated into three forms as is currently understood by ordinary, dull-witted people. In the Mahāyāna, be ardent, be resolute, like a powerful sword!

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha:

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World-Honored One, I ask out of appreciation, not because I do not understand. As someone with a bodhisattva’s seriousness of purpose, I wish to ask about the ground of what is pure and undefiled. For the sake of the bodhisattvas, I would like to move the Tathāgata to delineate and expand on these astonishing things in your exalted presentation of Mahāyāna well-balanced sutras. The Tathāgata’s great compassion has already been expounded so beautifully that I [know I] dwell within it. The ground of purity for the bodhisattva of which I speak is none other

than this very *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* that you so eloquently expound. World-Honored One, henceforth I will teach other living beings about the hidden *tathāgatagarbha* in some detail. I will also attest to the true basis of the triple-refuge. Anyone who can believe in this *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* will be able to recognize quite naturally the ground of the triple-refuge. Why is this so? Because of the presence of buddha-nature in the hidden treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*.

[The Buddha commented:]

Those who expound this scripture will all talk about the presence of the buddha-nature within oneself, without exception, and people like this will not have far to go to find the ground of the triple-refuge. Why? Because they [will grasp that]:

In the future it is I, myself, who should accomplish the Three Jewels. As a result, those who are śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, and other living beings as well, can honor and venerate them by relying on me.

Good man, this is the reason why you should make a proper study of the Mahāyāna scriptures.

Kāśyapa then said:

Thus is buddha-nature inconceivable. And the thirty-two major marks and the eighty minor marks [on a buddha's body] are also inconceivable.

At that, the Buddha praised Kāśyapa:

Excellent, excellent! Good man, you have already achieved wisdom of profound value. For you I will now explain further about entering this treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*.

If it were asserted that self is an abiding entity, then it would be a permanent dharma and there would be no separation from suffering. If one were to cultivate pure practice on the basis of nonself, it would not yield any benefits. If it were asserted that all dharmas are without self, that would constitute the annihilationist doctrine,¹¹⁹ and if it were asserted that self is an abiding entity [in all dharmas], that would constitute the

eternalist doctrine.¹²⁰ If it were asserted that that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, that would be the annihilationist view; and if all composite things were permanent, then that would again be an eternalist view. If one asserts [existence as] suffering, that would be annihilationist; if one asserts [existence as] bliss, that would be eternalist. To cultivate the notion that all dharmas are permanent is to fall into the error of the annihilationist view. To cultivate the notion that all dharmas are destroyed is to fall into the error of the eternalist view. It is like an inchworm whose hind legs move whenever his forelegs do. The cultivation of eternalism and annihilationism are always like this, for each one calls forth the other.

What I am implying here is that focusing your practice on what is painful in other dharmas is never going to be efficacious, but focusing your practice on what is joyful in other dharmas will be efficacious. Focusing your practice on nonself in other dharmas is to limit yourself to concern with the defilements, while focusing your practice on permanence in other dharmas brings you to what I call the hidden *tathāgatagarbha*. The nirvāṇa I speak of has no abode. It would indeed be of some value to pursue your [understanding] of other dharmas that are impermanent, but by cultivating your [understanding] of dharmas that are permanent you will be looking at the buddha, dharma, and sangha, as well as liberation proper. You should understand that this sense of a “middle way” in the Buddha’s dharma expresses the true-dharma, a perspective that distances itself from either extreme.¹²¹ Ordinary people, even those who are foolish, have no doubts about the [significance of the] middle. It is like someone weakened from illness, who, after eating butter, feels relieved.¹²²

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The inherent nature of dharmas of both existence and nonexistence is indeterminate, just like the fact that the natures of the four major elements are not the same. The fact that they differ from each other is well known by skilled physicians who make them contract or expand by following their idiosyncratic tendencies. Good man, the Tathāgata is also like this. He acts toward all living beings like a skilled physician, understanding the differences in the inherent makeup of their individual defilements, thereby removing [those defilements] and revealing the hidden

tathāgata treasury that is pure buddha-nature, permanently abiding and immutable. Those who assert that it does exist have a wisdom that is untainted. Those who assert that it does not exist are just speaking falsely. Those who assert that it does exist need not remain quiet, but they should not engage in frivolous speculation nor turn it into a matter of dispute. Just search for an understanding of the true nature of dharmas! Ordinary people who speculate or argue do so because they do not comprehend the subtle, hidden treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*.

If [I] expound¹²³ on the problem of suffering, the fool immediately thinks, “Ah yes, the body is impermanent!” and will preach, “Everything is suffering.” But what the fool cannot fathom is the presence of a blissful nature in the body. If I expound on impermanence, the ordinary person [similarly] reckons this to mean that all bodies are impermanent like water jars of unbaked clay. But a wise person would discern that one should never say, “Everything is impermanent.” Why? Because the seed of buddha-nature is within one’s own body. If I expound on nonself, the ordinary person will think, “Throughout the Buddha’s dharma there is never any presence of a self.” But the wise person would discern that “nonself” is a verbal convention and not real. Having understood things in this way, doubts should not arise in him.

If I speak of the emptiness of the tathāgata hidden treasury, the ordinary person who hears this will take it nihilistically. But the wise person would discern that a tathāgata is constant and immutable. When I say that liberation is like an illusion, the ordinary person will think, “Attaining liberation means to be obliterated.” But the wise person will discern that these lions among humans, though they may come and go, abide permanently without change. If I say that spiritual ignorance conditions all phenomena, an ordinary person who hears this will conceive of it as a distinction between two dharmas: enlightened knowledge and unenlightened ignorance. But a wise person will understand that their natures are not two, that nonduality is their true nature. If I say that conditioned phenomena condition consciousness, an ordinary person will think that I am talking about two things: phenomena and consciousness. But a wise person will understand that their natures are not distinct, that their nondual nature is their true nature.

When I allude to keeping or violating the ten aspects of good character, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, good states of existence and bad states of existence, or white dharmas and black dharmas, the ordinary person will infer these statements to be about dualities. The wise person, however, will comprehend that their natures are not two distinct things, that their nondual nature is their true nature.

If I say, “You should cultivate [your understanding of] the fact that all dharmas are characterized by suffering,” the ordinary person will infer this to be about a duality. The wise person, however, will comprehend that their natures are not two distinct things, that their nondual nature is their true nature.

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When I state that [the doctrine of] “all conditioned phenomena are impermanent” means the tathāgata hidden treasury is also impermanent,” the ordinary person will think these are two different things. The wise person, however, will comprehend that their natures are not two distinct things, that their nondual nature is their true nature. When I state that [the doctrine of] “all dharmas are without self” means that the tathāgata hidden treasury is also without self,” the ordinary person will infer that they are two different things. The wise person, however, will understand that their natures are not two distinct things, that their nondual nature is their true nature.

The nature of self and nonself are not two distinct things. The significance of something like this for the tathāgata hidden treasury cannot be measured; it is praised by innumerable, limitless numbers of buddhas. This is what I have been explaining here in this *Sutra that Accomplishes All Merit*.¹²⁴

Good man, both the nature and characteristics of self and nonself are not a duality. You should accept and admire this. Good man, you should also resolutely hold close and keep in mind those sutras that embody this approach. As I explained in the *Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom (Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra)*, self and nonself do not have two distinct characteristics. It is like the fact that curds are produced from milk, fresh butter is produced from curds, clarified butter produced from fresh butter, and the cream on clarified butter is produced from clarified butter. Does the nature of curds come from milk, does it come from itself, or does it arise from

something else? This is the same issue all the way down to the cream on the surface of clarified butter. If you say these are produced by means of something else, this would constitute “external causation” and it would mean they do not come from milk. If they did not come from milk, then milk would be not involved in them. If they arose out of themselves, they could not have arisen presupposing a continuity [of identity] over time.¹²⁵ If they did arise from within a continuity [of identity], then there would be no co-arising. If there was no co-arising, then the five kinds of dairy flavors would also not [arise] at the same time. But though they do not come into being at the same time, they definitely do not come from somewhere else. That is why you should understand that the characteristics of curds exist within milk prior to [the arising of curds], for when there is a rich sweetness of flavor in something, it does not change of its own doing.¹²⁶ This is true for all the flavors, up to and including the cream on the surface of clarified butter. The causality at work in a cow drinking water and eating grass is that these things are transformed by her blood vessels and milk is produced. If she eats sweet-tasting grass, her milk will thereupon taste sweet. If she eats bitter-tasting grass, her milk will thereupon have a bitter taste. There is a type of grass that grows in the Himalayas called *snigdha*.¹²⁷ If cows eat it, their milk will yield a clarified butter cream that completely lacks any colors such as green, yellow, red, white, or black. Thus, depending on the grain or grass that a cow eats, the color and flavor of her milk will differ.

By means of the causes and conditions resulting from behavior that is dominated by knowledge or ignorance, living beings will produce [karmic results] in two characteristic ways. And yet ignorance can be transformed and thereby turned into knowledge. In the same way, all dharmas, whether wholesome or unwholesome, are [ultimately] devoid of this kind of duality.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha:

World-Honored One, in your analogy of milk, what do curds represent? World-Honored One, if as you say the characteristic of curds is definitely present within milk, then it being in such a minute form that it cannot be seen makes me wonder what does it mean to say that “curds arise or

411b come into existence from the causes and conditions of milk”? When we say dharmas come into existence, it is because they originally did not exist, but [in your analogy] the phenomenon already exists, so how can we speak of it as “coming into existence”? If the characteristic of curds is definitely within milk, then within a hundred blades of grass there should be milk and likewise within milk there should be grass. But if one says that curds are definitely not within milk, then what causes the milk to produce the curds? On the other hand, if a dharma that originally did not exist can at a later time come into existence, then why is it that grass does not come into existence from milk [as curds do]?

[The Buddha answered:]

Good man, it cannot be said with certainty that fresh milk does or does not have curds within it. Nor can one state that it comes into existence from something else. If one takes the position that fresh milk definitely has curds within it, how does one then account for the difference between the substance of something and its flavor? For that reason one cannot say that milk definitely has the nature of curds within it. On the other hand, if one takes the position that fresh milk definitely does not have milk curds within it, then why is it that rabbit horns do not arise from milk? When poison is put into milk, the curds that are then formed will kill a person. Therefore it should not be said that milk definitely does not have the nature of curds within it. If one takes the position that curds arise from something else, then why do curds not arise from water? Therefore it should not be said that curds arise from something else.¹²⁸

Good man, the causal process in operation when a cow eats grass is that her blood turns white, then both grass and blood are broken down, and by means of her life force this changes into milk. Although milk comes from grass and blood, it cannot be said that [the raw materials and the finished product] are two distinct and separate things; it is just that we speak of it as being produced from this causal process. The other milk products from curds down to the cream on clarified butter are also like this. It is in this sense that we have named the flavors derived from cow’s [milk]. The breakdown of the milk is what then becomes the causality that leads to curds. What causes all this to happen? Perhaps fermentation, perhaps heat.

Because there is a process we are able to say that from certain causalities other things are produced, and this is also true for [all the milk products I have mentioned] down to the cream on the surface of clarified butter. This is why it cannot be said definitively that the characteristics of curds are not present in fresh milk, or that it is produced by some outside cause that is separate from milk, for such statements are inappropriate.

Good man, knowledge and ignorance are also like this. If one is influenced by defilements and constraints in what they do, the person is labeled ignorant. If one is influenced by thoroughly wholesome dharmas in what they do, the person is labeled knowledgeable. This is precisely why I say that these two are not distinct—how we speak of someone depends on the karmic conditions operative [at that moment]. That Himalayan grass called *snigdha* will, if any cow eats it, turn her milk into cream.¹²⁹ Buddha-nature is also like this.

Good man, living beings whose [accumulated] merit amounts to little will not find this grass. Buddha-nature is also like this, in that living beings do not see it because it is clouded over by their defilements. On the other hand, although the ocean is uniformly salty, within it there is also water so excellent that it tastes as good as milk. Think of the Himalayan Mountains themselves, for despite achieving a variety of merit by producing many medicinal plants, there are also poisonous plants there. The bodies of living beings are also like this: although they have poisonous snakes that make up the four elements of the body, they also have a wondrous medicine king within them, namely buddha-nature. This is no artificially constructed dharma but it is obscured by the dust of adventitious defilements. Whether *brahman*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, or *śūdra*, anyone who can remove these defilements will thereupon see the buddha-nature and complete the highest path. Just as when thunder cracks and clouds appear in the sky, flowers bloom on the tusks of all the elephants, but if there were no thunderclaps then there would be no blooming of flowers, and no words for it either. The buddha-nature of living beings is just like this. In its usual state it is covered by all the defilements and impossible to see. This is why I expounded on nonself in living beings [at one time].

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But if one could only hear this subtle *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, he would then see his buddha-nature, and it would be like seeing flowers

on an elephant tusk. And although you may hear about all the different *samādhis* discussed in other sutras, if you have not heard this sutra then you will not understand this subtle aspect of the Tathāgata, just like in the absence of thunder the flowers on the elephant tusks cannot be seen. It is only after hearing this sutra that one thereby understands the hidden treasury buddha-nature that is expounded by all tathāgatas, as in the metaphor of seeing flowers on elephant tusks when there is thunder. After hearing this sutra one thereupon understands that all living beings possess buddha-nature, and this is the reason why I expound the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa-sūtra*. I [also] call it “the hidden treasury that is a tathāgata,” extending the *dharmakāya*-like flowers on elephant tusks when it thunders. By nurturing something of such significance, one thus attains what is known as *mahāparinirvāṇa*. If a good man or good woman carefully studies and practices what is in this *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana*, know that this will be a person who repays their debt to the Buddha and is truly a disciple of the Buddha.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha:

This is extraordinary, World-Honored One. The buddha-nature that you speak of is very profound, very profound, difficult to perceive, difficult to enter. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas will be unable to swallow it.

The Buddha answered: “Good man, just so, just so. What you have expressed admiration for does not differ from what I have explained.”

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One. Why is buddha-nature so very profound, so difficult to perceive, so difficult to enter?”

The Buddha answered:

Good man, this is something like a hundred blind men going to a physician in order to have their eyes healed. The physician takes a golden scalpel and makes an incision in their retinas. He then holds up one finger and asks if they can see it or not, but the blind men answer that they are still unable to see anything. He then holds up two fingers and then three fingers and until they finally say yes, they are able to see slightly. Good man, this is how it was in the time before this *Subtle Sutra of the*

Great Nirvana had been expounded by the Tathāgata. Although innumerable bodhisattvas had equipped themselves with the perfections, even to the point of reaching the ten stages, they were still unable to see that they themselves had the buddha-nature.

Upon the Tathāgata expounding it, however, they will see it immediately if only slightly. But having seen it at all, these bodhisattva-mahāsattvas will all exclaim “This is extraordinary, World-Honored One. We have traversed the cycle of birth and death countless times, continually confused by nonself.”

Good man, thus even bodhisattvas who earn a place among the ten stages may not clearly discern the buddha-nature. As such, how could one expect śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas to be able to perceive it? Good man, this is analogous to a man who looks up at the sky and sees wild geese flying by. He may think, “That was a flock of geese I just saw in the sky,” but in fact he is unsure of what he was looking at, as there were only traces of birds in his gaze. In much the same way, bodhisattvas who have progressed to the ten stages may perceive and understand only a small portion of this tathāgata-nature. How much harder for a śrāvaka or pratyekabuddha to be able to discern this!

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Good man, it is like an intoxicated man trying to walk down a road that he can barely see in his blurred vision. Bodhisattvas at the ten stages who have discerned only a small part of the tathāgata-nature are in a state like this. Good man, this is also analogous to a thirsty man crossing a wide field. The man’s thirst presses upon him so that he searches everywhere for water. He sees a clump of trees and on one of the trees sits a white crane. But the man has become so disoriented that he is unable to distinguish between what is a tree and what is water. As he is unsure of what he is looking at, he will just gaze upon the white crane against the group of trees. Good man, bodhisattvas at the ten stages who have discerned only a small part of the tathāgata-nature are in such a state.

Good man, imagine a man adrift in the middle of the ocean, hundreds of thousands, yea, innumerable *yojanas* [from shore]. In the distance he sees a large boat, a watchtower, and a large building. At that moment he thinks, “Ah, that watchtower is just an illusion. And yet, the more I look at it, the more certain I am of my feeling that what I see is what I

know to be a watchtower!” Bodhisattvas at the ten stages who perceive the tathāgata-nature within them are in such a state.

Good man, it is like a prince born with a delicate constitution who stays up all night frolicking at a party. When the sun comes up, he finds that everything he sees has become unclear. In much the same way, for bodhisattvas at the ten stages, although they may see the tathāgata-nature within themselves they are not very clear about it.

Good man, this is also analogous to someone in a government ministry who is detained because of work for the king and returns home late with the night pressing in upon him. Suddenly lightning flashes and he sees a herd of cows. At that moment he thinks, “Were those cows? A group of clouds? A house, perhaps?” He stares [in the direction of] what he saw for some time and realizes that though he has the impression that what he saw were cows, it all seems uncertain to him now. In much the same way, for bodhisattvas at the ten stages: though they may see the tathāgata-nature within themselves they remain unable to ascertain precisely what it is.

Good man, it is also like a precept-keeping *bhikṣu* who looks into water that is free of any insects and yet sees something like the forms of insects in it. At that moment he thinks, “Those things moving in the water, are they insects? Is it dust?” After observing the water for a long time, although he knows that what he sees is dust, he is not completely sure. In much the same way, bodhisattvas at the ten stages may see the tathāgata-nature within themselves but they are not very clear about it.

In addition, good man, consider the analogy of someone who looks into the darkness and sees a small child in the distance. At that moment he thinks, “Was that an ox, an eagle, or a person?” He observes the darkness for a very long time, concluding that although he saw a child, he is not completely sure. In much the same way, bodhisattvas at the ten stages may perceive the tathāgata-nature within themselves but they are not very clear about it.

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In addition, good man, it is like a man who sees a painted image of a bodhisattva at night in the dark. At that moment he thinks, “This bodhisattva image, is it Maheśvara, or Mahābrahmā, or merely a robe made of dyed cloth?” He gazes at it for some time, and while in his mind he is

saying “that is the image of a bodhisattva,” in fact he is not completely sure. In much the same way, bodhisattvas at the ten stages may perceive the tathāgata-nature within themselves but they are not very clear about it.

Good man, this buddha-nature that you possess is thus profound and difficult to discern. Only buddhas can understand it; [the realm] of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas does not encompass it. Good man, the wise must be discriminating in this way in their understanding of the tathāgata-nature.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying: “World-Honored One, as you have explained, the buddha-nature is subtle and difficult to understand. Is it something that can be seen with our physical eyes?”

The Buddha said:

Kāśyapa, good man. It is like the heaven of neither thought nor non-thought, which is also something that those who tread the two [non-Mahāyāna] paths are unable to understand. Understanding comes as a result of having faith in accordance with this sutra. In the same way, good man, śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas who believe in what is taught in this *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* will thus know of their own tathāgata-nature by themselves. Good man, for this reason you should carefully perform and cultivate the practices of this *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. Good man, buddha-nature is thus something only buddhas fully understand; [the realm] of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas does not encompass it.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha again, saying: “World-Honored One. Mundane, ordinary people regard their nature as a living being to confirm the existence of a self.”

The Buddha said,

Think about this parable which centers on two people who were close friends. One was a prince, the other was poor and humble, yet the two of them moved around together. On one occasion, the poor man noticed an impressive sword owned by the prince, which was pure and powerfully constructed like no other. In his mind the poor man coveted the sword. Sometime later, the prince had to travel to another country and took the sword with him. Meanwhile, the poor man, while spending the night

away from home on one occasion, talked in his sleep, and kept repeating, “The sword, the sword.” Someone nearby overheard him, grabbed the man and took him to the king. Upon seeing him, the king asked, “This sword of which you speak, where is it to be found?” The man answered the king directly, explaining what he could, and added:

King, even if you were to cut up this body of your humble servant, severing my hands and feet in hopes of getting at the sword, you would still not find it. When this servant was close to your son, the prince, that was when I did happen to see it, but just once, and I dared not reach out to touch it. How could I have taken it?

The king then asked him, “When you saw the sword, what did it look like?”

He answered, “Great king, what this servant saw was something like a ram’s horn.”

When the king heard this he broke out in a smile and said, “As I follow your thinking, I see there is nothing to fear, for that sword is not in my storehouse. How could you have possibly seen such a thing near the prince?”

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Then the king turned to his ministers and asked them, “Have any of you ever seen this sword?” But upon uttering these words, the king dropped dead.

Thereupon another prince succeeded him to the throne, and he also asked his staff, “Tell me if any of you have seen this sword among the treasures in the palace.” The staff answered, “We have seen it.” So he asked, “What is it shaped like?” And they answered, “Great king, it looks like a ram’s horn.” Then the king said, “Where in the palace would a sword like that be stored?” And thus did four kings in succession all search for the sword, but to no avail.

Now some time after the last king had departed, the former prince who had left for another country returned to his homeland, once again assuming his position as prince and in due time succeeded to the throne as king. When he, too, asked the staff if any of them had seen the sword, they answered, “Great king, we have all seen it.” So he continued, “What did it look like?” [One person] answered, “Great king, its color is pure

like the *utpala* (blue lotus) flower.” Someone else answered, “It is shaped like a ram’s horn,” and then someone else said, “Its color is red, like a cluster of flames.” Another chimed in, “No, it looks like a black snake.” Overcome with laughter, the king blurted out, “None of you have seen what my sword actually looks like.”

Good man, bodhisattva-mahāsattvas are just like this. When out in society they expound upon the true characteristics of self but having preached that dharma they then proceed to abandon it. And just like that prince who took his wonderful sword with him when he left for another country, the ordinary, ignorant person [who has been exposed to this teaching] will say “All things have a self; there is a self,” just like that poor friend of the prince who cried out in his sleep, “The sword, the sword!” When śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas ask living beings, “What marks or forms does the self have that characterize it for what it is?”, they will get such answers as “I have seen the form of the self—it is the size of a human thumb,” or “It looks like a grain of rice,” or “It is just like a grain of millet.” And others will say, “The marks that characterize self reside within the mind where it blazes like the sun.” Thus living beings do not really know what it is that distinguishes the self, much like the palace staff did not know what it was that distinguished the sword.

When bodhisattvas preach the dharma concerning the matter of self in such a manner, ordinary people will not understand and instead divide things up in various ways to fallaciously create notions about marks [they believe] characterize the self. All this resembles the way in which the queries about what the sword looked like led to the answer that it looked like a ram’s horn. These ordinary people, one after another, will continue to think in this way, in the process producing false views. It was in order to cut off false views such as these that the Tathāgata expressed the things he did about nonself. In the parable, this is why the [king]¹³⁰ told the palace staff, “That sword is not in my storehouse.”

[The Garland of Letters]¹³¹

Good man, the true self that the Tathāgata has been talking about today is what is called the buddha-nature. In my teachings this buddha-nature has been likened to the pure sword [in the previous story]. Good man, if

an ordinary person is able to communicate it well, he will be in accord with the highest buddha-dharma. But if someone can proclaim it in a detailed way that distinguishes things appropriately, know that what you have is someone with the countenance of a bodhisattva.

413a Good man, whatever different treatises, spells, verbal utterances, and written words there are, they are all buddha utterances; they do not reflect what is spoken by the proponents of other paths.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa said to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, how is it that the matrix of syllables (**akṣaramātrkā*) was uttered by the Tathāgata?

[The Buddha said:]

Good man, uttering the first half of the syllables or *akṣaras* is what forms the matrix [of the phonetic system], providing the support for recorded essays, spells, and literature [as a whole]. And as for the genuine dharma and all its divisions (*skandha*), ordinary people study this phonetic matrix of syllables so that later they will be able to discern what is dharma and what is not dharma.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then spoke again to the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One, what is the meaning of the *akṣaras* of which you speak?

[The Buddha answered:]

Good man, there are fourteen vowel sounds that designate what is meaningful in *akṣaras*. The word “*akṣara*” itself is called nirvāṇic because [syllabic speech] is permanent and indissoluble (*a-kṣara*). If it is indissoluble, then it is indestructible (*akṣaya*), and indestructible is none other than what the adamant body of the Tathāgata is. The [following] fourteen vowel sounds are what I call the basis of syllables or *akṣaras*.

A is unbreakable (*abheda*), and being unbreakable is precisely why what is called the Three Jewels is like the adamant vajra. The sound *A* is also without corrupting influences (*anāsrava*). And that which is without corrupting influences is none other than the Tathāgata. Nothing flows from the Tathāgata’s nine orifices, thus he is without any cor-

rupting influences. Nor does his body even have the nine orifices, so for this reason he is free of any corrupting influences. To be free from the corrupting influences is to be permanent, and permanence is precisely what the Tathāgata is. The Tathāgata is unmade (*akṛta*) and that is [another reason] why he is without corrupting influences. In addition, the sound *A* is also called virtue (*aṅga*). Virtue is precisely the Three Jewels, and thus we call it *A*.

Ā means *ācārya*. Now what is meant by *ācārya*? It is someone who has succeeded in being called a “holy one” (*ārya*) in the world: without attachments, with few desires; someone who has [attained] satisfaction. That person is also called “pure” (*āpūta* or *āpūnita*), as they can ferry living beings across the great ocean of saṃsāra, in and out of which flow the three existences. This is what is called holy. The sound *Ā* is also the practice of discipline (*ācaritam*): maintaining the pure precepts and comporting oneself in accordance with the world (*lokānūvartanā*). The letter *Ā* also means to depend on (*āśraya*) holy persons: to study [their] comportment, stopping, starting, and rising movements (*gocara* or *ācāra*). It is also to worship (*pūja*), respect (*ādara*), and bow down in reverence (*namaskāra* or *pādavanda*) to the Three Jewels, to provide filial care for one’s father and mother, and to study the Mahāyāna. good men and good women who maintain the precepts and bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, these are the holy ones. *Ā* also means to teach using injunctions (*ādeśana* or *ājñā*), such as when saying, “Hey you, come here!” (*āgaccha*), or “You must do this!”, or “You must not do that!” Anyone who is able to obstruct (*āvaraṇa*) teachings that advocate impropriety is known as a holy person. This, therefore, is what is called the letter *Ā*.

I denotes “this” (*idam*), the holy life (*brahmacarya*) in the Buddha’s dharma that is extensive (*vistara*), pure (*viśuddha*), and unstained (*vimāla*) like the full moon. It is in this way that you should do what must be done and refrain from what must not be done. *This* is meaningful (*sārtha*) and [*this*] is not meaningful (*anārtha*); *this* is a Buddha utterance and *this* is a Māra utterance. *This* is therefore what is meant by *I*.

Ī is the Buddha’s dharma. It is subtle, profound, and difficult to attain. Like Maheśvara and Mahābrahmā, this dharma is called free and autonomous (*īśvara*). As they are able to sustain it, these [deities] are

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called “protectors of the dharma” (*dharmapāla*). The autonomous [lords] are also called the “four world-protectors” (*lokapāla*). Their autonomy enables them to guard this *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. *Ī* means to be able to proclaim something freely, so it can also mean to expound the dharma for the sake of living beings in a free and autonomous way. Moreover, since *Ī* means autonomy, what is it that I have taught? It is [to encourage you] to cultivate your practice of the well-balanced (*vaitulya*) scriptures. The sound *Ī* also means cutting out jealousy (*īrṣyā*) just like removing weeds, all of which can transform [a situation] into something auspicious (*śrī*). This, therefore, is *Ī*.

U is the most exalted (*uttara*), the most supreme (*uttama*), and the most advanced (*udāra*) of all sutras: namely, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*. In addition, *U* indicates the nature of a tathāgata (*tathāgatagarbha*), something that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas have yet to hear about. It also stands for Uttarakuru, the ideal among of all places [to live]. If bodhisattvas can manage to hear and accept this sutra, then they would [similarly] become the most eminent (*utkr̥ṣṭa* or *utkarṣa*) among all living beings. This is why we say that this sutra is the highest and the best. This, therefore, is the letter *U*.

Ū is like cow’s milk (*ūdhasya*), the most excellent among all flavors. The nature of a tathāgata is also like this, and this [*Mahāparinirvāṇa*] is [therefore] the most respected and exalted (*ūrdhva*) among all sutras. If anyone should slander it, you should know that that person would be no different from an ox. In addition, *Ū* is called someone without wisdom (*ūnajñāna*) or without mindfulness (*ūnasmṛti*). When someone slanders the subtle and secret *tathāgatagarbha*, it should be understood that such a person is in a most regrettable (*ūrmi*) state. They are far from the secret *tathāgatagarbha* when they preach the doctrine of nonself; thus they are called *Ū*.

E denotes “this” (*etad*), the nirvāṇa of the buddhas that is their natural condition (*dharmatā*). Thus it is called *E*.

Ai means tathāgata, as it indicates “thus come” (*aiti*). In addition, *Ai* is the movement (*airyātha* or *airyāthika patha*) of a tathāgata—starting, stopping, contracting, stretching, or rising up. His [movement] is never without benefit to living beings. This is thus called *Ai*.

O is known as the defilements (*kleśa*), which are also called “outflows” (*ogha*). The Tathāgata has permanently cut off all the defilements, and this is referred to by the letter *O*.

Au means the Great Vehicle (*auttarika-yāna*?). Of the fourteen [vowel] sounds, this is the last one (*auttarapadika*?). The Mahāyāna sutras are also like this in that they are the last word among all scriptures. This is therefore called *Au*.

Aṃ designates the ability to stop (*saṃruddha* or *saṃrodha*) all things impure. Within the Buddha’s dharma it has the ability to abandon all gold, silver, and precious stones. This is what is called *Aṃ*.

Aḥ means the supreme vehicle (*mahāyānaḥ*). Why? Because this Mahāyāna scripture, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, is most excellent (*niṣṭhāḥ*) among all sutras. This is what is called *Aḥ*.

Ka designates the arising of great compassion (*karuṇā*) toward living beings. Just as the Buddha looks upon his son Rāhula, *Ka* means to do your best (*kalyāṇa*) toward others. This is why it is called *Ka*.

Kha refers to amity with someone who is not to be trusted (*khalaprīti*). Those who are not to be trusted are also said to be muddled (*khaṭuka*) in that they do not believe in the *tathāgatagarbha*, and this is why it is known as *Kha*.

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Ga refers to a womblike repository (*garbha*), and this repository is none other than the hidden treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*. All living beings possess buddha-nature, and that is why this is called *Ga*.

Gha is the voice (*ghoṣa*) of the Tathāgata that is constantly present (*nitya*). To what does “the constantly present voice of the Tathāgata” refer? It refers to the fact that the Tathāgata permanently abides without change. This, therefore, is *Gha*.

Ṇa is the aspect of destruction (*bhaṅga*) that is in all conditioning (*saṃskāra*). This is what is meant by *Ṇa*.

Ca has the meaning of practice (*caryā*). Because it pacifies (*abhi-cāruka*), it is known to mean practice. This, then, is *Ca*.

Cha is the Tathāgata covering all living beings to protect them (*prati-chādana*), like a great canopy (*chattra*). This, then, is *Cha*.

Ja is complete liberation (*punarjanmajaya*) in which there is no aspect of aging (*nirjarā*). This, then, is known as *Ja*.

Jha is an overgrowth of *kleśa*, like a dense forest (*jhaṣa*). This, then, is known as *Jha*.

Ñā means wisdom (*ñāna*).¹³² Understanding the nature of the dharma that is reality (*tattvadharmatā*) is therefore called *Ñā*.

Ṭa refers to preaching the dharma while only half [the Buddha's] body is manifest (*parisphuṭa*) in Jambudvīpa, like a half-moon [that takes the shape of this letter].¹³³ This, then is what is known as *Ṭa*.

Ṭha is the consummate (*niṣṭhāvat* or *naiṣṭhika*) nature of the dharma body. It is like a full moon [that takes the shape of this letter].¹³⁴ This is therefore called *Ṭha*.

Ḍa designates an idiotic (*ḍimba* or *ḍimbha*) sangha member. He does not understand permanence and impermanence, and is comparable to a small infant (*ḍimba* or *ḍimbha*). This is therefore called *Ḍa*.

Ḍha is not understanding the gratitude owed (*ānuvidhitsu*) to one's teacher. [Such a person] is comparable to a ram (*menḍha*). This, then, is *Ḍha*.

Ṇa denotes that which is not this noble (*aṅāriya*)¹³⁵ doctrine, like [teachings] found in the heretical (*pāṣaṇḍa*) paths of the outsiders. This is therefore called *Ṇa*.

Ta is the Tathāgata when he tells the *bhikṣu*, “You should put aside your apprehension (*ātāṅka*) for I will expound the subtle dharma for you.” This, then, is known as *Ta*.

Tha means illusion (*svapnāvasthā*). Living beings are surrounded by it as they transmigrate through saṃsāra, trapped like silkworms or gold beetles.¹³⁶ This, then, is what is called *Tha*.

Da represents great charity (*dāna*), what is known as the “Mahāyāna.” For this reason it is called *Da*.

Dha is to praise virtue (*dhanya*). The Three Jewels are like Mount Sumeru in their loftiness (*sotsedha*), broad expanse (*pariṇaddha*), and durability (*dhīra*). This is therefore called *Dha*.

Na refers to the fact that the Three Jewels are steadfast (*adhiṣṭhāna*), without movement (*naiścalya*), just like the crossbeam in a gate (*indrakīla*). This is called *Na*.

Pa means what is called an inverted apprehension (*viparyāsa*). If someone were to say that the Three Jewels were all perishable (*parikṣaya*),

you should understand that such a person deceives himself (*parimūḍha*). This, therefore, is called *Pa*.

Pha designates worldly calamity (*vipatphala*). If one says that when worldly calamities occur, the Three Jewels are also extinguished, you should understand that such a person is foolish, ignorant, and violates what has been indicated by the Sage. This, therefore, is called *Pha*.

Ba refers to the ten powers (*bala*) of buddhas. This, then, is what is called *Ba*.

Bha is a heavy burden (*bhāra*). When someone is suitable (*bhavya*) to bear [the weight of] the unsurpassed true teaching, you should know that such a person is a great bodhisattva. This, then, is what is known as *Bha*.

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Ma represents the glorious (*maṇḍana*) mental discipline (*manodaṇḍa*) of bodhisattvas, referring to this *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa*[-*sūtra*]. This, therefore, is called *Ma*.

Ya refers to the fact that bodhisattvas, wherever they may be (*yatra-tatra*), preach the teachings of the Great Vehicle (*Mahāyāna*) for living beings. This, then, is what is known as *Ya*.

Ra is to effectively decimate (*uparati*) the [three poisons of] greed (*rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*), and delusion (*moha*), as one expounds the teaching of truth (*tattvadharma*). This, then, is what *Ra* signifies.

La refers to the “voice-hearer path” (*śrāvakayāna*), which is agitated and unsettled (*lola*). [By contrast,] the *Mahāyāna* is fixed and has no movement (*acala*). To free oneself from (*uccalana*) the voice-hearer path and assiduously practice the unexcelled *Mahāyāna*, this is thus called *La*.

Va is the great dharma rain (*mahā-dharma-varṣa*) rained down for living beings by the Tathāgata and World-Honored One (*bhagavat*), namely the world’s spells (*vidyā*) and scriptures. This, therefore, is *Va*.

Śa is to be free of the three darts (*śalya*).¹³⁷ This, therefore, is known as *Śa*.

Ṣa means completion (*pariṇiṣpatti*). If a person is able to hear this *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, he would then be firmly established (*sampratiṣṭhita*) in all the *Mahāyāna* scriptures; thus is this called *Ṣa*.

Sa represents the preaching of the true-dharma (*saddharma*) for living beings, causing joy (*saṃharsaṇa*) in them. This, then, is what *Sa* represents.

Ha is a sense of joy (*harṣa*) in one's mind. Extraordinary (*hā*)! The World-Honored One has relinquished (*hāta*) all conditioning (*saṃskāra*). Alas (*hambho* or *aho bata*)! The Tathāgata is entering *parinirvāṇa*!" Therefore this is *Ha*.

Kṣa means Māra. No matter how many māras may try, they cannot damage the *tathāgatagarbha*, and that is why this is called *Kṣa*. In addition, *Kṣa* also expresses conformity with the world in displaying [the Tathāgata] having a father, mother, wife, and child. Therefore this, too, is called *Kṣa*.

Ṛ, *Ṝ*, *L*, and *L̄*—these four syllables I explain as having four meanings. That is, buddha, dharma, and sangha, and their opposition (*pratipakṣa*). What I call their “opposition” refers to conformity or acting in accordance with the ways of the world (*lokānuvartana*), such as when [the Buddha] has Devadatta display his rupture of the sangha or the Buddha's conjuring up various other forms, shapes, and images in order to set forth the rules of training (*śikṣāpada*). The wise understand and know they should not respond to any of these things with fear, as these are “acts of conformity with the world.” For this reason they are called *Ṛ*, *Ṝ*, *L*, and *L̄*.

The voice may arise from breathing, from the base of the tongue, or from the nasal area; it may be long, short, or staccato. Depending on what it sounds like, we discern what it means. All discriminations in sound are made by how the tongue and teeth [are used]. In this way the meaning of a syllable can turn the speech act of a living being into something pure. But the buddha-nature in living beings is not like this—a verbal designation (**śabda-prajñapti*) that only later becomes pure. Why? Because its nature is originally pure. Although it may be located within the aggregates (*skandha*), sense bases (*āyatana*), or sense fields (*dhātu*),¹³⁸ do not identify it with the aggregates, sense bases, or sense fields. For this reason living beings should all take refuge in the bodhisattvas who, by means of their buddha-nature, look upon living beings without discrimination.

And for this reason the half-syllables are the basic units in scriptures, treatises, and other written works. However, all the meanings in these half-syllables are also the basis of speech that is afflicted by the defilements.

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That is why they are called half-syllables. By contrast, complete syllables are the basis of all that is good in speech. For example, someone who does bad deeds in this world might be called a “half-person” and someone who cultivates good deeds might be called a “complete person.” In this way, the basis of all scriptures and treatises comes from half-syllables, so if someone were to say that the Tathāgata and proper liberation were contained in half-syllables, that would be incorrect. Why? Because these are things apart from words. For this reason, in regard to any and all phenomena the Tathāgata is unhindered, unattached, and truly liberated.

What could be called “comprehending the meaning of syllables”? If one understood that the appearance of the Tathāgata in the world could effect the destruction of half-syllables, that I would call “comprehending the meaning of syllables.” But if one only has the meanings that come from following what is expressed with half-syllables, that person would not understand the nature of the Tathāgata.

What would constitute “the meaning of no syllables”? When people familiarize themselves with and practice a dharma that is unwholesome, that is what I call “[a dharma] of no syllables.” A person of no syllables also refers to those who, though they familiarize themselves with and practice a dharma that is good, nevertheless do not understand what is permanent and impermanent, constant and inconstant in the Tathāgata. They do not understand the two jewels of the dharma and the sangha, what is vinaya and what is not vinaya, what are sutras and what are not sutras, what has been spoken by Māra and what has been spoken by the Buddha. If one is incapable of distinguishing such things, he would constitute someone who follows and adheres to “meanings of no syllables.” Having now explained [the implications] of following those meanings that are devoid of syllables entirely, I therefore urge you to free yourself from what are half-syllables and grasp well what lies in complete syllables.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One. We should indeed study carefully the [total] number of syllables. For having now encountered the most exalted teacher, we have received both encouragement and admonishments from the Tathāgata.

The Buddha praised Kāśyapa: “Excellent, excellent! To seek the true-dharma you must study these things.”

Then the Buddha also imparted this to the bodhisattva Kāśyapa:

Good man, the *kācilindi* and the *cakravāka* are two kinds of birds who do things in tandem; they are never apart from each other, whether moving or stationary. In much the same way the dharmas of suffering, impermanence, and nonself are never apart from each other.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One. How can suffering, impermanence, and nonself be like the *cakravāka* and the *kācilindi* birds?”

The Buddha said:

Good man. There is a dharma that is painful and there is a different dharma that is blissful, there is dharma that is permanent and there is a different dharma that is impermanent, there is dharma that is self and there is a different dharma that is nonself. Just like rice differs from hemp or wheat, and wheat is likewise different from beans, millet, or sugar cane, in the same way from a variety of seeds emerge sprouts that will then become [a variety of] leaves and flowers. These [examples] are all impermanent and yet whenever the fruit ripens people enjoy it, and that moment we can call “a constant.” Why? Because its nature is true and real.

414c Kāśyapa then asked the Buddha: “World-Honored One. If there is a constancy in things like that that, would that be the same as [the constancy] of the Tathāgata?”

The Buddha answered:

No, good man, you should not construe things like that. Why? If you were to say the Tathāgata is like Mount Sumeru, then when the *kalpa* of destruction comes and Sumeru is destroyed, would you have it that the Tathāgata is also destroyed in the same way? Good man, you should not hold that kind of understanding. With the exception of nirvāṇa, good man, among all the dharmas there is not one that is permanent. I was only using a worldly figure of speech when I said that [the enjoyment of] fruit is a constant.

Kāśyapa then asked the Buddha: “World-Honored One. Excellent, excellent! Now I see what the Buddha was saying.”

The Buddha told Kāśyapa:

Just so, just so. Good man, even those who practice all the *samādhis* described in the sutras, until they hear this *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*, everything they say will only pertain to impermanence. But when they have heard this sutra, even when the defilements are present in them it will seem as if they are gone, and they will then be of benefit to all humans and deities. Why? Because they will have clearly ascertained the presence of buddha-nature within themselves. Good man, this is also like a mango tree (*āmra*). When its flowers begin to open and scatter, that we say is impermanent. But when its fruit has ripened, it is of great value, and that we can say is invariable.

Good man, even those who practice all the *samādhis* described in the sutras, until they hear this *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*, everything they say will only pertain to impermanence. But when they have heard this sutra, even when the defilements are present in them it will seem as if they are gone, and they will then be of benefit to all humans and deities. Why? Because they will have clearly ascertained the presence of buddha-nature within themselves. In addition, good man, this is analogous to what happens when gold ore is melted. What had been something with the characteristics of impermanence when melted turns into gold, which is of great value, and that we can say is invariable.

Good man, even those who practice all the *samādhis* described in the sutras, until they hear this *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*, everything they say will only pertain to impermanence. But when they have heard this sutra, even when the defilements are present in them it will seem as if they are gone, and they will then be of benefit to all humans and deities. Why? Because they will have clearly ascertained the presence of buddha-nature within themselves. Good man, it is like sesame. Before it is pressed it is known as an impermanent [substance], but after pressing it yields oil, which is of great value, and that we can say is invariable.

Good man, even those who practice all the *samādhis* described in the sutras, without hearing the *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*, everything they say

415a will only pertain to impermanence. But when they have heard this sutra, even when the defilements are present in them it will seem as if they are gone, and they will then be of benefit to all humans and deities. Why? Because they will have clearly ascertained the presence of buddha-nature within themselves. In addition, good man, this is analogous to the flow of a multitude of rivers that all return to the sea. The *samādhis* described in the sutra canon all return to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* of the Mahāyāna. Why is this? Because ultimately what I am talking about is the presence of buddha-nature. Good man, this precisely why I say there is a dharma that is permanent, and there is a different dharma that is impermanent, and so on up to the teaching of nonself, which is also like this.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then asked the Buddha:

World-Honored One. The Tathāgata is already free from the poisonous arrow of sorrow. Great sorrow is the mark of deities, but the Tathāgata is not a deity. Sorrow is the mark of a human being, but the Tathāgata is not a human being. Sorrow is the mark of the twenty-five forms of existence in saṃsāra, but the Tathāgata is not in any of those twenty-five forms of existence and therefore the Tathāgata has no sorrow. Why, then, do people speak of the Tathāgata's sorrow?

[The Buddha responded:]

Good man, beings in the heaven of nonideation are so called because ideas are not formed [in that realm].¹³⁹ But if there is no [mental process to produce] ideas, that should mean there is no life force. If there is no life force, then how could someone have aggregates, sense fields, and sense bases? In that sense, one cannot say the life force of a being in the heaven of nonideation resides in any particular place, [and yet this heaven is real]. Good man, it is like the tree spirits who reside in trees. It cannot be claimed with certainty that they reside in the branches, the nodes, the stems, or the leaves of trees. But just because their location is not fixed does not mean that we can say they do not exist. The life force of a being in the heaven of nonideation is like this.

Good man, the Buddha's dharma is also like this. It is exceedingly profound and difficult to grasp. The Tathāgata truly has no sorrow or

anxiety, and he brings forth great compassion for those who are enmeshed in sorrow. For he looks upon all living beings as he looks upon his son Rāhula.

In addition, good man, a life force of a being in the heaven of non-ideation can only be truly understood by a buddha; the knowledge of all others simply does not extend this far. This is also true for the state of neither ideation nor nonideation.¹⁴⁰ Kāśyapa, the nature of the Tathāgata is pure and unstained. As this is a constructed, transformation body, where could there be sorrow or anxiety? But to say that the Tathāgata has no sorrow is to question how he could be capable of benefiting living beings in disseminating the buddha-dharma. To say the Tathāgata has no sorrow is to question how he “looks upon living beings as he looks upon [his son] Rāhula.” And if someone denied that he looks upon others as Rāhula, such talk would be false. In this sense, good man, the Buddha is inconceivable, the dharma is inconceivable, the buddha-nature in living beings is inconceivable, and the life force of a being in a heaven devoid of ideation is inconceivable. The Tathāgata has sorrow and he does not have sorrow. This is the realm of buddhas and simply cannot be understood by śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas.

Good man, this is analogous to the impossibility of a house in all its detail standing in the sky. Yet if someone claimed that there could never be any means by which a house could be suspended in mid-air, that would be unfounded. It is in this sense that one should not say that a house is standing in the sky or is not standing in the sky. Though an ordinary person might claim that a house does stand in the sky, in fact the sky is such that in fact nothing resides in it. Why? Because its nature offers no support.¹⁴¹

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Good man, the mind is just like this. One cannot say it resides in the aggregates, the sense fields, or the sense bases, nor can one say it does not reside in those places. The life of beings in the heaven of non-ideation is also like this and the sorrow of the Tathāgata is like this as well. If the Tathāgata had no sorrow, then how can it be claimed that he regards living beings as if they were Rāhulas? If it were claimed that he does have sorrow, then why it is said that his nature is the same as the sky?¹⁴²

Good man, consider the analogy of a magician. Although he conjures up a variety of things—a palace, killing someone and then nurturing him back to health, being tied up and escaping, objects such as gold, silver, *vaidūrya*, jewels, a grove of trees or an individual tree—none of them are real. The Tathāgata is like this. In conformity with the world, he may manifest distress but actually there is no reality in the emotion being displayed.

Good man, the Tathāgata has already entered *parinirvāṇa*, so how could he have sorrow or anxiety? If someone were to say that the Tathāgata's entering into nirvāṇa was something impermanent, know that it would be that person who would have sorrow. If someone were to say that the Tathāgata does not enter into nirvāṇa but permanently abides in a way that is immutable, know that that person would be without sorrow. The Tathāgata does worry and does not worry, but this is not something that can easily be understood.

Moreover, good man, this is analogous to the fact that a lower person is quite familiar with a lower dharma, but does not have knowledge of notions of the middle or higher. Someone of the middle knows about the middle [dharmas] but does not know about the higher. But a higher person understands the higher *and* the middle and the lower. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are just like this—their knowledge is restricted to their own stage of understanding—but the Tathāgata is not, for he completely understands his own stage as well as the stages of understanding in others. This is why the Tathāgata is said to have unhindered wisdom. He manifests phantom transformations that accord with worldly custom and when ordinary people see this with their physical eyes they presume they are real. Yet despite the desire in some to thoroughly understand the unhindered, unsurpassed wisdom of the Tathāgata, this simply will not occur. He has anxiety and he does not have anxiety—only a buddha can understand this. And based on this causality, [this teaching that] “there is dharma about self and there is a different dharma about nonself” is what I call, “the nature of *cakravāka* and *kācilindi* birds.”

For in addition, good man, the Buddha's dharma moves in tandem, just like the *cakravāka* birds do. In the height of summer when the waters swell, these birds select high plains on which to settle as safe areas to

raise their young. When that period ends, they follow their instincts and move to other areas that give them security. The Tathāgata’s appearance in the world is just like this. In order to transform innumerable living beings he enables them to reside in the true-dharma, just as the *cakravāka* and *kācilindi* birds choose the high plains as the place to set down their children. The Tathāgata in like manner enables living beings to accomplish what they need to do and then immediately enters *mahāparinirvāṇa*. Good man, with the adage, “There is a dharma that is suffering and there is a different dharma that is bliss,” I am alluding to the fact that conditioned phenomena are suffering and that nirvāṇa is bliss. This is the most recondite [of doctrines], for it destroys conditioned phenomena.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One. Why is it that when living beings attain nirvāṇa it is called ‘the greatest bliss’?”

The Buddha said:

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Good man, as I have explained, conditioned phenomena as a whole are marked by aging and death.

Conscientious and attentive,
 Is the place I call the immortal (**amṛta*).
 Inattentive and not conscientious,
 That I call mortal (**mṛta*)
 If you are not inattentive
 Then you can obtain the deathless place.
 In like manner, the inattentive
 Always proceed down a road of death.

If one is inattentive, he is in [the realm of] created dharmas, and the created dharmas constitute what is most painful. Not to be inattentive thus refers to nirvāṇa; nirvāṇa is marked by deathlessness and constitutes what is most pleasurable. If one proceeds on the path of conditioned phenomena, that I call “the place of death where one receives the greatest pain.” But if one reaches nirvāṇa, this I call “the place of deathlessness where one receives the greatest pleasure.” To not be inattentive, even if one is involved with conditioned phenomena, I would still call that “a body that is permanent, blissful, deathless, and indestructible.”

What is it to be inattentive? What is it to be attentive? Mundane, ordinary people [follow] a dharma I call inattentive and of constant death. Supramundane, holy people are attentive and have neither aging nor death. Why is this? Because they have entered the ultimate, permanent bliss that is nirvāṇa. It is in this sense that I say there is a dharma that is painful and there is a different dharma that is blissful; there is dharma that is self and there is a different dharma that is nonself.

Like someone here on the ground who sees no traces of birds when looking up at the sky, good man, living beings who lack divine vision will not see their own tathāgata-nature existing right there in the midst of their own defilements. This is why I have expounded the recondite teachings of nonself. What is this about? It is about the fact that without divine vision one cannot understand the true self and instead, a self is constructed in a way that is inappropriate. Anything created that is a product of the defilements is impermanent. This is why I have said that there are dharmas that are permanent and different dharmas that are impermanent.

He who is steadfast and strong,
As if standing on a mountaintop,
Constantly observes ordinary people,
On the ground and in the wilderness [below].
Having ascended a palace of great wisdom,
A platform of unsurpassed wonder,
He has removed his own sorrow
Yet sees the sorrow in living beings.

Having completely cut off the defilements in himself, however numerous, the Tathāgata resides on a mountain of wisdom, observing living beings who themselves are constantly [plagued by] the defilements, hundreds of millions in number.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha:

World-Honored One. The meaning of what you have expounded in these verses does not make sense to me. Why? Because those who have entered nirvāṇa have neither sadness nor happiness. How does one attain the “ascent to a palace of wisdom”? Moreover, what does it mean to live at the top of a mountain and observe living beings below?

The Buddha said:

Good man, the palace of wisdom is just another name for nirvāṇa. He who has no sorrow refers to tathāgatas; he who has sorrow refers to ordinary people. It is because ordinary people have sorrow that they regard tathāgatas as not having sorrow. The peak of Mount Sumeru refers to proper liberation. Making diligent effort is a metaphor for the fact that there are no disturbances on Mount Sumeru. The earth refers to conditioned phenomena; these ordinary people who are settled on the earth, they create these conditioned phenomena. The term “wisdom” is thus a name for right awakening. Freed from existence, [the liberated person] permanently abides and is therefore called “tathāgata.” Tathāgatas have sympathy for the innumerable living beings that are continuously struck by the poisonous arrows of their various states of existence. This is why I referred to the Tathāgata as having sorrow. 416a

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One. If a tathāgata were to feel sadness, then we could not call him ‘a perfectly enlightened one.’”

The Buddha then said to Kāśyapa:

All things have causes and conditions for coming into existence. In accordance with the transformations that living beings are bound to go through, the Tathāgata takes birth and manifests himself among them. But though he may undergo birth [as a living being], in actuality no birth takes place. This is why I say the Tathāgata is a “constantly abiding dharma,” just like the *kācilindi* and *cakravāka* birds [that are always together].

Fascicle IX

Chapter Four

The Nature of the Tathāgata: Part 6

[The Buddha said:]

In addition, good man, this situation is somewhat like the moon in that when there are people who cannot see it, it prompts them all to say, “The moon has sunk,” and so creates the idea of the moon “sinking away.” In truth the nature of the moon is such that it does not sink away; since its visibility shifts in other regions, in those locations living beings will be thinking, “The moon has come out.” In truth the nature of the moon is that it never “comes out” either. Why? Because it is merely not visible when it is blocked by Mount Sumeru. The moon is always in existence; its nature is such that there is no coming out or sinking.

The Tathāgata, Worthy of Offerings, Perfectly Enlightened One is also like this. He comes out into the great trichilocosm, on occasion manifesting in Jambudvīpa with a father and mother. Living beings all think that the Tathāgata came into existence in Jambudvīpa or that the Tathāgata has manifested his nirvāṇa in Jambudvīpa, but in fact there is no nirvāṇa in the nature of tathāgatas. Living beings may all think that truly the Tathāgata’s *parinirvāṇa* will be just like when the moon goes away, but, good man, in truth the nature of the Tathāgata is without coming into existence or going out of existence. It is for the purpose of spiritually transforming living beings that a tathāgata shows himself to come into or go out of existence.

Good man, [what we see as] a full moon will manifest as only half full when viewed from another locale, and what we see as half full will

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be seen as a full moon when viewed from another locale. When people in Jambudvīpa see the first crescent of the moon they all think they perceive the first day of the month, and when the moon is full they think of that as the fifteenth day and have the idea that the moon's cycle is complete. But the nature of the moon is such that it actually neither waxes nor wanes; the [perceived] increase or decrease in its size is due to Mount Sumeru. Good man, [the presence of] the Tathāgata in Jambudvīpa is like this: he manifests birth, he manifests nirvāṇa, and so forth. When initially he comes into existence like the first crescent moon, everyone thinks that a child has been born. When the infant takes those seven steps, it is like the second day in a month. When he manifests himself entering school, it is like the third day in a month. When he leaves his household [to enter the religious life], it is like the eighth day in a month. When he shines forth the subtle light of wisdom that can destroy the innumerable hordes of māras lurking among living beings, it is like a full moon on the fifteenth day of the lunar cycle. When he manifests his thirty-two major and eighty minor physical marks, adorning himself even while he shows himself to be passing into nirvāṇa, it is like an eclipse of the moon. Thus what living beings see is not the same: they may see a half-moon, they may see a full moon, or they may see a lunar eclipse. And yet the nature of the moon is such that despite the appearance of it waxing and waning and going into eclipse, in truth it is always fully rounded. The body of the Tathāgata is just like this. That is why I refer to it as permanently abiding and unchanging.

Good man, consider further the metaphor of the full moon in all its manifestations to viewers here and there, how it appears in cities, towns, and villages, reflected in water collected between mountains, in wells, ponds, large bowls, and water jars. There are living beings that, over the course of traveling a hundred *yojanas* or one hundred thousand *yojanas*, see the moon as constantly following them. There are also ordinary, ignorant people who, having mistaken conceptions of their experience, may say:

I saw the moon previously when I was in town, or when I was in my home. Now I see it from here, standing in this wide-open space.

Is this the same moon that I saw before, or is it a different one?

They also wonder about the size and shape of the moon changing, or if it is really shaped like the opening of a water jar. Some say, “It looks like a big wheel.” Some say, “It seems to be forty-nine *yojanas* [across].” Everyone sees the light of the moon, but some say what they are seeing is a sphere that looks like a golden disk. The moon has only one nature but there are a variety of living beings, and each sees something different in it.

Good man, it is much the same with the Tathāgata appearing in the world. There are some humans and gods who think, “The Tathāgata is present right here in front of me, right now.” And there are those who are naturally unable to hear or unable to speak who perceive the Tathāgata as also being unable to hear or unable to speak. There are also various groups of living beings, each using a different form of speech, all of whom think that tathāgatas all use the same language as their own. And there are individuals who may also think, “He was present in my house when he accepted my offering.” There are also living beings that look upon the body of the Tathāgata as being immeasurably large, just as there are some who see it as extremely small. There are some who will see the Buddha in the form of a śrāvaka, and there are some who will see [the Buddha] in the form of a pratyekabuddha. There are also heretics who each think, “The Tathāgata is present now so that he can become a renunciant to study our dharma.” And there are also living beings who think, “The Tathāgata has come into the world now only just for me.”

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The true nature of the Tathāgata may thus be compared to the moon in that his body is a dharma body rather than a body that is born into existence. It is a body of expediency that becomes visible in conformity with the world. As the result of innumerable causal forces set in motion in the distant past, the Buddha thus becomes visible much like the moon does, appearing to those who are in this or that locale as if he is being born where they are. It is in this sense that I speak of the Tathāgata as abiding permanently and immutable.

Moreover, good man, it is like the *asura* king Rāhu holding back the moon with his hands, which people throughout the world regard as [the cause] of lunar eclipses. But the *asura* king is incapable of doing anything

that actually affects the moon itself; what he does is block its light. The moon-globe is not disturbed in any way when this happens; it is only because of the moon's obstruction by the hands of the *asura* that it is rendered invisible. When he pulls his hands away, throughout the world it is thought that the moon has been restored to life, with everyone saying that the moon has undergone considerable pain and suffering. But in truth even a hundred thousand *asura* kings could not cause any trouble for the moon.¹⁴³

The Tathāgata is just like this. Some living beings may show up at the Tathāgata's location with violent intentions and cause him to bleed, committing one of the five heinous crimes, reaching the point of becoming *icchāntika*. In a future time they will appear among living beings intent on creating problems, attempting to rupture the sangha or cut off [the transmission of] the dharma. But hundreds of thousands, even incalculable numbers, of *māras* would still be unable to injure the Tathāgata's body, causing him to shed blood. Why is this? Because the body of a tathāgata is not made of flesh and blood, sinew and muscle, bone and marrow. The truth is that there is no injuring the Tathāgata. Living beings all think the dharma and the sangha will be destroyed and the Tathāgata will perish. But the nature of a tathāgata is truly without change or disintegration. It is only in conformity with the world that such things seem evident.

In addition, good man, it is like two people sparring with swords or lances who cut each other and draw blood; even if the injuries to one of them is so grave as to cause death, it would not come from any intention to kill. The karmic impact in a case like this would be light rather than heavy. For one who comes to where the Tathāgata is with no thoughts of killing, even if that person were to cause the Tathāgata to bleed, the karmic effect would be similarly light rather than heavy. In this way the Tathāgata has brought forth the doctrine of karmic retribution but only for the purpose of spiritually transforming living beings in the future.

In addition, good man, this is like the highly skilled physician who, in enthusiastically teaching his son the basic principles of medicine, explains:

These are the medicines made from roots, these are the medicines made from stems, and these are the colored medicines. There is

some variety in how each of them looks, all of which you must know well.

Respecting whatever commands his father gave him, the son studied diligently and thus gained a clear understanding about the medicines. Sometime later, when the elder physician's life had run its course and he died, his son cried out:

Father! It was you who originally taught me about medicines from roots, medicines from stems such as these, and medicines from flowers such as these, showing me what colors and forms they have.

The Tathāgata is just like this. In order to spiritually transform living beings he has brought forth restrictive precepts that must be observed without violation. There will be individuals in the future who may commit one of the five heinous crimes, who may denigrate the true-dharma, or who may be *icchantikas*, and this is why I have made plain [this system of precepts]. After the Buddha's disappearance I want the *bhikṣus* to create an understanding of the profound meaning in this sutra, the degree of seriousness in [each of] the precepts, and the analytic statements about the dharma in the Abhidharma in the same way that the physician's son [worked to create his own understanding].

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In addition, good man, it is like the fact that a human knows that a lunar eclipse occurs only once every six months, yet gods above see eclipses in the space of an instant. Why? Because in the heavens a day is long while for humans it is short.¹⁴⁴ Good man, the Tathāgata is just the same. Gods and humans universally regard the Tathāgata's lifetime as short, but just like how frequently gods and humans see lunar eclipses lasting but an instant, in an instant a Tathāgata manifests a myriad nirvāṇas in which he has cut off the defilement-māra, the aggregate-māra, and the māra of death, which is why the hundreds of thousands of millions of māras in heaven all know the Tathāgata has entered *parinirvāṇa*, and that the revelation of the innumerable hundreds of thousands of previous karmic attainments was in accordance with the variety of natures [of living beings] in the world. These displays are thus innumerable, endless, and inconceivable. This is why the Tathāgata abides permanently, without change.

In addition, good man, this is analogous to a bright moon that living beings view with pleasure, which is why they call the moon a “joyful sight.” If living beings are plagued by greed, anger, or stupidity, they will not be inclined to admire the moon and call it a “joyful sight,” however. But nothing is more admired as a joyful sight than the Tathāgata, whose nature is invariably good, pure, and without even a trace of defilement. Living beings that take joy in the dharma look upon him in this way without enmity, but those with malicious intent look at him with displeasure. It is in this sense that the Tathāgata is analogous to a bright moon.

Good man, there is also the analogy of how the length of a day differs during the three seasons of spring, summer, and winter. A winter day is short, a spring day is average, and a summer day is quite long. The Tathāgata is also like this in the way [he is perceived] within the great trichilocosm. For those whose lifetimes are short and for śrāvakas, he appears to have a short life span. Based on what they see, they all decry that the lifetime of a Tathāgata is brief, analogous to a winter day. For the bodhisattvas he appears to have a medium-length life span that may reach one *kalpa* or something less than one *kalpa*, analogous to a day in spring. It is only a buddha who sees the immeasurable length of another buddha’s lifetime, analogous to a summer day.

Good man, as the recondite teachings of the well-balanced Mahāyāna as expounded by the Tathāgata are brought forth into the world, a great dharma rain will fall upon it. In the future, if there are people who are able to preserve these texts and analytically show their implications, [thereby] benefiting living beings, you should understand those individuals to be true bodhisattvas, analogous to sweet rain falling at the height of summer. Yet if there are śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas present, hearing the Tathāgata’s recondite teachings will feel like a winter’s day that makes them shiver with cold. For those who are bodhisattvas, however, if they hear recondite teachings and admonitions such as these, they will [understand] that it is the Tathāgata’s nature to abide permanently without change, [always as fresh] as a spring day when buds sprout on the vine. In truth, the nature of a tathāgata is such that there is neither short nor long, no time duration of any kind. It is for the sake of the world that [a

tathāgata’s lifetime] is manifest in these ways. This is, in fact, the genuine dharma-nature of the buddhas.

In addition, good man, [the buddhas] are like a cluster of stars that do not appear during the day. The people all reckon:

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In the daytime the stars disappear but they have not really disappeared. The reason they are not visible is because of how sunlight impacts what we see.

Tathāgatas are also like this. The śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are unable to see them, just like people in this world cannot see stars in the daytime.

In addition, good man, this is also analogous to the sun and moon not being visible when the darkness of a shadow [covers them]. An ignorant person will say, “The sun and moon are gone!” But of course the sun and moon have not really gone anywhere. When the true-dharma of the Tathāgata has completely disappeared, the Three Jewels will also appear to be gone. But in the same way these things will not be gone forever. That is why you must understand that the Tathāgata abides permanently and without any change whatsoever. How can this be? It is because the true nature of the Three Jewels is unstained by any form of defilement.

In addition, good man, it is like a comet that appears at night during the dark half of the month. The light of the comet burns for a brief period of time and then disappears. Upon seeing this, living beings may get the idea that this is a portent of something ominous. *Pratyekabuddhas* react in similar fashion to a world in which no buddhas are present. When living beings in general notice this, they will say to themselves, “The Tathāgata has truly passed into extinction,” and become filled with sadness. And yet the body of the Tathāgata in fact will not have passed into extinction, just as the sun or moon are not destroyed [when they are not visible].

In addition, good man, one can make an analogy to the disappearance of all traces of fog or mist when the sun appears in the sky. This *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* will have the same effect as it comes forth into the world. If living beings have the sutra pass through their ears just once, they will be able to remove the negative karma accruing from

all their transgressions, even those that bring immediate retribution in hell. The profound realm of this *Great Nirvana* [Sutra] is inconceivable. Skillfully propounding the subtle tathāgata-nature, it is on that basis that good men and good women should constantly abide in the thought that the Tathāgata is immutable, that the true-dharma will never be cut off, and that the sangha jewel will never disappear. Therefore skillful means should be frequently cultivated and this sutra diligently studied, and before long the individual who does so will attain *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*.

Therefore I call this sutra the *Assemblage of Immeasurable Merit*. I also call it the *Awakening that Cannot be Exhausted*. And because it is inexhaustible, I also call it the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*. As glorious as a summer's day, its body is without limit, so I call it the *Great Nirvana*.

In addition, the light from the sun and moon, good man, are the brightest of all; no other sources of light can reach that level [of intensity]. The light of the *Great Nirvana* [Sutra] is like this, for it surpasses the light of *samādhi* in other sutras. That is, the light inherent in the *samādhis* of other sutras cannot reach its level [of intensity]. Why? Because the light of the *Great Nirvana* can enter the pores of living beings. Even without the *bodhicitta* aspiration to awakening, living beings are still able to create the causality that leads to awakening. That is another reason why it is called the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*[-sūtra].

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The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha:

World-Honored One. The Buddha has explained that the light of this *Mahāparinirvāṇa*[-sūtra] enters the pores of all living beings, and that even without the aspiration to awakening a living being can still create the causality that leads to awakening. But this does not make sense. Why? World-Honored One, if this light entered the bodies of those who commit one of the four grave offenses, the bodies of those who commit one of the five heinous crimes, or the bodies of the *icchantikas*, and created a causality that brings awakening [in all these people], then what would there be to distinguish these groups from those who have been pure in observing the precepts and have been cultivating practices that are morally wholesome? If there are no distinctions among these groups,

then why does the Tathāgata preach the importance of individuals [serving as] the four refuges [in the Buddha’s absence]?¹⁴⁵ World-Honored One. The Buddha has also said that if living beings heard just this one sutra, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, they would then be able to remove the defilements within themselves. Then why did the Tathāgata say previously that even if people brought forth personal aspirations before buddhas present in numbers as many as the grains of sand in the Ganges River and then heard the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*[-*sūtra*], they may still not comprehend its meaning? If people do not understand the sutra’s meaning, then how can they eliminate all their defilements?

The Buddha said:

Good man, with the exception of the *icchāntikas*, after having heard this sutra all living beings will be able to create the causal conditions needed for enlightenment. When the sound and the light of the dharma enter a person’s pores that person will, without fail, attain *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*. How does this happen? If someone were to honor the innumerable buddhas with offerings, he would thereby be able to hear the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. But those whose religious merit is slight will thus be unable to hear it. What is the reason for this? It is because a virtuous person is capable of hearing a matter of such great significance but a vulgar or petty person is not able to hear it [even when listening]. And what is this matter of great significance? It is the profound, hidden treasury of which the buddhas speak, what I refer to as “buddha-nature.” This is the meaning of this teaching, and this is why I refer to it as a matter of great significance.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha:

World-Honored One. How can those who have not brought forth the *bodhicitta* resolution obtain that which can serve as a cause for awakening?

The Buddha told Kāśyapa:

If, after having hearing this *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, a person declares, “I have no need to commit to any aspiration to *bodhi*” and denigrates

the true-dharma, he will have a dream in which he encounters a *rākṣasa* demon. He will be gripped with fear, for the *rākṣasa* will say to him, “Hey, good man! If you do not put forth your *bodhicitta* right now, I will take your life!” He will awaken in morbid fear and immediately resolve to attain *bodhi*. When his life ends, he may be reborn in one of the three unfortunate realms or as a human or as a deity, but wherever he ends up he will continue to recall his *bodhicitta* resolution. You should thus understand that at that point this person is a bodhisattva-mahāsattva. Thus is the spiritual majesty of this *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*: it can move those who have never brought forth *bodhicitta* to create causes that can bring about awakening. Good man, this is what I call “the causality that produces *bodhicitta*.” There will be no awakening otherwise. It is in this sense that you know the subtle Mahāyāna scriptures truly embody what the Buddha has taught.

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You may also think of this, good man, like rain that pours down from a great cloud covering the sky, bringing water to the earth, dried trees, rocky cliffs, high plains, and earthen mounds. The water does not remain where it falls but flows downward, pouring into fields below, filling reservoirs and benefiting innumerable living beings.

Thus it is with this *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana*. It rains down the dharma rain, universally moistening living beings. The only exception [to its universal benefit] is the fact that it is not reasonable to expect *icchāntikas* to produce the *bodhicitta* aspiration.

In addition, good man, [an *icchāntika*] is like a charred seed (*dagdhā-bījā*). Even if exposed to sweet rain for a billion *kalpas*, in the end that seed will not germinate. And if it did germinate somehow, this would be contrary to reason. Those grouped as *icchāntikas* are just like this. Even if they hear this *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana*, in the end they will not be capable of producing anything that would germinate into *bodhicitta*. And if they did manage to produce that aspiration, it would be contrary to reason. Why? Because these people have cut off all their wholesome karmic roots, and like charred seeds they are incapable of producing roots that could germinate into *bodhi*.

Good man, this situation is also analogous to a *maṇi* jewel.¹⁴⁶ If placed in murky water, its radiant power would make the water clear but if

thrown into mud it would not have the same effect. This *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* is also like this. Placed amid the murky waters of the five *ānantarya* transgressions that bring immediate retribution or the four grave offenses committed by living beings, it would have the effect of purifying the thoughts of such individuals to where they would aspire to awakening. But when thrown into the muddy [mind] of *icchāntikas*, even after a billion years it would not be able to purify their thoughts to the point at which they would resolve to attain awakening. Why? Because *icchāntikas* have destroyed their good karmic roots, and as such they are not vessels [for spiritual pursuits]. Even if they listened to this *Mahā-parinirvāṇa-sūtra* over the course of a billion years, in the end they would still be incapable of producing *bodhicitta* within themselves. Why? Because *icchāntikas* lack any of the meritorious states of mind [that make *bodhicitta* possible].

Good man, another analogy is the medicinal tree called the “medicine king,” so called because it produces the most excellent of all medicines. Normally it is mixed with whey, or honey, or perilla, or water, or milk, and then rolled into the form of a stick or a round ball. Then it is smeared on a wound, or used to smoke the body, or rubbed on the eyes. It may be seen or it may be smelled, but one way or another it can eliminate any and all illnesses contracted by living beings. Now this medicinal tree does not think:

If living beings take my roots they should never take my leaves. If they take my leaves, they should never take my roots. If they take my wood, they should never take my bark. If they take my bark, they should never take my wood.

This tree, despite not having such thoughts, effectively eliminates any disorder or ailment.¹⁴⁷

Good man, this *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* is also like this. It can eliminate the negative karma accrued by any living being, including the four *pārājika* offenses and the five transgressions that bring immediate retribution, regardless of whether the transgression was generated internally or externally. It can be why those who have never formed the *bodhicitta* resolution thereupon do just that. Why? Because this subtle scripture

418b is the king among sutras, just like that medicinal tree is the king among medicines. People who cultivate [the teachings of] the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*—and even those who do not—will be struck when they hear that there is a sutra with this name. Upon hearing it, they will trust in it, and find that all the serious ills stemming from their defilements will disappear. With the exception of *icchāntikas* whom it cannot impact, this sutra will bring [those who understand it] to abide in *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*. And just like the wondrous medicine [from that medicinal tree], although capable of healing a wide variety of serious illnesses, it is nevertheless ineffective for someone fated to die.¹⁴⁸

In addition, good man, consider someone who has injured his hand. If he applies strong, poisonous medicine, such as scorpion’s tail, [directly to the wound], the poison will penetrate into him. But if he had no wound, the poison could not seep inside him. *Ichchantikas* are like this. Having no cause that could lead to liberation is like having no wound: no strong, poisonous medicine can enter them. By the word “wound,” I am referring to those causal conditions that lead one to unsurpassed enlightenment, and by the word “poison” I am denoting the preeminently superb medicine [of this sutra]. Those who are completely without wounds are what we call *icchāntikas*.¹⁴⁹

In addition, good man, consider the metaphor of a diamond that cannot be broken yet is capable of breaking all other things, with the exception of tortoise shells and the horns of white rams. This *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* is just like that, for it is capable of establishing countless living beings on the path to enlightenment. It is only the *icchāntikas* whom it cannot move to produce any cause that would lead to awakening.

In addition, good man, this situation is like the purslane plant, the *śallakī* tree, and the *karnikāra* tree: even if you cut off their branches and stalks, they will continue to grow. The *tāla* tree, on the other hand, is not like this; it will not grow back after being cut down.¹⁵⁰ Living beings are also like this. If they manage to hear this *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, then even if they have committed one of the four *pārājika* or five transgressions that produce immediate retribution, they would still be able to generate causal conditions that produce bodhi. But *icchāntikas* are different. Even if they hear and accept this subtle scripture, they will

still be incapable of generating causes that could bring them to the path leading to *bodhi*. Good man, *icchantikās* are somewhat like *khadira* or *tinduka* trees, which do not regenerate after they are cut down, just as charred seeds [do not germinate].¹⁵¹ Even when they do hear this *Mahā-parinirvāṇa-sūtra*, [*icchantikās*] will remain unable to produce the causal conditions that would lead to *bodhi*, like charred seeds.

In addition, good man, it is like a great rain that, after falling, no longer remains in the sky. This *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* is also like that. The dharma rain falls universally but it does not remain (*avatiṣṭhate*) with *icchantikās*. An *icchantika* has a stiff body that is wound up very tight; it is like a diamond in that nothing can penetrate it.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying,

World-Honored One, you once uttered this verse:

[Verse One]

Not seeing what is good (*kalyāṇa*), they will not do it.
 Only seeing what is bad (*pāpa*), this they may do.
 On that basis, one should be afraid,
 As if on a dangerously steep path.

World-Honored One, would you explain what it was you were saying there?

The Buddha said,

Good man, [regarding *icchantikās*,] “not seeing” refers to not seeing the buddha-nature. “What is good” is *anuttarā samyakṣambodhi* itself. To say “they will not do it” refers to [an *icchantika*] being unable to approach a good friend who can guide him spiritually. “Only seeing” refers to seeing without good reason. The word “bad” here refers to their repudiation of the well-balanced Mahāyāna sutras. And “this they may do” refers to the fact that *icchantikās* do say there are no well-balanced [sutras]. The meaning of the verse is simply that *icchantikās* do not think in a way that advances them toward the pure and good dharma. What is the pure and good dharma? It is nirvāṇa itself! To advance toward nirvāṇa refers to the capacity to cultivate practices that are wise and good, yet *icchantikās*

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have no practices that are wise and good. This is why they are incapable of progressing toward nirvāṇa. “On that basis, one should be afraid” refers to repudiating the true-dharma. Who should be frightened? I am talking about those who are said to be wise. Why? Because anyone who denigrates the dharma has neither good thoughts nor skillful means. The “dangerously steep path” refers to the composite things (*samskāra*) [of the world].

Kāśyapa once again asked,

And what is the meaning of this verse also spoken by the Buddha?

[Verse Two]

How to see what has been done?
How to obtain a good dharma?
On what basis is one not afraid,
As if on a king’s level path?

What is this referring to?

The Buddha said:

Good man, this allusion to “how to see what has been done” refers to coming forward with the harmful things [that you yourself have done]. Every bad deed you have done from your birth until your death should be confessed until there is nothing left to speak of. This is how you find the basis [for living] without fear. The path metaphor refers to the righteous path walked by people and kings, from which all bandits flee. By confessing all your transgressions in this way, without exception [your fears] will completely disappear.

In addition, one may also speak of “not seeing what has been done” in reference to the fact that *icchāntikas* do not admit to themselves the host of bad things they have done. Because the *icchāntikas* are arrogant, even though they often do things that are harmful, while doing them they initially have no sense of fear. This is why *icchāntikas* are unable to attain nirvāṇa; they are like monkeys grabbing at the [reflection of the] moon in the water. Good man, if all living beings, however innumerable, were

to all at once attain *anuttarā samyaksaṃbodhi*, the tathāgatas would still not see the *icchantikas* attaining *bodhi*. This is also the meaning of what I have called “not seeing what has been done.”

In addition, the actions of whom else are not seen? I am referring to “not noticing what has been done by the tathāgatas.” The Buddha has expounded the existence of buddha-nature for the benefit of living beings, but *icchantikas* transmigrate through saṃsāra unable to discern what this is. It is in this sense that I used the phrase “not noticing what has been done by the tathāgatas.”

icchantikas will also look at the complete nirvāṇa of the Tathāgata and say to themselves, “This truly shows impermanence, nothing more than a lamp going out when its oil is extinguished.” Why are they like this? Because their bad behavior (*pāpa-karman*) does not distress them.

When bodhisattvas are present, doing good deeds whose merit they turn over toward the goal of attaining *anuttarā samyaksaṃbodhi*, even as the *icchantikas*—being devoid of faith themselves—revile those bodhisattvas and seek to ruin their efforts, they find that bodhisattvas respond by offering [their own merit] to the *icchantikas*, wanting to accomplish the path of excellence together with them. Why? Because the reality of the Buddha’s dharma is naturally like this.

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[Verse Three]

When something bad is done, one does not feel [its effects]
immediately.

It is like fresh milk that curdles [over time].

Or like ashes covering a fire,

On which the fool blithely treads.

The *icchantikas* may be called “blind.” For this reason they do not see the path of the arhat. Similarly, arhats do not course through the harsher paths in saṃsāra, and by means of their own blindness they malign the well-balanced [sutras] and do not want to practice what it is in them. In the same way that arhats approach the cultivation of compassion, *icchantikas* are similarly not interested in practicing what is in the well-balanced [sutras].

Now you may hear someone speak like this:

I no longer believe in the śrāvaka scriptures. I believe in the Mahāyāna [sutras], which I read, recite, and interpret. For this reason I am now a bodhisattva. All living beings have buddha-nature, and by dint of having this buddha-nature their bodies contain the thirty-two major and eighty minor physical marks [of a buddha]. What I say is no different from what the Buddha says. Now you and I together can destroy the innumerable evil defilements as easily as smashing a [ceramic] water jar. And by destroying those entanglements [we] will behold the liberation of *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*.

People like this, despite such elocution, do not truly believe in the existence of buddha-nature and speak in this elaborate way only for personal gain. Anyone who speaks like this I call a harmful person. But harmful people like this do not feel the karmic effects [of their behavior] quickly, like milk curdling [over time].

Consider the analogy of an imperial envoy with expertise in diplomacy and who is skilled in using expedient means. When in another country on a mission, he knows it would be better to lose his life than do anything that would prevent the king's message from reaching its destination. Wise people are also like this, for they do not begrudge their own lives [in working] among ordinary people to fulfill the imperative to disseminate what they know about the tathāgata hidden treasury as extolled in the Mahāyāna well-balanced [sutras]—namely, that all living beings possess buddha-nature.

Good man, there are *icchāntikas* who take on the persona of an arhat, residing in desolate areas and disparaging the well-balanced Mahāyāna scriptures. Ordinary people who see someone like this will typically remark, “There goes a true arhat, a great bodhisattva-mahāsattva.” But these *icchāntikas* are unsavory *bhikṣus* who live in the forest yet violate the dharma of forest life. When seeing what is provided for others, for example, they become jealous. They say things like, “All the well-balanced Mahāyāna scriptures are nothing but the preaching of Māra Pāpīyas,” and also claim that tathāgatas are impermanent dharmas. They seek to destroy the true-dharma and break up the sangha. These statements

reflect the kind of thing that a Pāpīyas would say, not a person of humility. The dissemination of such fabrications reflects a deleterious, contrary dharma. These are people who do bad deeds but do not feel retribution immediately, like fresh milk that curdles [over time], or like ashes covering a fire on which fools blithely tread. Someone like this I regard as an *icchantika*.

Therefore you should understand that the Mahāyāna well-balanced scriptures are decidedly pure. When thrown into murky water a maṇi jewel will cause the water to become clear—the Mahāyāna scriptures are also like this.

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Good man, consider the analogy of a lotus flower: it cannot but open when it is bathed in sunlight. All living beings are also like this: anyone who had not previously produced the *bodhicitta* will do so when they perceive the sun that is the *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]*, and this then indeed becomes the cause leading to their liberation. That is why I have expounded the [significance] of the light of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]* that enters one's pores and then without fail becomes the wondrous cause for [a later effect]. For those who are *icchantikās*, although they possess buddha-nature, they are held down by the stain of their innumerable transgressions, unable to get free, like silkworms inside of cocoons. Because of their karmic conditions, they cannot produce a cause that would lead to *bodhi* and instead transmigrate through saṃsāra with no end in sight.

In addition, good man, consider the fact that the blue lotus flower (*utpala*), the yellow lotus flower (*kumuda*), the red lotus flower (*padma*), and the white lotus flower (*puṇḍarīka*) all grow in mud, yet in their final flowering they are untainted by that mud. Living beings that cultivate [the teachings of] this *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* are also like this: despite the presence of the defilements in them, in the end they are untainted by those defilements. Why is this? Because they understand the power in the nature and the form of the Tathāgata. Good man, it is like a nation in which a pure, cool wind frequently blows. When that wind touches the skin of living beings, it completely removes their burning distress. This Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra*, is like that: universally entering the pores of living beings and creating the subtle yet

marvelous causes and conditions for liberation. Except for the *icchāntikas*. Why? Because they are not vessels for the dharma.

In addition, good man, consider [the power of] an excellent physician so skilled in all eight technical disciplines of healing¹⁵² that he is able to eradicate all forms of illness, with the exception of those that inevitably bring death. Thus are the entirety of the sutras, meditations, and *samādhis* capable of curing all the ills [brought on by] the defilements of greed, anger, and stupidity. They can pull out the poisoned needles and arrows of those defilements, but they cannot cure someone of the effects of committing one of the four grave offenses or five heinous crimes.

Good man, there are also physicians whose medical skills surpass the eight technical disciplines of healing and are thus capable of removing whatever pain or infirmity may strike living beings, but even they cannot cure an illness that brings certain death. This *Mahāparinirvāṇa Mahāyāna-sūtra* is just like [a physician] in removing all the defilements that affect living beings, bringing them to peacefully dwell within a pure, wondrous causality [that leads to becoming] a tathāgata, and enabling those who have yet to make their *bodhicitta* resolution to finally do so. But it cannot do anything for an *icchāntika* who faces certain death.

419c In addition, good man, consider the analogy of an excellent physician possessing wonderful medicine that can cure those who have lost their sight. He can enable them to see the light of the sun, the moon, the stars, and the constellations, to see a myriad of different colors and shapes. Yet he does not have the ability to cure someone who is born blind. This Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra*, is like that, capable of making śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas open their eyes of wisdom, enabling them to peacefully dwell within the innumerable, endless stream of Mahāyāna scriptures. It has the power to take anyone who has not aspired to liberation and enable that person to do so, including someone who has violated one of the four grave offenses or committed one of the five heinous crimes. But having been born blind, the *icchāntikas* are excluded.

In addition, good man, consider another analogy of an excellent physician skilled in the eight technical disciplines of healing. In order to cure living beings of every pain or infirmity the physician applies a variety

of different treatments. For vomiting, for example, medicines may be smeared on the body, inhaled, or used to irrigate the nasal passage. Some medicines are made in powdered form or rolled into pills. But if the patient is poor and ignorant and does not want the treatment, then the skilled physician out of pity may decide to take that person back to his home and force him to take the treatment. By the power of the medicine, the patient is relieved of his distress. Similarly, if the placenta is not delivered when a woman gives birth, a doctor administers treatment to make the placenta come out. He may also calm the baby, relieving it of any distress. This Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra*, is also like that in that it will reach anywhere, even into a person's home, to take away the defilements that afflict living beings. Even for those who have committed one the four grave offenses or five heinous crimes, or who have not resolved to attain liberation, it can nevertheless enable them to bring forth that resolution. But this excludes *icchantikas*.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One. Someone who commits one of the four grave offenses or five heinous crimes is known to be seriously depraved, analogous to cutting off the top of a palmyra tree that will not grow back. By themselves people like this would never make a resolution for awakening, so what can be done to create the causality that would bring *bodhi* to them?

The Buddha explained:

Good man, there are living beings that dream they have fallen into a hell where they undergo agonies, which then brings up feelings of remorse in them. When that happens, they think:

How miserable! We have brought upon ourselves this punishment for wrongdoings. If we could somehow rid ourselves of those wrongdoings, we would definitely commit ourselves to the attainment of awakening. For nothing could be worse than what we have seen here.

After they awaken, instantly they understand the great fruition that accrues from the true-dharma. They become like an infants who gradually grow into adulthood, constantly thinking like this:

There is a physician who is skilled and knows his medicines very well. When I was still in the womb he treated my mother with medicine to calm her, and thanks to that she had an easy time of it. Because of those [favorable] conditions within her, my life [in the womb] was completed without incident. It is a miracle, really, that my mother went through so much agony for a full ten months while carrying me to term. After I was born, she dried me off, wiping off the moisture [on my skin], and removing my impure urine and feces. She fed me with her milk, raised me, and protected me. This is why I will repay her kindness by caring for her with sensitivity, protecting her, honoring her, and complying with her wishes.

When a man who has committed the four grave offenses or five heinous crimes faces the end of his life, he [should] fix his concentration on this Mahāyāna *Great Nirvana Sutra*; for no matter if he is reborn in the realms of hell, among animals, in the realm of hungry ghosts, with the gods in the heavens, or as a human being, a sutra such as this will empower him to create the causes needed for liberation. But this excludes *icchantikas*.

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In addition, good man, consider the analogy of an excellent physician and his son who was also an excellent physician. They possessed a depth of knowledge exceeding that of other physicians, including detailed knowledge of the best incantations to use in eliminating poisons. Whether confronted with a dangerously poisonous snake, a serpent demon, or a pit viper, they had a medicine they enchanted with their ritual incantations, making it more effective. They painted this medicine on leather shoes and whenever those shoes came into contact with poisonous insects, their poison would disappear. But there was one exception, namely the poison of what was called the “great serpent.” This Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra*, also functions like this. If there are living beings that have committed one of the four serious offenses or five heinous crimes, [this sutra] can wipe away all [their karmic issues], enabling these individuals to dwell in the liberation of *bodhi*. Just like the medicinal shoes that were able to eliminate the various forms of poison, [this sutra] can move someone who had not previously aspired to liberation to endeavor to do so, thereby enabling that individual to calmly settle in

the path to *bodhi*. This is possible because of the efficacious medicine that is this Mahāyāna *Great Nirvana Sutra*, which empowers living beings to produce serene bliss within themselves. The only exception would be the great serpent *icchantikas*.

Good man, imagine a man who painted a great drum with a medicine made up of a mixture of poisons. When he pounded that drum in a crowd, even those with no inclination to listen would nevertheless hear it, and all who did would die. But there would be one exception: a person who did not die unexpectedly from this. This Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra* is like that. It produces an audible sound everywhere, and those living beings that do hear it will find their greed, anger, and stupidity completely destroyed. Among them there will even be some who do not otherwise think about these things yet will notice that the causal power of the *Great Nirvana [Sutra]* has destroyed their defilements, and their fetters have disappeared by themselves. And when it comes to those who have transgressed by committing one of the four serious offenses or five heinous crimes, upon hearing the sutra they, too, will create the causal conditions that lead to the highest *bodhi*, gradually losing their defilements. But this will not apply to *icchantikas*, who is excluded from those who will not experience such an unexpected death.

Good man, this is analogous to nighttime, when all activities come to a halt. Anyone who is not finished with something has to wait [until the next day] for the sunlight. For those who study the Mahāyāna, though they have cultivated all the *samādhis* in the sutras, they still have to wait for the sunlight that is the Mahāyāna *Great Nirvana [Sutra]*. Only after hearing this recondite teaching of the Tathāgata will they undertake the actions of *bodhi* and settle themselves in the true-dharma. As rain from the heavens moistens and grows all seeds, [each] realizing their fruit that [in turn] thoroughly eliminates hunger and brings wealth and happiness, the immeasurable dharma rain that is the tathāgata hidden treasury in like manner is capable of removing the eight types of fever.¹⁵³ The many benefits accruing from the fruit realized when this sutra appears in the world means peace and joy for all, enabling living beings to see their buddha-nature just as the eight-thousand śrāvakas were able to realize the fruit of their received predictions [of buddhahood] in the [*Lotus*]

Flower of the Dharma (Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra).¹⁵⁴ In the fall one harvests and in the winter one stores, as nothing more is produced at that time. The *icchantikas* also feel they are in such a time, for in regard to such wholesome dharmas, for them there is nothing to be done.

In addition, good man, consider the analogy of an excellent physician who perceived that someone's son had been possessed by something nonhuman. Immediately he selected a special medicinal herb and sent it off with a messenger, to whom he gave this instruction:

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Take this medicine and quickly give it to that person. If he has run into evil demons, then by the power of the medicine the demons will all leave him. If you think you might [arrive too] late, then I will go myself. Whatever happens, do not let him bend over and die prematurely. If that ill person is able to see the authority held by a messenger or myself, his suffering will be alleviated and he will obtain serenity and joy.

This Mahāyāna scripture, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, is just like this. If there are monks, nuns, laymen or laywomen, or even non-Buddhists who effectively accept and embrace a sutra like this, recite it and become thoroughly acquainted with it, then analyze and explain it in detail to others, write it down themselves or enable others to write it down, these activities all become causes that lead to awakening. Even if someone has committed one of the four grave offenses or five heinous crimes, even for someone who has been seized by the poisonous venom of evil spirits, to hear this sutra is to have all dangers disappear, like the harmful spirit who departed upon seeing the skilled physician. Understand that one [who embraces this sutra] is a true bodhisattva-mahāsattva. Why? Because being able to hear the *Great Nirvana [Sutra]* over a period of time means thinking about the Tathāgata's permanence as well. And because being able to hear the *Great Nirvana* over a period of time also means this, how much more so if someone copies it, embraces it, or recites it. Excluding the *icchantikas*, all others would be bodhisattva-mahāsattvas.

Next, good man, consider those people born without the ability to hear sound. The *icchantikas* are like this. Even if they wanted to hear

this sublime sutra, they would be unable to do so. The reason is that they are devoid of the karmic conditions to make this possible.

Now consider, good man, the example of an excellent physician for whom there were no illnesses beyond the efficacy of his treatments and who also had extensive knowledge of [the power of] innumerable ritual incantations. This physician examined the king and told him, “Great King, the condition you have now is inevitably fatal.”

The king answered, “But, my good man, you have not seen what is inside my belly. How can you say for certain that I will die from this illness?”

The physician answered, “If I you do not believe me, then the king should take a laxative and purge everything from inside; he can then examine the contents himself.”

But the king did not comply with the suggestion and so did not take the recommended medicine. At that point the physician used the power of incantations to create an ulcer around the king’s anus, and from its pustules flowed a mixture of small worms and blood. When the king saw this, he became both frightened and embarrassed. He then [turned and] praised the physician, saying, “Excellent, excellent! My good man, I did not utilize what you had previously told me. But now I understand that what you have done for this body of mine is of great benefit.”

[Thereafter] he honored that physician with reverence, just as he honored his own father and mother. This Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra*, is just like this. Living beings may be [currently] plagued by desires or not, but in either case the sutra has the power to make the defilements in their lives collapse and melt away. Even to the point that if they see the sutra in their dreams, they should still honor it with reverence, as in the analogy of the king who honored the physician. At the same time, the physician knew the king’s illness was fatal and that he would not be able to cure him. This Mahāyāna *Great Nirvana Sutra* is also like that, for in the end it cannot cure *icchantikas*.

To restate, good man, analogous to a skilled physician who is so competent in all eight technical disciplines of healing that he can cure all forms of illness except that he cannot heal those who face certain death, buddhas and bodhisattvas in like manner are able to provide subtle treatment for

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all who have transgressed except that they cannot heal the *icchantikas* who likewise face certain death.

In addition, good man, consider the skilled physician thoroughly familiar with the eight technical disciplines of healing from careful study of the classic texts, and who also has broad knowledge beyond those eight ways of healing. His first priority is to teach everything he knows to his son, helping the son understand what there is to know about medicinal plants that grow in water and on land, on mountains and in streams. In this way he gradually teaches him the eight disciplines and the other advanced healing techniques as well. The Tathāgata, Worthy of Offerings, Perfectly Enlightened One is just like this. His first priority is to teach his children—the monks and other followers—the expedient means by which they can eliminate all the defilements and cultivate practices that purify their bodies of notions that are fragile or unsteady. When I speak of “water, land, mountains, and streams,” water is a metaphor for the body being subject to pain and suffering, like bubbles on the surface of water; land is a metaphor for the body not being solid, like the trunk of a banana tree; and the image of mountains and streams is a metaphor for cultivating the notion of nonself from within the defilements. This is what I mean when I refer to the body as nonself.¹⁵⁵

To his disciples the Tathāgata teaches in succession the ninefold canon of scriptures so that they may become thoroughly familiar with that dharma. It is only after this that he teaches the hidden treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*, expounding the Tathāgata’s permanence for his disciples. The Tathāgata expounds the Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra* in this way for those who have already made their resolution for awakening as well as for those who have not, thereby creating a karmic cause for *bodhi* in both, with exception of the *icchantikas*. Thus, good man, this Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra*, is immeasurably, innumerably, and inconceivably rare. You should understand it to be the most skilled of all skilled physicians, foremost and superior, the king among sutras.

In addition, good man, consider the analogy of a great ship that sails across the sea from this shore to that shore, and then returns from that shore to this one. The Tathāgata, Worthy of Offerings, Perfectly Enlightened One

is also like this. He rides on the jeweled ship that is *Mahāparinirvāṇa Mahāyāna[-sūtra]*, going round and round, back and forth, delivering living beings. Wherever there is anyone who should cross, he enables that person to see the Tathāgata's body. It is in this sense that the Tathāgata is called "the supreme pilot." That is, whenever there is a ship there should be a pilot, and it is precisely because there is a pilot that the ferrying of living beings across the ocean [of saṃsāra can be accomplished]. The Tathāgata's constant presence spiritually transforms living beings in this manner.

In addition, good man, consider the analogy of someone who boards a boat in the middle of the ocean, hoping to be brought across it. If there is a favorable wind, it will not take long for him to cross over innumerable *yojanas*. But if not, then even if he resides in that boat for a long time, even innumerable years, he will not move from that original spot. At some point the boat will disintegrate, sinking into the water, and he will die. In this way living beings board ships coursing on the sea of birth and death [permeated with] delusion. If they happen to encounter the powerful wind created by the *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]* then rather quickly will they be able to reach the shore of the supreme path. If they do not encounter it, they will continue transmigrating in saṃsāra for a considerable amount of time, and at some point things will disintegrate and they will fall into the realms of hell, animals, or hungry ghosts.

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In addition, good man, consider the analogy if people did not encounter a wind king [such as this sūtra] and had to remain at sea for a long time, they would think, "We are going to die, right here and now." But if, just as those thoughts occurred to them, they did encounter a favorable wind, they would follow it and make it across the ocean. At that point they would say, "How wonderful! How extraordinary this wind, enabling people like us to sail across this sea of difficulties in peace and safety."

Thus do living beings dwell in the delusory sea of saṃsāra for a very long period of time. Exhausted from hardship, not coming into contact with a wind like this *Great Nirvana*, they naturally think, "We are certain to fall into the realms of hell, animals, or hungry ghosts." But it is precisely when they are thinking this way that they may suddenly encounter the wind of the Mahāyāna *Great Nirvana*. And by following it they would

be blown into *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*. At that moment they will know truth and be filled with a sense of wonder. They will say in admiration, “How wonderful! In all this time we had never seen nor heard of the hidden treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*.” At that point pure faith in the *Great Nirvana Sutra* will have arisen in them.

In addition, good man, this is also like a snake that sheds its skin. Now does that mean the snake is going to die?

[Kāśyapa answered:]

No, World-Honored One.

[The Buddha said:]

Good man, the Tathāgata also expediently manifests the relinquishment of a poisonous body. Would you say, “The Tathāgata is impermanent and will disappear”?

[Kāśyapa answered:]

No, World-Honored One. In this world of Jambudvīpa the Tathāgata expediently relinquishes his body, just as a poisonous snake relinquishes its old skin. This is why it is known that the Tathāgata is a constantly abiding presence.¹⁵⁶

[The Buddha said:]

In addition, good man, like a goldsmith who obtains fine gold that he then fashions into a variety of implements by using his imagination, the Tathāgata similarly manifests various material bodies among the twenty-five forms of existence for the purpose of spiritually transforming living beings so they can extract themselves from *saṃsāra*. This is why I say the Tathāgata has what I call “a boundless body” and why, despite the fact that he reveals himself in different bodies, I also speak of [the Tathāgata] as “permanently abiding without change.”

In addition, good man, this is also somewhat like the *āmra* mango tree and *jambu* or rose apple tree.¹⁵⁷ Within one year, these trees change three times. At one time they produce flowers with an effulgent luster. At another time they produce leaves that grow thick and luxuriant. And

at a third time everything withers and dries out and the trees look like they are dying. Good man, what do you think? Are these trees actually decaying or not?

[Kāśyapa answered:]

No, World-Honored One.

[The Buddha said:]

Good man, the Tathāgata similarly displays three different bodies in the triple world. There is a time for his birth, there is a time for his adulthood, and there is a time for his nirvāṇa. Yet despite [what these changes suggest], in truth the body of the Tathāgata is not impermanent.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa praised these words, saying:

Excellent! That is truly a sacred teaching: the Tathāgata abides permanently without change.

[The Buddha said:]

Good man, the recondite language of the Tathāgata is profound and difficult to understand.¹⁵⁸ It is analogous to what happens when a great king tells his retinue to bring him *saindhava*.¹⁵⁹ The one word “*saindhava*” refers to four different products [from Sindhu]: salt, a drinking cup, water, or a horse. Since the same word is used to designate four different things, only the wise attendant understands what the king means when he calls for it. If the king seeks *saindhava* when he is bathing, he is to be given water. If the king is eating and asks for *saindhava*, then he is to be given salt. If the king asks for *saindhava* when he has finished a meal and wants to drink alcohol, then he is to be given something to drink with. And if the king requests *saindhava* when he wants to travel, then he is to be given a horse [of the type bred in Sindhu]. In this way the wise attendants are able to decipher the four ways this abstruse word is used by the king.

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In much the same way, the Mahāyāna sutras have four notions of impermanence. Wise attendants of the Mahāyāna should clearly understand what is meant [in each instance]. If the Buddha is in the world lecturing on the Tathāgata’s nirvāṇa to living beings, a wise attendant would

understand this to be a case where for those who conceive of him as permanent the Tathāgata expounds the characteristics of impermanence, because he wants to have those *bhikṣus* cultivate their discernment of impermanence. Or when he says “The true-dharma will disappear,” a wise attendant should understand this to be a case where for those who conceive of him as bliss the Tathāgata expounds the characteristics of suffering, because he wants to have those *bhikṣus* spend more time cultivating their discernment of suffering. Or when he says, “I am suffering from illness now” or “The monastic communities are breaking up,” a wise attendant would understand this to be a case where for those who conceive of him as self the Tathāgata expounds the characteristics of nonself because he wants to make the *bhikṣus* cultivate their discernment of nonself. Or when he says, “The emptiness that I speak of is true-liberation,” a wise attendant would understand this to be a case where the Tathāgata is saying that the twenty-five forms of existence are not found in true liberation, because he wants to make the *bhikṣus* cultivate their discernment of emptiness.

This is why I speak of true liberation as empty and also as immovable. The term “immovable” refers to the fact that within liberation there is no suffering, and therefore [liberation] cannot be moved. True liberation is without any distinguishing marks or signs that can be perceived. To say there are no distinguishing marks means there is no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and so forth; that is why I also call it “signless.” True liberation is permanent and immutable; it is devoid of anything impermanent, distressing or mutable. For this reason, I refer to liberation as “permanent, immutable, cool, and refreshing.”

Or when [the Buddha] preaches that all living beings have the tathāgata-nature, the wise attendant would understand this to be a case where the Tathāgata is expounding a dharma of permanence, and he wants to make the *bhikṣus* cultivate their discernment of this dharma that is genuinely permanent. Know that any *bhikṣus* who are able to follow and study this are truly my disciples, for they clearly understand the tathāgata hidden treasury, just like the wise attendants of a great king are thoroughly familiar with his intentions. Good man, if a king’s dharma includes such enigmatic language, why would the Tathāgata’s not be so? Good man,

this is precisely why the recondite teachings of the Tathāgata are difficult to fathom. Only a person of wisdom will have the power to discern my profound buddha-dharma; it cannot be believed by worldly, ordinary types of people.

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In addition, good man, consider the fact that when the *palāśa* tree, the *karṇikāra* tree, or the *aśoka* tree experience drought, none of them will bloom. Indeed all other plants that grow on earth or in water will also dry up, for there can be no growth if there is no moisture. All medicines would also lack strength. Good man, this *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* is also like that. After I disappear, there will be living beings incapable of honoring it, who will see it as devoid of any spiritual power. Why will this come to pass? Because they will not understand the recondite treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*. And why will they not understand? Because their merit will be weak.

In addition, good man, in the future the Tathāgata's true-dharma will disappear. At that time there will be many *bhikṣus* whose behavior is noxious. They will not understand the recondite treasury containing a tathāgata. Lazy and unmotivated, they will be incapable of reciting, proclaiming, or analyzing the Tathāgata's true-dharma. It is like a foolish thief who throws away jewels only to walk away with the chaff of straw. Because they will not comprehend the recondite treasury containing a tathāgata, they will not be motivated to put into practice what is in this sutra. How sad! This harsh, future world, how frightening, how painful it will be! Living beings will not make efforts to hear this Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra*. Only bodhisattva-mahāsattvas will be able to grasp the true meaning in this sutra without being attached to its words. In their preaching to other living beings they will accord with it rather than resist it.

In addition, good man, this is somewhat like a female cowherd who, in coveting greater profit from selling milk, adds water to double her supply. She then sells it to other cowherd women who, upon acquiring the milk, add water to double the supply yet again. They in turn sell it to women in a nearby town who also add water to double it. These townfolk in turn sell it to other women in the town who, upon acquiring it, yet again add water to double its volume before they bring it to the

marketplace to sell. At this time there was a man who had just taken a wife in order to have children. Requiring quality milk to serve guests that she would be entertaining, the new wife ventured into the marketplace hoping to buy some. There she found numerous milk sellers seeking a plurality of prices [for their product]. She responded to them by saying: “Your milk is full of water and not worthy of your price. But I have to entertain guests presently, so I will have to take it.”

After acquiring the milk she returned home, where she boiled it to make porridge, producing a dish without a trace of milk flavor. But although no one could taste [the milk] in her dish, it was still a thousand times better than the bitter flavors [of other foods]. Why? Because the flavor of milk is that much superior to other flavors.

Good man, after my nirvāṇa it will be more than eighty years before the true-dharma disappears. During that time this sutra will spread widely throughout Jambudvīpa. But during that time there will also be harmful *bhikṣus* who will simplify this sutra and divide it up into any number of parts. They will succeed in destroying the sight, smell, and beautiful flavors of its true-dharma. Although these harmful people may read and recite a scripture like this one, they will forsake the Tathāgata’s deeper, core meanings and instead establish it as a worldly work adorned with flowery rhetoric and devoid of any real significance, shrinking a former part and enhancing a latter part or shrinking a latter part and enhancing a former part [at will].

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Understand that harmful *bhikṣus* like this are colleagues of Māra. They condone keeping all manner of things that are impure, all the while saying, “The Tathāgata has given me complete permission to store these things.” Like cowherds adding water to milk, these awful *bhikṣus* will corrupt this sutra by mixing worldly language into it, making it impossible for many living beings to explain, copy, or grasp it properly, or revere, praise, or honor it with offerings. Out of personal interest these harmful *bhikṣus* will not disseminate this sutra very widely; channels where it could be communicated will be few and even then it will not be sufficiently discussed. Like those impoverished cowherd women who “developed” their milk for sale to the point where porridge made from it had lost all trace of any milk flavor, this Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nir-*

vana Sutra, will thus have been “developed” such that it is so weakened as to lose its aromas and flavors. But though it may be without aroma or flavor, it will still surpass other sutras by a thousandfold, just as the [watered down] milk surpassed the bitter flavors [of other foods] by a thousandfold. Why is this? Because this Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra*, is foremost among the śrāvaka sutras, just like milk is the best among flavors. This is precisely why I call this sutra the *Great Nirvana*.

In addition, good man, among good men and good women there are none who do not seek a male body [in their next rebirth]. Why is this? Because in all women are lodged a collection of things problematic. In addition, good man, just as the urine of a mosquito would be unable to moisten the surface of the earth, that is how difficult it is to satisfy the lust of a woman. When a man is engaged in lustful activity with a woman, even if he were [as potent] as the entire earth rolled into a ball the size of a peppercorn seed, he would still be unable to satisfy her. Even if there were men as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges River who engaged in lustful activity with one woman, they would be unable to satisfy her. Good man, like an ocean that is not filled even when all the rains coming down from the heavens fill up a hundred rivers flowing into it, such is the dharma of womanhood. Even if every man were to have lustful relations with one woman, that woman would not be satisfied. In addition, good man, when flowers bloom in spring on the *aśoka*, *pāṭala*, and *karṇikāra* trees, there are bees that come and suck their attractive and fragrant flavors but are not contented. Women who desire men are like this: they are insatiable.

Good man, it is in this sense that good men and good women who listen to this Mahāyāna *Great Nirvana Sutra* will always decry the marks that characterize a female and seek to be male. Why? Because this Mahāyāna scripture has the characteristic of manliness (*pauruṣa*). I am referring to buddha-nature. If someone does not understand buddha-nature, then he does not have male characteristics. Why do I say this? Because he cannot grasp the fact that the buddha-nature exists within himself. I would say those unable to know the buddha-nature are to be called women. I would say those who are able to know themselves that

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the buddha-nature exists are characteristically male. If a woman is able to know definitively that the buddha-nature exists within herself, you should know that this constitutes her as male.

Good man, this Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra*, is a collection of merit beyond measure, limit, or conception. Why? Because by having expounded the hidden treasury that is the *tathāgatagarbha*, good men and good women who desire to quickly comprehend this rec-ondite *tathāgatagarbha* will thereby expediently apply themselves to the practice (*abhiyoga*) of what is in this sutra.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then addressed the Buddha:

World-Honored One. Thus it is, thus it is, as the Buddha has explained. It is with this manliness that I have now been able to enter the *tathāgata* hidden treasury and that is why the *Tathāgata* has awakened me today for the first time. It is by means of this that I have obtained definitive and clear understanding.¹⁶⁰

The Buddha said:

Excellent, excellent (*sādhu, sādhu*)! Good man, it is a dharma in accordance with the world that you now profess.

Kāśyapa once again spoke:

But I do not [profess] a dharma in accordance with the world.

The Buddha praised Kāśyapa:

Excellent, excellent! What you have now understood is that the flavor of this unsurpassed dharma is profound (*gambhīra*) and difficult to understand; yet it *can* be understood. Just as a bee gathers flavors [from different flowers], you should also proceed [to garner the dharma] in that way. In addition, good man, just as the liquid produced by mosquitoes would never be able to moisten this great earth, such will be the dissemination of this sutra in the future. And just like that mosquito liquid, the true-dharma is going to disappear, and when it does this sutra will be the first to sink into the earth. You should thus understand this to be a sign of the dissolution of the true-dharma.

In addition, good man, this is analogous to the first month subsequent to summer, called autumn, for the rain in autumn is continual. This Mahāyāna scripture, the *Great Nirvana Sutra*, is like that. Because there are bodhisattvas in the southern region it will spread widely there, like a downpour of dharma rain filling that area. When the true-dharma is about to disappear, the entire sutra with nothing missing will reach Kashmir, and there it will sink into the earth and be lost. There will be those who believe in it and there will be those who do not. In this way the dharma flavor that is the ambrosia of immortality in these Mahāyāna well-balanced sutras will all disappear into the ground. After this sutra has disappeared, the entire corpus of Mahāyāna sutras will have perished. Anyone who manages to obtain this entire sutra, with nothing lacking, will be an elephant king. Bodhisattvas should understand that the unsurpassed true-dharma of the Tathāgata will be lost before long.

Fascicle X

Chapter Four

The Nature of the Tathāgata: Part 7

At that time Mañjuśrī addressed the Buddha with these words: “World-Honored One. It now appears that Cunda has doubts. Pray give us another analysis so that these doubts may be dispelled in him.” 422c

The Buddha said: “Good man, explain these doubts to me so that I may remove them.”

Mañjuśrī said:

In his mind Cunda has doubts about the permanent abiding of the Tathāgata, arising from wondering whether he has the ability to discern the buddha-nature. If seeing buddha-nature makes it permanent, then when you have not seen it, it should be impermanent. But if something is impermanent before then it should be impermanent afterward as well. Why is this? Because things in this world that did not exist previously can indeed come into existence now, and after they have existed they then return to nonexistence. All things are equally impermanent in this way, so in this sense there is no distinction made for buddhas, bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, or pratyekabuddhas.

The World-Honored One then uttered the following verse:

Previously existing, now nonexistent.

Previously nonexistent, now existing.

A dharma existing over the three time periods

Is not possible.

Good man, it is in this sense that buddhas, bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas are distinguished and are not distinguished.

Mañjuśrī praised this, saying:

Excellent. This is truly a sacred teaching. For the first time I have now understood that buddhas, bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas are to be distinguished and are not to be distinguished.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then spoke to the Buddha:

The Buddha has explained that there is no difference in the natures of buddhas, bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas. I beg the Tathāgata to give blessings and peace of mind to all living beings by explaining this in a more expansive and detailed way.

The Buddha said:

Good man. Listen carefully, very carefully, and I will explain this to you. Good man, this is comparable to a householder or the son of a householder who is raising many milk cows of various colors. He always appoints one person to be in charge of protecting and nourishing the cows. On one occasion, in order to make an offering, after milking the cows the milk is all put into one container and placed on an altar. Looking down at the milk, he sees how uniformly white it is and wonders why it is that while each of the cows is a different color, the milk they produce is the same color. He then reflects on the fact that the causes and conditions of living beings that lead to karmic retribution similarly yield a single color, like that of milk.

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Good man, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas all have identical buddha-natures, just like that milk. Why is this? Because they equally exhaust their contaminants of mental defilements. And yet living beings say, “There are distinctions between buddhas, bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas.” But although there are śrāvakas and ordinary people who wonder how there could be no distinction among the three vehicles, after a period of time these living beings themselves will understand that everyone in the three vehicles has the identical buddha-nature, just as that person realized the [implications of] karmic causality when looking at the characteristics of milk.

Good man, this is analogous to gold ore. After it is refined and the impurities are removed, then and only then is it melted to become [what people think of as] gold. Only after all this does its value increase enormously. Good man, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas are also like this, in that they all can accomplish the identical buddha-nature. Why? Because removing their defilements is like removing impurities from gold ore. In this sense there is nary a distinction among the identical buddha-natures of all living beings. At first people only hear about the *tathāgata-garbha*. It is [only] later, when they attain buddhahood, that they understand it as a matter of course, just like that elder came to understand the uniform character of milk. How does this happen? It happens by means of cutting away the incalculable defilements that plague each individual.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One. If all living beings have buddha-nature, then what is the difference between buddhas and living beings (*sattvas*)? As you have explained, living beings have many errors in their ways, but if they all possess buddha-nature, then by what causality would Śāriputra and others [attain] a *parinirvāṇa* that is a minor nirvāṇa, a pratyekabuddha [attain] a *parinirvāṇa* that is a middle nirvāṇa, and a bodhisattva [attain] a *parinirvāṇa* that is a major nirvāṇa? If all these people have the same buddha-nature, then why are their *parinirvāṇas* not the same as the *parinirvāṇa* of a tathāgata?

[The Buddha answered:]

Good man, the nirvāṇa attained by buddha world-honored ones is not what is attained by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. This is why the *mahā-parinirvāṇa* [of the buddhas] is called “an auspicious state.” Even if there were no buddha in the world, that does not mean that [followers of] the two vehicles would not attain their two nirvāṇas.¹⁶¹

Kāśyapa spoke again: “What does that mean?”

The Buddha said:

Over a period of incalculable, endless, *asaṃkhyeya kalpas*, only one buddha has appeared in the world to reveal the three vehicles. Good man, the issue you raise about there being no difference between [the

parinirvāṇas of] bodhisattvas and followers of the two vehicles I have already addressed here in this *Tathāgatagarbha Great Nirvana [Sutra]*. [The *parinirvāṇa*] of arhats is not “an auspicious state” but all arhats will attain this “*mahāparinirvāṇa*” [at some point].¹⁶² In this sense, *mahāparinirvāṇa* contains the end point, the final bliss, which is why I call it *mahāparinirvāṇa*.

Kāśyapa said:

Now for the first time I understand the meaning of what the Buddha was saying about what is distinguished and what is not distinguished. What is this about? It is about the fact that in the future bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas will find their way to *mahāparinirvāṇa*, just like the waters flowing in so many rivers will find their way to the sea. Therefore, [buddha-nature in] those who are śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is called “permanent” rather than “impermanent.” In this sense there are distinctions, and there are also no distinctions.

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Then Kāśyapa said: “What are the distinctions in their natures?”¹⁶³

The Buddha said:

Good man, śrāvakas are like fresh milk, pratyekabuddhas are like milk curds, bodhisattvas are either like fresh butter or clarified butter, and buddha world-honored ones are like the cream on the surface of clarified butter. It is in this sense that within this *Mahāparinirvāṇa[-sūtra]* I speak of four natures that are distinguished from one another.

Kāśyapa then asked: “What characterizes that nature in living beings in general?”

The Buddha said:

Good man. Just like milk and blood are not yet separated in a newborn calf, an ordinary person’s nature is mixed together with the defilements in him.

Kāśyapa then said:

In Kuśinagara there was a *caṇḍāla* named Joyful. The Buddha predicted that this person, by means of bringing forth one thought of resolving to attain awakening, would be among the thousands that will quickly attain

the unsurpassed path of truth as a buddha in this world. So why, then, does the Tathāgata not predict the swift attainment of the Buddha’s path for Venerable Śāriputra and Venerable Maudgalyāyana, and others like them?

The Buddha said:

Good man, there are śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas who make vows in which they say, “Far into the future will I take responsibility for supporting the true-dharma. Then and only then will I attain the unsurpassed path to buddhahood.” Because they can produce these vows [of commitment] quickly, I can give them predictions of attainment quickly.

In addition, good man, you should also consider the analogy of a merchant who has a priceless jewel that he takes to the marketplace to sell. A fool sees it, but not recognizing it for what it is, scoffs at [its stated value]. The owner blurts out, “My jewel is valuable beyond measure!” Upon hearing this, the fool laughs out loud and says to the others around him, “That is not really a jewel at all, it is only a crystal bead.”

Good man, śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are just like this. If they heard a prediction that [their attainment will] come quickly, they would thereupon become unmotivated, derisive, and surly, just like the fool who did not know a true jewel when he saw it. In the future there will be *bhikṣus* incapable of cultivating the good dharma in a disciplined manner. As a consequence of being extremely poor, in painful circumstances, or overwhelmed by hunger, they will leave their households in order to gain nourishment for their bodies. But as their resolve will be wobbly, they will fall into improper ways of earning a living, using guile and trickery. If they were to hear that the Tathāgata was granting predictions of speedy attainment to śrāvakas, they would laugh out loud in contempt and disgust. Understand that these things mean the destruction of morality. Such people even falsely declare that they already possess superhuman faculties. It is with this in mind that I follow someone’s quick production of a vow [based in understanding] with a prediction of quick attainment, and for someone who protects the dharma I will give a prediction of attainment in the distant future.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa spoke once again to the Buddha:

World-Honored One. How can bodhisattva-mahāsattvas achieve an assembly that is indestructible?

The Buddha told Kāśyapa:

If bodhisattvas desire to protect the true-dharma with diligence and zeal, that will be the causal means by which they can achieve an assembly that cannot be disrupted.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa spoke once again to the Buddha:

World-Honored One. What causes the lips and mouths of living beings to become dry?

The Buddha told Kāśyapa:

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If they do not recognize that the Three Jewels are a permanent form of existence, it will cause their lips and mouths to dry up. It is like when a person's mouth becomes dysfunctional and he can no longer discriminate among the six flavors of sweet, bitter, spicy, sour, salty, and astringent. All living beings that are ignorant and bereft of wisdom do not understand that the Three Jewels are dharmas that abide permanently. This is why I call that a mouth that has become dry.

Next, good man, consider a living being that does not know of the permanent abiding of the Tathāgata. You should understand that he is like a person born blind. When someone does know of this permanent abiding of the Tathāgata, though he may have vision with his physical eyes, what I am speaking about here is vision with divine eyes.

Good man, if one is able to understand the permanence of the Tathāgata, know that that person will have cultivated sutras like this one for some time. When I speak about these things, I am alluding to [seeing with] divine eyes. But even if one has divine sight, he still may not be able to understand the permanence of the Tathāgata. On other topics I may be alluding to [seeing with] physical eyes. But some people are not even able to recognize the hands, feet, or other parts of their own bodies, so how could they be able to make others understand? It is in this sense

that I have referred to their [understanding] as operating through physical eyes.

In addition, good man, the Tathāgata always serves as the father and mother for all living beings. Why do I say this? There are many varieties of form among living beings, such as having two legs, four legs, many legs, or no legs. The Buddha employs just a single sound in expounding the dharma for each and every kind [of living being], but each will gain their own understanding of what he says. One by one, each pleads with him, “O Tathāgata, would you please preach the dharma to me?” It is in this sense [that I am] called their mother and father.

In addition, good man, think of a baby who for the first sixteen months speaks but does not yet communicate. Yet the father and mother want to teach the child how to speak, so at first they make the same sounds as the baby and then gradually teach the baby proper language. Would you consider this way of speaking by the father and mother to be incorrect?

[Kāśāyapa answered:]

No, World-Honored One.

[The Buddha then continued:]

Good man, the buddha tathāgatas are also like this: when they expound the dharma to living beings they adapt to the various sounds those living beings make. For the purpose of enabling them to establish themselves in the true-dharma, the tathāgatas will manifest in a variety of forms, according to how they will be seen. Now when the tathāgatas adapt their language in this way, should that be considered incorrect?

[Kāśāyapa answered:]

No, World-Honored One. Why? Because what is spoken by the Tathāgata is like the roar of a lion. In accordance with the various sounds of the world, he illustrates the wondrous dharma for living beings.

Chapter Five

The Query of the Entire Assembly

At that time the World-Honored One released a multicolored ray of light from his forehead that illuminated the body of Cunda, shining green, yellow, incarnadine, white, red, and purple. Upon experiencing this, Cunda and his kinsmen picked up their dishes of food and quickly brought them to the Buddha, wanting to present their final offerings to the Tathāgata and the *bhikṣus*. There were a variety of different plates filled to the brim that they intended to place before the Buddha but on that occasion there were powerful gods present who prevented them from proceeding any further. The gods surrounded them and addressed Cunda, saying: “Stop right there, Cunda! Do not present those offerings.” At that point the Tathāgata once again released a variegated beam of light, this time limitless in its scope. Upon encountering this light, the gods quickly moved aside and allowed Cunda to proceed to the Buddha’s location and offer his donation. Then the gods and other living beings each took up their own offerings and placed them before the Buddha, knelt on one knee, and said, “All we ask, Tathāgata, is that you allow the *bhikṣus* to accept this food and drink.” Aware of the occasion, the *bhikṣus* then picked up their robes and bowls and with uniform serenity [accepted the offerings]. 424a

At that time Cunda spread out a variety of jeweled lion seats for the Buddha and the monks. He hung silk banderoles and canopies, and strewed fragrant flowers and garlands of precious stones. The occasion was thus adorned with the finery of the great trichiliocosm, just like the Sukhāvātī Land of Bliss in the West.¹⁶⁴

Then Cunda, standing before the Buddha and filled with grief and lamentation, addressed him in a serious tone: “I beseech you, World-Honored One. May you look upon us with pity and remain living for one more *kalpa* or at least something close to a full *kalpa*.”

The Buddha said to Cunda:

If you wish to have me remain in the world for a long time, you should quickly present what will be the final completion of the perfection of charity (*dāna-pāramitā*) for you.

At that time the same sound rang out in the different voices of the bodhi-sattva-mahāsattvas, gods, humans, and other assorted creatures, saying:

Amazing, Cunda! You achieve such great merit in having the Tathāgata accept what will be unsurpassed as the final offering. Yet we will make no merit at all. The offerings we have prepared have become meaningless.

Wanting to fulfill the wishes of the entire assembly, at that moment the World-Honored One generated incalculable numbers of buddhas, each one [standing] on a pore of his skin. Each of these buddhas had what amounted to an incalculable number of *bhikṣu* sanghas. These world-honored ones as well as their surrounding assemblies were all shown to be accepting offerings, just as the Tathāgata Śākyamuni himself had accepted what had been offered to him by Cunda.

At that time the meal of cooked rice brought by Cunda was enough to satisfy the entire state of Magadha, for there were eight bushels.¹⁶⁵ By means of the Buddha's supernatural power, this also satisfied everyone in the assemblies present. Upon seeing this, Cunda was transported with joy, seemingly without end. Everyone in the assemblies felt the same way.

At that point, each person in that great crowd, having received the Buddha's blessing, thought, "Having now accepted our donations, it will not be long before he enters nirvāṇa." And thinking this, they felt both sadness and joy. Meanwhile, in that narrow strip of earth between the [sal] trees, by means of the Buddha's supernatural power there were now innumerable buddha world-honored ones and their retinues occupying spaces no bigger than the point of a needle, sitting down and eating the donated food, no differently than the others. Upon seeing this, the [assembled] gods, humans, and *asuras* began to cry, expressing their grief by saying:

424b Today the Tathāgata has accepted our last offerings, and having accepted those offerings, he will attain *parinirvāṇa*. To whom should we present our offerings then? We are now being separated forever from the Unsurpassed [Worthy] and Tamer [of Men]. We will lose our sight and go blind.

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to console everyone gathered in the assembly, responded in verse:

None of you should grieve.
 For what is appropriate in the dharma of buddhas.
 I enter nirvāṇa,
 Having passed through innumerable kalpas,
 Always enjoying the greatest pleasures,
 Eternally dwelling in a place of serene peace.
 Listen now, with your full attention,
 As I explain about nirvāṇa.
 Having been freed from the notion of eating,
 The end brings no trauma of hunger or thirst.
 It is for you, now, that I explain this,
 In accordance with the wishes of all living beings.
 So that anyone in any group
 Can attain the bliss of serene peace.
 Listen and cultivate your practice
 Of the permanent abiding of the dharma of buddhas.

If a crow and a horned owl
 Were to share the same roost in a tree,
 Just like parents or brothers,
 Then I would pass into the eternal extinction of nirvāṇa.
 The Tathāgata regards everyone
 As if they were [my son] Rāhula,
 Always honored by living beings,
 Why would I pass into the eternal extinction of nirvāṇa?

If a snake, a rat, and a wolf,
 Were to saunter into the same hole,
 And love each other like brothers,
 Then I would pass into the eternal extinction of nirvāṇa.
 The Tathāgata regards everyone
 As if they were Rāhula.
 Always honored by living beings,
 Why would I pass into the eternal extinction of nirvāṇa?

If the flowers of *saptaparṇa* trees
Were to turn into the fragrance of *vārṣika* [flowers],
And the fruit of *kālaka* trees
Turned into the fruit of *tinduka* trees. . . .
The Tathāgata regards everyone,
As if they were Rāhula.
Why would I leave compassion behind,
And enter the eternal extinction of nirvāṇa?

If *icchāntikas* in their present bodies
Were to accomplish the Buddhist path,
Forever dwelling in supreme bliss,
Then I would pass into the eternal extinction of nirvāṇa.
The Tathāgata regards everyone,
As if they were Rāhula.
Why would I leave compassion behind,
And enter the eternal extinction of nirvāṇa?

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Were to accomplish the Buddhist path at the same time,
Freeing themselves from error and calamity,
Then I would pass into the eternal extinction of nirvāṇa.
The Tathāgata regards everyone,
As if they were Rāhula.
Why would he abandon that compassion,
And pass into nirvāṇa forever?

If mosquito urine were to soak the entire earth,
[Covering] mountains and swelling hundreds of rivers,
That filled the oceans as they poured into them.
If such a thing were to occur,
Then I would pass into the eternal extinction of nirvāṇa.
As one whose compassionate thoughts regard everyone
As if they were Rāhula,
Always honored by living beings,
Why would I pass into the eternal extinction of nirvāṇa?

This is precisely why all of you
 Should deeply appreciate the true-dharma.
 You should not let your anxiety grow,
 Weeping and moaning.
 If you yourself want to pursue the proper practice,
 You must cultivate [understanding of] the Tathāgata's permanence.
 Contemplate the fact that a dharma like this
 Has had a long existence without change.

You should also keep this in mind:
 The Three Jewels all abide permanently.
 This will gain you great protection,
 Like casting a spell on a dried plant to make it bear fruit.
 This is what I call the Three Jewels.
 And the fourfold community [of followers] should listen carefully.
 Having heard this, you should be overjoyed,
 And immediately bring forth *bodhicitta* resolutions for awakening.
 If you can see your way to reckoning that the Three Jewels
 Do abide permanently, the same as the ultimate truth,
 That would [fulfill] the greatest wish
 Of all the buddhas.

If there are any monks, nuns, laymen, or laywomen who ardently aspire to fulfill this greatest wish of the tathāgatas, know that such people are without delusion and worthy of being honored. Through the power of their aspiration, their virtue and karmic reward will be foremost in the world, like those of an arhat. Those who cannot conceive of the permanence of the Three Jewels are *caṇḍālas*. But those who can understand the permanent abiding of the Three Jewels and the actual causality of dharmas will free themselves from suffering and be in a state of bliss—no injury or obstacle could impede them.

After hearing this dharma, the assembly of humans, gods, *asuras*, and other beings was at that moment transported with joy, seemingly without end. The minds [of those in the assembly] became pliant, they easily dissolved their internal obstacles, their thinking lost its usual unevenness, their bearing

became dignified and pure, and their countenances beamed with joy—for they grasped the eternal abiding of the Buddha. And thus the assembly endeavored to provide ever more heavenly offerings by scattering a variety of flowers, powdered incense, and smearing incense, and played heavenly music, all in a spirit of paying homage to the Buddha.

At that time the Buddha said to the bodhisattva Kāśyapa: “Good man, you have seen these many extraordinary things, have you not?”

Kāśyapa said:

425a Yes, I have seen them, World-Honored One. I have seen buddhas immeasurable, limitless, and indescribable, accepting food offerings presented to them by people and gods in great assemblies. In addition, I have seen the tremendous physical beauty of the buddhas, how the space they occupy when seated is like the point of a needle, and how the crowds surrounding them are not impeded by each other. I have also seen [those in] the assembly make vows. As you expounded those thirteen verses just now, I understood how each one in the assembly thought: “Just now the Tathāgata accepted only my offering.”

Suppose the food offered by Cunda was minced into tiny pieces so that there would be one piece per buddha. In that case there would not be enough to go around. But through the spiritual powers of the buddha, there is enough for everyone in the assembly. Only bodhisattva-mahāsattvas and Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince, can understand extraordinary things like this. These are all manifestations of the Tathāgata’s skillful means, and this is how the great community of śrāvakas and even *asuras* will all understand the Tathāgata to be a permanently abiding dharma.

At that time the World-Honored One turned to Cunda and said: “Is what you have just witnessed not rare and extraordinary?”

[Cunda answered:]

It truly is, World-Honored One. What I have seen are innumerable buddhas with thirty-two major and eighty minor marks adorning their bodies. Now I have also seen how all the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas have forms of uncanny, exquisite beauty. Before me I behold the Buddha’s body appearing like a medicinal tree surrounded by bodhisattva-mahāsattvas.

The Buddha said to Cunda:

The innumerable buddhas that you saw before were transformations of myself, created to benefit all living beings, to bring them joy. The practices cultivated by these bodhisattva-mahāsattvas are beyond conception, for they are engaged in the work that innumerable buddhas do. Cunda, you have now fully perfected the practices of a bodhisattva-mahāsattva and have attained to where you are residing in the ten stages.¹⁶⁶ Practices that are done by bodhisattvas are accomplished in you.

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then said to the Buddha,

World-Honored One. Just so, just so! Just as the Buddha has explained, the bodhisattva practices accomplished by Cunda make me joyous as well. And now, because the Tathāgata wants innumerable living beings of the future to become beacons of bright light, he expounds the Mahāyāna *Great Nirvana Sutra*.

[Cunda asked:]

World-Honored One, should we regard everything expounded in the canon of sutras as having meanings that are incomplete in that there is something additional to consider (*sāvaśeṣa-artha*), or as having meanings that are complete with nothing further to consider (*niravaśeṣa-artha*)?

[The Buddha responded:]

Good man, among my utterances there are some in which the meanings are incomplete and there are others in which the meanings are complete.

Cunda then asked the Buddha:

World-Honored One, when these verses were spoken,

To take what you have
And donate it in all cases,
Is only to be praised,
You will suffer no injury.

World-Honored One, what did you mean? How do we discriminate between those who maintain the precepts and those who violate them?¹⁶⁷

The Buddha said: “With the exception of one type of person, the donations to everyone else should be praised.”

Cunda then asked: “Why do you say, ‘With the exception of one type of person’?”

The Buddha said: “This refers to those who violate the precepts in the ways I have explained in this discourse.”

425b Cunda continued: “I still do not understand. May I humbly ask you to elaborate on this?”

The Buddha said:

The precept violators that Cunda asks about are those whom I refer to as *icchantikas*. To everyone else, making donations is always something that should be praised, something that yields great rewards.

Cunda asked another question: “What is the meaning of ‘*icchantika*’?”

The Buddha said:

Cunda, when a monk, nun, layman, or laywoman speaks in a malicious manner, disparaging the true-dharma, and does this repeatedly, never regretting his or her remarks or feeling shame, I regard such a person as coursing the *icchantika* path. To commit one of the four grave offenses or perpetrate one of the five heinous crimes, knowing that such behavior is a serious violation yet from the outset feeling neither fear nor shame, nor admitting to what he or she has done, [is the same]. Or, if instead of forever protecting, delighting in, and furthering the Buddha’s true-dharma, a person disparages it, belittles it, or speaks of it with reproach—such a person I would also say is coursing the *icchantika* path. The kind of person who would say there is no buddha, dharma, or sangha, I would also say is coursing the *icchantika* path. With the exception of *icchantikas* of this ilk, donating to everyone else is to be praised.

At that time Cunda spoke to the Buddha again: “World-Honored One. When you say, ‘violate the precepts,’ what do you mean by that?”

The Buddha answered:

Cunda, when a person commits one of the four grave offenses, perpetrates one of the five heinous crimes, or maligns the true-dharma, someone like that I call a violator of the precepts.

Again Cunda asked: “When someone violates the precepts, can that [karmic stain] be removed?”

[The Buddha] said:

Cunda, when there is just cause, then indeed it can be removed. If the person dons the robes of a monastic even without having fully renounced the world, and his thoughts are constantly filled with shame and fear, then he will reproach himself for what he has done, saying, “Fie! Why did I commit such a serious crime? How bewildering that I would have done a deed this cruel.” If, as he feels regret, he has thoughts of preserving the dharma, such as:

I want to promote the true-dharma. To those who preserve the dharma I will make offerings. To those who read and recite the Mahāyāna scriptures I will ask questions, retaining what I receive to read and recite myself. And after I have grasped the meaning and benefited from what I have learned, I will also explain this in detail to others.

I declare that a person like this is not a violator of the precepts. Why? Good man, like the sunrise can remove the darkness of even the smallest shadow, when this *Subtle Sutra of the Great Nirvana* appears in the world it can remove the transgressions perpetrated by living beings over countless *kalpas* in the same way. That is why in this sutra I have expounded that by preserving the true-dharma one obtains a great reward and removes the karmic impact of their moral violations.

If someone who maligns the true-dharma later comes to regret his actions and returns to that dharma, on his own he will think of all the unwholesome things he has done as if he had injured himself. He will be stricken by feelings of dread, anxiety, and shame. [He knows that] except for the true-dharma there will be no hope for deliverance, and for that reason he simply must return to it. If he can take refuge in what I have expounded in this way, then to make donations to him will bring

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merit beyond measure, for I would call such a person “worthy of offerings in this world.”

If [a monastic] commits a depraved act such as those I have just mentioned, and yet, after fifteen days or a month have passed, he is still not of a mind to take refuge and publicly confess what he did, then if someone were to make a donation to this person, the resultant karmic benefit would be extremely small. Anyone who commits one of the five heinous crimes is in this situation. But when such an individual does feel remorse and internally embraces his shame, thinking, “This unwholesome act I have done is now something of profound misery to me. What I should be doing is promoting and supporting the true-dharma,” then I would no longer call this person “someone [guilty] of one of the five heinous crimes.” If you were to make a donation to this person, you will obtain merit beyond measure. By contrast, the merit gained from making donations to people who have committed grave offenses but are not interested in supporting or taking refuge in the dharma is not worth mentioning.

Good man, I would like to explain a bit more about this matter of behavior involving serious misdeeds, so listen carefully and I will break it down and explain it in some detail for you. What [the perpetrator] should be thinking is, “That which is called the true-dharma is precisely this hidden treasury containing a tathāgata, therefore that is something I will support and foster.” If you make a donation to this type of person you will obtain a superior reward.

Good man. Imagine a pregnant woman who, near the end of her term, sees her nation erupt into violent turbulence, so she escapes to another land. There she ends up giving birth in a shrine. But soon after, she hears that her old country has become peaceful and prosperous again, so carrying her child in her arms she begins to make her way home. On the way she wades into a river with turbulent and swiftly flowing waters. When she is midway across, she realizes that she cannot make it to the other shore while holding the baby. At that moment she thinks, “I would rather die in this spot than abandon my child just to get across myself.” With that thought, mother and child together sink into the water, and their lives come to an end. After her death she is reborn in a heaven

because of the mercy she displayed in sacrificing herself in her efforts to get the child across the river. In fact, this woman's original nature was vile yet despite that she attained rebirth in a heaven due to her love for her child. People who commit one of the four grave offenses or five heinous crimes but then feel they want to protect and care for the dharma will also be like this: although they may have engaged in unwholesome behavior in the past, because they [now] care for the dharma they can still become a field of merit unsurpassed in this world. Caring for the dharma in this way has immeasurable karmic rewards.

Cunda then spoke up again:

World-Honored One. If an *icchāntika* by himself comes to regret his actions, and honors, venerates, and praises the Three Jewels, would making donations to that person bring significant karmic reward or not?

The Buddha said:

Good man, you should not speak about things in that manner. Good man, this is analogous to a person who spits out the pit of the mango he is eating onto the ground and then thinks, "Well, inside that pit it should also be sweet." So he picks it up again, breaks it open in his hands, and tastes the [seed] inside, only to find it extremely bitter. Regretting his decision, he thinks, "I guess I made a mistake about [eating] the seeds inside the fruit." He goes back, collects the pieces, puts them in the ground, and then tries to nurture the seed pieces by watering them with *sumanā* oil and milk from time to time. What would you say about what he is trying to do? Do you think he will be able to grow that seed or not?

[Cunda answered:] "No, World-Honored One. Even if the sweetest rains were to fall from the heavens, still nothing would grow from that seed."

[The Buddha said:]

Good man, the *icchāntikas* are just like that. They have burned away their karmic good roots, so by what rationale would they be able to remove the impact of their transgressions? Good man, if their attitudes were wholesome and good, then I would not call them *icchāntikas*. Good man, it is in this sense that I say that the karmic rewards for charitable

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acts are not without distinctions. How does this work? The rewards for donations given to śrāvakas differ; the rewards for donations given to pratyekabuddhas also differ; only donations given to tathāgatas bring the maximum rewards. This is why I say, “Charitable acts as a whole are not without distinctions.”

Cunda spoke once again: “Why did the Tathāgata utter the verses [on donating to monastics]?”

The Buddha said:

Cunda, the reason why I spoke those verses was to respond to a lay Buddhist *upāsaka* in Śravastī who made offerings to a Jain Nirgrantha without clearly believing [in him], and then came to ask me about the meaning of his act of charity. Those were the circumstances in which I composed those verses.

It was also to expound the meaning of the secret *tathāgatagarbha* to the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas. What was meaning of the verse? The words “in all cases” referred to “all cases of what is a small portion.” Understand that a bodhisattva-mahāsattva is a hero among the people: welcoming those who maintain the precepts and donating necessities to them, ridding [the sangha] of those who violate the precepts, weeding them out like harsh barnyard grass.

In addition, good man, in the past I also expounded this verse:

All rivers
Will have bends.
All forests
Will be known by their trees.
All women
Will use guile.
All who are free
Will gain peace and happiness.

At that time the bodhisattva-mahāsattva Mañjuśrī rose from his seat, respectfully bared his right shoulder, knelt with his right knee on the ground, and then came forward, paying obeisance at the Buddha’s feet before speaking, beginning with these verses:

All rivers
 Do not necessarily have bends.
 All forests
 Are not necessarily known by their trees.
 All women
 Do not necessarily use guile.
 All who are free
 Do not necessarily gain peace and happiness.

[I know] that there are additional things to consider that are relevant to the meanings of these verses taught by the Buddha. I only ask that you take pity on us and explain the reasoning behind them.

Why do I ask? World-Honored One, within the great trichilocosm there is a continent called Godānīya.¹⁶⁸ This continent has a river called *Śalya, the banks of which are straight and do not bend. Like a rope used as an incline, it goes straight to the Western Sea. Rivers shaped like this have never been mentioned in the other sutras expounded by the Buddha. Since these *vaitulya* and *āgama* sutras have expositions for there are other meanings to consider, I beseech the Tathāgata to enable bodhisattvas to grasp the deeper implications in those teachings.

World-Honored One, the Tathāgata appears like someone who at first discerned where a gold mine was but afterward would not discern where the gold itself was. You have completely understood the dharma but what you have explained to us is incomplete and does not exhaust the subject matter. Although the Tathāgata may have created other explanations on [a particular topic], you should also use indirect, expedient means to help us understand what you intend to communicate.

“All forests will be made of trees” is also a statement for which there are additional things to consider. Why? Because people take various jeweled ornaments containing gold, silver, or *vaiḍūrya* and make them into the shape of trees, and when these are brought together they are also called “forests.”

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“All women will use guile” is another statement for which there are additional things to consider. Why? Because there are women who do an excellent job of maintaining the precepts, no matter how restrictive. They are accomplished in virtue and have great compassion.

“All who are free will gain peace and happiness” is another statement that is incomplete. Why do I say this? Among those who are free are sacred sovereigns who are *cakravartins*, Tathāgata Dharma Kings who are not associated with the Māra of death and so do not pass away, as well as Brahmā, Śakra, and other gods who, although free, are all impermanent. If attaining permanent abiding and immutability is what you are calling freedom, then that would [only] refer to the Mahāyāna *mahāparinirvāṇa*.¹⁶⁹

The Buddha said:

Good man, what you have now said is a most eloquent discourse, but stop a moment and listen. Mañjuśrī, consider the case of a distinguished householder who was hampered by the pain of illness. A skillful physician examined him and concocted a medicinal plaster for him. But at that point the sick man very much wanted [to ingest] a large dose of medicine. So the physician put it to him like this:

If you were able to eliminate it, then you could take the large dose of medicine [for which you ask]. But now your body is enervated, so you should not ingest large quantities [of medicine]. You must understand that this plaster is called “sweet dew” but it is also called “poisonous medicine.” If you were to receive a large dose of this medicine and it turned out you did not eliminate it, that medicine we would then call poisonous [in your case].

Good man, do not think that what the physician has said amounts to violating his duties or losing confidence in the power in the plaster he created. Good man, the Tathāgata is like him when it comes to kings, queens, regents, princes, and ministers. There was an arrogance about King Prasenajit, and in his son and queen as well, and in order to subdue that arrogance I made plain to them something that was frightening, just like the physician did for his patient. That was why I created these verses:

All rivers
Will have bends.
All forests

Will be known by their trees.
 All women
 Will use guile.
 All who are free
 Will gain peace and happiness.

Mañjuśrī, you should now understand that there are no errors in the preaching of the Tathāgata. Even if the earth itself could be turned upside down, there would never be any errors in the words of the Tathāgata. It is in this sense that I say that within the totality of what the Tathāgata has said there are utterances in which there are additional things to consider [than the words alone].

Then the Buddha praised Mañjuśrī:

Excellent! Excellent, good man, is your long-standing knowledge of what this kind of discussion is about. It is because you feel mercy for others that you ask these detailed questions about the meaning of the Tathāgata's verse, wanting to empower all living beings to attain wisdom.

At that point Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince, came before the Buddha once again and quoted verses [of the Buddha]:

In regard to the language of others,
 Comply rather than oppose.
 And do not examine
 What others do and do not do.
 Just examine where your own actions
 Have been good and have not been good.

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World-Honored One. Expounding a dharma medicine such as this could not be the right teaching.¹⁷⁰ When you say, "In regard to the language of others, comply rather than oppose," I beseech the Tathāgata to take pity on us and provide us with the right teaching.

Why do I speak this way? World-Honored One, you have always said that all ninety-five kinds of heretical learning¹⁷¹ lead to coursing in the unfortunate realms but the śrāvaka disciples are all directed on the right path. Those among them who continue to support the precepts, maintain

their comportment, and are careful about the karmic roots they sow have a deep appreciation for the Great Dharma, and will course in the fortunate realms.¹⁷² But why is it, Tathāgata, that [despite the sentiment in those verses] in our ninefold canon we see disdain expressed toward another person, which then leads to reproach. What was your intent in verses like those I just quoted?

The Buddha said to Mañjuśrī:

Good man, when I uttered those verses they were not meant as a universal statement for all living beings. At the time I was speaking to King Ajātaśātru.¹⁷³ Buddha world-honored ones would never speak contrarily without good cause; there was a reason why I spoke to him in this way. Good man, after having killed his father, King Ajātaśātru came to see me. Hoping to subdue me, he asked me this:

Tell me, would you say that the World-Honored One has omniscience or not? If you have omniscience, then why would you allow Devadatta to join the sangha, given the fact that for countless lifetimes Devadatta has continually harbored evil thoughts in following the Tathāgata in order to kill you?

Good man, when I spoke those verses that you quoted it was for the king in that situation:

In regard to the language of others,
Comply rather than oppose.
Do not examine
What others do and do not do.
Just examine where your own actions
Have been good and have not been good.

The Buddha then informed the great king:

Having killed your father, you have committed a most serious crime that will immediately bring the most severe karmic result. You must publicly admit what you have done and seek purification. What circumstances could motivate you to instead look for faults in others?

Good man, it was in this sense [of admonishing Ajātaśatru] that I uttered those verses for that king. In addition, good man, the verses were spoken in order to [urge him] to support rather than malign the precepts, and to observe the faults of others only after achieving disciplined comportment in himself. If there are people who, in accepting the admonitions of others, distance themselves from their personal bounty of bad behavior, and also teach others to help them to also move away from their own many bad behaviors, such people would then be my disciples.

Then the World-Honored One spoke these verses to Mañjuśrī:

Everyone fears a weapon,
 No one does not love life.
 “As I forgive myself” should be the simile [for treating others].
 Do not kill and do not take up arms.

Then Mañjuśrī came before the Buddha again and reiterated these verses:

Not everyone fears a weapon,
 Not everyone loves life.
 “As I forgive myself” should be the simile.
 Devote yourself to creating skillful means.

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Tathāgata, the [obvious] meaning in this dharma verse (**dharmapada*) also does not exhaust every possibility. Why do I say this? It is not plausible that a god, human being, or *asura* would pick up a sword and stab arhats, *cakravartin* kings, beautiful women, elephants, horses, or ministers of the treasury. And even if warriors, strong-willed women, horsemen, alpha-male horses, leaders among wild animals, and precept-keeping *bhikṣus* run into such danger they would not be afraid. It is with this meaning in mind that I say there are additional meanings to consider in the Tathāgata’s verses.

And the phrase ““As I forgive myself” should be the simile” is also incomplete. Why? If an arhat were to take the self as a simile for viewing others, then he would be carrying an idea of self and an idea of a personal lifetime. If he were to hold notions of self and personal lifetime, then he would have to guard and protect them. Ordinary people should see

all arhats as [serious] practitioners, but if [arhats think] like this, it would constitute a false view of things. And if people embrace false views, when their life ends they will be reborn in Avīci Hell. Moreover, to suppose that an arhat could have harmful thoughts toward living beings simply does not make sense, and countless numbers of living beings are quite incapable of harming an arhat as well.

The Buddha said:

Good man, to speak of “an idea of self,” is to allude to the thoughts that arise in living beings of great compassion and the utter lack of any intent to injure another. It is to allude to the impartial mind of an arhat. Do not say that the World-Honored One has spoken contrarily without good cause. One day in the past there was a great hunter in Rājagṛha who went after herds of deer and over time had killed many. He invited me to eat the meat with him, and although I accepted his invitation at that time, I expressed the compassion I felt toward all living beings as if they were [my own son] Rāhula by speaking these verses to him:

You can be enabled to have a long life,
Dwelling in this world for so long.
But if you abided by the dharma of nonviolence,
Yours would be like the lifetimes of buddhas.

This is why I also uttered the verse you mentioned:

Everyone fears a weapon,
No one does not love life.
“As I forgive myself” should be the simile.
Do not kill and do not take up arms.

The Buddha said:

Excellent! Excellent, Mañjuśrī, is your questioning of the Tathāgata’s recondite teachings such as these for the sake of the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas.

Mañjuśrī then uttered these verses to the Tathāgata:

How could respecting my father and mother,

Obeying and revering them,
 How could practicing this dharma
 Mean falling into Avīci Hell?

The Tathāgata responded to this by answering Mañjuśrī with the following verses:

If you are attached to your mother,
 And delusional about your father,
 Obeying and revering in this way
 Will mean falling into Avīci Hell.

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Then the Tathāgata added these verses for the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī:

In all cases, depending on others
 Results in what we call suffering.
 In all cases, relying on oneself
 Means autonomy and joy.
 In all cases, arrogance
 Inclines one to excessive violence.
 The wise and gracious
 Are loved by everyone.

At that point, the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī addressed the Buddha, saying:

World-Honored One. What the Tathāgata has expounded here also does not exhaust [your knowledge on the subject]. All I ask is that the Tathāgata bestow mercy upon us by expounding his reasoning further.

Why do I say this? It is like the son of a householder. When he studies under a teacher, he is dependent upon that teacher, is he not? But if he depends upon that teacher, he will never accomplish his own purpose. Yet if he does not depend upon him, he will not accomplish his goals either. But even when he attains some autonomy, he may still not accomplish anything. That is why [we know] there are additional meanings to consider in what the Tathāgata expounds.¹⁷⁴

In addition, World-Honored One, suppose there was a prince who never received any training. Whatever he touched would lead to nothing. He would have freedom or autonomy, but he would be in the dark,

constantly suffering. For someone like this prince, if one were to say, “He was autonomous,” that would suggest that “autonomous” implied nonachievement. But if one were to say “He was dependent on another,” that would suggest that “dependent” also implied nonachievement. It is in this sense that I allude to the meanings expounded by the Buddha as having something additional to consider. That is also why “In all cases, depending on others” does not necessarily mean that the person ends up suffering, and why in all cases “autonomy” does not necessarily bring happiness.

In the verse, “In all cases, arrogance inclines one to excessive violence,” there are additional meanings to consider as well. World-Honored One, there are strong-willed women who go forth from their homes to study the Way out of arrogance, yet they maintain the precepts, comport themselves impeccably, guard their sense faculties, and do not let themselves become wild or scattered. Therefore the fetters produced by arrogance do not necessarily lead a person to violence in all cases.

In the verse “The wise and gracious, are loved by everyone,” there are additional meanings to consider as well. For there are people who, after secretly committing one of the four grave *pārājika* offenses, do not abandon their dharma robes [as they should], but instead become quite strict about holding themselves to the rules of comportment. When those who are protective of the dharma see these people they will not love them, and when the lives of these offenders end, they will surely fall into hell. If a wise person commits a serious violation and a dharma protector sees it, the dharma protector will immediately try to get that person expelled and returned to lay status. It is with this in mind that I ask how could we say that in all cases those regarded as “wise and gracious” will always be loved?¹⁷⁵

At that time the Buddha said this to Mañjuśrī:

There are reasons why the Tathāgata has expounded these verses in which there are additional meanings and there are reasons why the buddha world-honored ones preach this particular dharma. Once there was a woman in Rājagṛha called Subhadṛā. On returning to her parents’ home she took the opportunity to come to where I was, whereupon she

took refuge in the buddha, dharma, and sangha. And then she said: “No woman has the power to be free. Yet every man has unencumbered autonomy.” At that moment I understood that woman’s mind, and so I preached to her the verses I have quoted to you now [about dependence and self-reliance]. Mañjuśrī, what you have done is excellent, excellent. For the sake of all living beings you have now succeeded in questioning the Tathāgata about his recondite teachings such as these. 427c

Mañjuśrī spoke once again, uttering these verses:

Every living being
Relies on food and drink to survive.
Every one with great power
Has a mind without jealousy.
In every case it is due to eating or drinking,
That ailments are so often painful.
Every pure practice cultivated
Brings peace and happiness.

[He continued:]

Now the World-Honored One has thus received the offering of food and drink from Cunda. There could not be any fear in the World-Honored One, could there?

At that time, the World-Honored One responded in verse yet again for Mañjuśrī:

It is not that every living being
Relies entirely on food and drink to survive.
It is not that every one with great power
Has a mind without jealousy.
It is not always due to eating
That ailments are stressfully painful.
It is not that every pure practice
Always brings peace and happiness

Mañjuśrī, if you become ill, thus will I also suffer the pain of illness. Why do I say this? It is because arhats, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas,

and tathāgatas in fact do not partake of food. It is only from their desire to spiritually transform others that they make a show of enjoying the things that have been donated by countless living beings, for by doing so they enable the donors to complete [their practice of] the perfection of charity, thereby rescuing hell beings, animals, and hungry ghosts. If someone asserts that the Tathāgata's body was weak and thin during his six years of practicing austerities, that view would be unfounded. The buddha world-honored ones have individually removed themselves from the existences [in saṃsāra]; they are not the same as ordinary people. How could they have a body that is weak? Through their diligent praxis, the buddha world-honored ones have obtained adamantine bodies; these are not the same as the fragile bodies of worldly people. My disciples are also like this; inconceivably, they do not rely on eating.

In the verse "Every one with great power has no jealousy," there is another meaning that remains unexpressed. After all, there are people in this world who go through their lives with long periods of never feeling jealous, and yet they also have no power.

In the verse "The pains from all ailments are due to eating," there is also another meaning that remains unexpressed. One also sees people whose ailments are externally caused, such as being pricked by a thorn, cut by a sword, or lanced by a spear.

In the verse "Every pure practice brings peace and happiness," there is something additional as well. This world also has people who are following heretical paths cultivating pure *brahmacarya* practices, and yet they still suffer pain and anxiety. This is the sense in which the word "every" as used by the Tathāgata in the verse includes some other things to consider. I call this principle, "The Tathāgata does not put forth a verse without a reason, it is only due to particular causes that he speaks." One day in the past there was a brahman in Ujjayinī (Ujjain) called *Koṭira who came to me wanting to take the eight precepts on the fourth day of the lay observance. That was the occasion in which I spoke those verses.

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At that time bodhisattva Kāśyapa addressed the Buddha and said:

World-Honored One. Which utterances are those that have no additional meanings to consider? Which are those that have complete meanings?

[The Buddha answered:]

Good man, excluding only some auxiliary paths, “complete” would refer to those blessed (*kuśalapakṣa*) dharmas that are permanent (*nitya*) and joyous (*sukha*). I call them “complete” and I also call them “teachings that have nothing additional to consider.” Those dharmas that do have something else to consider I call “teachings with additional [meanings]” and also “teachings without additional [meanings].” My hope is to instill a yearning for the dharma (*dharma-kāma*) within sons [and daughters] of good families, by means of which they can come to understand both those utterances that have additional meanings and those that do not have additional meanings.¹⁷⁶

At that the bodhisattva Kāśyapa’s heart leaped with a joy that overwhelmed him. He came before the Buddha and said, “How rare this is, World-Honored One. You do indeed equally view all of us as if we were Rāhulas.”

At that time the Buddha praised the bodhisattva Kāśyapa: “Excellent, excellent! What you have now perceived is both sublime and significant.”

The bodhisattva Kāśyapa then said to the Buddha: “World-Honored One. I would like to ask the Tathāgata to expound on the merit to be attained from this *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*.”

The Buddha then told Kāśyapa:

Good man, anyone who is able to hear the name of this sutra will gain merit. But this cannot be fully communicated by śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas, for only buddhas can understand it. Why is this? They cannot conceive of this buddha realm. How much less likely is it that will they take possession of, read and recite, develop expertise in, and make copies of the rolls of this sutra.

Then gods, humans, and *asuras* came before the Buddha and spoke these verses, the same sound arising from each of their different mouths:

The buddhas are difficult to fathom,
 The dharma and sangha are also so.
 That is why we beseech you now,
 Asking only that you remain here for a short while.
 For the Venerable Kāśyapa,

And Ānanda, and
The members of their two groups,
It will be some time before their arrival.
Just so for the sovereign of Magadha,
Great King Ajātaśatru,
Who sincerely admires the Buddha,
But has not yet arrived.
All we ask, Tathāgata,
Is to sympathize with us a little and stay
In this great assembly:
Clear away this net of our doubts!

Then the Tathāgata also spoke in verse for the many groups assembled there:

My dharma's eldest son,
Named Mahākāśyapa,
And Ānanda, diligent of effort,
Can cut away all your doubts.
You will ascertain the truth.
Ānanda, master listener,
Naturally will understand
What is permanent and impermanent.
For that reason you should not
Give in to sorrow.

At that time the great assembly presented offerings of various things to the Tathāgata. Upon presenting their offerings to the Buddha, they immediately made resolutions to attain *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*. Bodhisattvas as numerous as the number of grains of sand in innumerable, endless Ganges Rivers attained the first *bhūmi* stage. Then the World-Honored One extended a consecration to Mañjuśrī, bodhisattva Kāśyapa, and Cunda. After their consecrations, he spoke these words:

Good men, cultivate your minds, be conscientious, and avoid indolence. Now my back hurts, my whole body aches, and I want to lie down like a small infant or someone who is chronically ill. You, Mañjuśrī, shall

expound the great teaching to the four groups of followers. I now entrust this dharma to you. In addition, when Kāśyapa and Ānanda arrive, I also entrust the true-dharma to them.

At that point, after the Tathāgata had spoken those words he displayed pain in his body, wanting to discipline the living beings present. He then lay down on his right side, like someone who is ill.

Notes

- ¹ In the Pāli Canon, the *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta* can be found as *sutta* number sixteen in the *Dīghanikāya* collection. For the Pāli Text Society English translation by T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, see Bibliography. A Sanskrit text has been reconstructed from fragments and translated into German by Ernst Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra; Text in Sanskrit und Tibetisch, verglichen mit dem Pāli nebst einer Übersetzung der chinesischen Entsprechung im Vinaya der Mūlasarvāstivādins* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1950; Kyoto: Rinsen, 1986, reprint).
- ² That is, the name *Nirvana Sutra* (*Niepan jing* 涅槃經) as used in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese exegetical commentaries and essays from the medieval period only designated Taishō nos. 374, 375, and 376. Some scholars today use the terms “Hinayana *Nirvana Sutra*,” or “the *Nirvana Sutra* in Pāli” (Sonya S. Lee, *Surviving Nirvana: Death of the Buddha in Chinese Visual Culture* [Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010]) but this is not traditional and potentially misleading. There are *other* Pāli texts called *Nibbāna sutta* that consist of short dialogues in the *Ānguttara Nikāya* and *Udāna* in which the topic of *nibbāna* is discussed; they have no content relationship to the original detailed narrative on the great decease of the Buddha or the massive Mahāyāna discourse here in which there is no decease of the Buddha.
- ³ Although the tradition in modern scholarship has been to date this effort 416–423, Jinhua Chen (2004), has argued convincingly that despite the contradictory information in his biographies, Dharmakṣema did not arrive in Guzang until 420, and the biographies are consistent that he added a significant amount to his translation at the end of his life, his death coming in 433.
- ⁴ Taishō no. 475, 14.544a29. See Étienne Lamotte, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, translated by Sara Boin (1976), p. 114.
- ⁵ *Sal* is the anglicized name for the Sanskrit *śāla*, Latin *Shorea robusta*, still grown for its timber in South Asia today. It is speculated that this type of tree may have had some religious significance for the Śākya family. The river’s name in the Faxian translation is instead Hiraṇyavatī, which agrees with the story as told in the Pāli version of the sutra. Regarding Kuśinagara, the urban center for the Malla kingdom at that time, there is some difference of opinion as to how to reconstruct the name for this location. In Pāli it is Kusinārā and usually rendered Kuśinagara in Sanskrit. MPNS Sanskrit Fragment (hereafter SF) 2, however, has Kuśinagarī, yet Kuśinagara is used in the Gandharī MPNS fragment published in *Buddhist manuscripts in the Schøyen*

Collection (Braavig, 2000), vol. 1, p. 248. The Chinese here only gives the first three syllables of the name, *ju shi na* 拘尸那. It is thus not clear in what form the name was transmitted in the case of this text, so I have used the conventional pronunciation here. The present-day city of Kuśinagar in eastern Uttar Pradesh serves as a Buddhist pilgrimage site.

- 6 The “triple world” means “all known forms of life in saṃsāra.” Specifically it refers to three different types of existence, the division reflecting the degree of spiritual attainment of the inhabitants of the three worlds. First is the realm of desire and form (*kāmadhātu*), which is the plain upon which our known world operates. Second is the realm of form only (*rūpadhātu*), where individuals have removed their desires through religious discipline. Third is the realm of neither desire nor form (*ārūpyadhātu*), where only consciousness remains.
- 7 The *palāśa* tree is identified as the *Butea monosperma* or *Butea frondosa*. Written *palāśa* in Pāli, there are two stories called *Palāśa Jātaka* in the *Jātaka* collection. The Francis and Cowell translation of the *Jātaka* (Cowell 1897, vol. III, nos. 307 and 370) translate it as “Judas tree” but today it is more commonly referred to as bastard-teak or dhak, anglicized from the Hindi *dhāk*. In addition to its medicinal qualities, in Buddhist writing, the bright red *palāśa* flowers are symbols of monks wearing red robes and the three-pronged leaf as a symbol of the Three Jewels.
- 8 These “four immeasurables” (Skt. *catur-apramāṇa*) are also known as “four noble abodes” (*brahmavihāra*): kindness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*mudītā*), and equanimity or impartiality (*upekṣā*). This set also occurs in the *Yoga Sūtras* and probably predates Buddhism.
- 9 The eight qualities found in the ideal form of water: that it is sweet, cool, soft, light, clear, odorless, not harmful to the throat, and not harmful to the stomach.
- 10 In other words, they complained openly about what was expected of them as homemakers. There are many kinds of dharmas from many different sources presented in the MPNS, with the Buddha’s dharma usually identified as such. In this particular case, the allusion is to dharma in the sense of social duty.
- 11 This is a medicinal plant seed called *tinglizi* that is still used today. Although *tinglizi* matches a Sanskrit word for mustard seed (*sarṣapa-phala*) below in SF 14, in Chinese herbal medicine *tinglizi* has been identified variously as *Lepidium apetalum* (Willdenow), *Lepidium micranthum* (Lebour), *Descurainia sophia*, and so forth.
- 12 The Licchavis (or Licchavāṅs) were a regal and powerful *kṣatriya* clan in India at the time of the Buddha. Their capital was the city of Vaiśālī, the site of the Second Buddhist Council, held approximately a hundred years after Śākyamuni’s death. In Buddhist literature they appear as devout followers of the Buddha, but in other literature they are seen following other teachers. They play an important role in this sūtra because one of Ajātaśatru’s core ambitions was to destroy them, and he succeeded in conquering Vaiśālī.

- ¹³ The usual Indic basis for this name Guangmutian is Virūpākṣa, one of the four world protector (*lokapāla*) deities. But as this deity is clearly female, the reconstruction tentatively presents this name in female form.
- ¹⁴ The Buddha dies on the bank of this river. The Hiranyavati River is identified today as the Little Gandak River, which runs through the Gorakhpur and Kushīnāgara districts in Uttar Pradesh. In his trek to this area, the Buddha insists on crossing this river before stopping to rest, despite his ill health. Although this line is the only allusion to the river in this text, this story is related in some detail in the *Mahāpārīṇibhāna-sutta*. The red flowers of the *aśoka* tree are appropriate here because in the version of the Buddha's life story that appears in the *Divyāvadāna* he was born under an *aśoka* tree (rather than a sal tree), and Xuanzang records being taken to that same *aśoka* tree when he visited Lumbini in the seventh century. The *aśoka* is identified as the *Saraca asoca* (aka *Saraca indica*).
- ¹⁵ Uttarakuru is one of the traditional nine geographical divisions of the world in ancient India. Located north of Mount Sumeru, it was conceived as a land of "eternal beatitude." Trāyastriṃśa, or the Heaven of the Thirty-three, is the second of six heavens in the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*). Located atop Mount Sumeru, it is ruled by the god Indra, and Nandanavana is the name of a park therein.
- ¹⁶ The term *vaijayanta* is normally understood as an epithet of the palace of Indra, from *vijaya* or *viyanta*. The names Śakra and Indra are used interchangeably in the MPNS.
- ¹⁷ Maheśvara is famous as an epithet of Śiva, and is considered to be the Buddhist form or name of that deity. In the Vajrayāna, Maheśvara appears in the Womb (Garbha) Mandala with characteristics of destruction and healing similar to those of Śiva. The allusion on p. 146 to Maheśvara as representing or inhabiting a realm of quietude is unclear. Maheśvara also appears in the *Lotus Sutra*; Leon Hurvitz (1976: 2, 404) translates the name as "the Great Self-Mastering God."
- ¹⁸ The term "peak existence" (Skt. *bhava-agra*) at times refers to the highest of the four heavens in the *rūpadhātu*, the realm of form that transcends sense pleasure, but here it is merely a reference to the *rūpadhātu* itself, of which there are sixteen heavens beginning with the Brahmā realm, or *brahmāloka*.
- ¹⁹ Māra Pāpīyas (if inflected to nom. sg., then Māraḥ Pāpīyān), elsewhere abbreviated to either Māra or Pāpīyas, is normally depicted as an enemy of the Buddha who represents an opposing set of values, such as indulgence in desire, violence in the service of personal ambition, and so forth. He famously appears right before the Buddha is about to attain complete awakening in an attempt to dissuade him from completing the path. Here he is depicted interestingly as a kind of enforcer god of hell who, when faced with the Buddha's imminent disappearance, becomes compassionate and works to help the hell beings gain liberation. In general, the MPNS perspective is that there are many māras about in the world that work at cross-purposes to the Buddha and may succeed in deceiving unsuspecting individuals. There is scant suggestion that they are part of a vast conspiracy led by "King Māra," but as a powerful deity Māra also has

the power to manifest himself in manifold ways. It should also be mentioned that due to the nature of Chinese syntax it is often unclear if the sutra intends the word “Māra” to be read as plural or a singular. One recurring trope in the MPNS is the notion of “four māras,” functioning as a metaphor for four areas of human experience that thwart spiritual progress (see n. 27). The name Māra is also applied, perhaps figuratively, as a label to false teachers preaching false doctrines, some in the form of sutras and vinayas; they are thus accused of misrepresenting the Buddhist perspective.

- ²⁰ This listing has already occurred above twice: *devas*, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *kiṃnaras*, and *mahoragas*.
- ²¹ A *yojana* is a measure of length used from ancient times in India. Its meaning changed over time and thus it is unclear precisely how it should be interpreted here. Generally, in Buddhist literature it is taken to be approximately 4.35 miles (seven kilometers).
- ²² This fabric is identified by Shimoda (1993, 91) as *kācalindika*, from the Tibetan transliteration *ka tsa li nda*.
- ²³ *Dānava* and *asura* are two different kinds of fearsome occult spirits. They also appear together on p. 18 as part of a longer list of beings from the spirit world, but there their company are generally attractive types. In the MPNS, *dānava* are clearly regarded as demons, while the *asura* have a more complex identity. In this particular passage, the *asura* are treated as loathsome as *dānava* to make the point that the MPNS has the power to turn around “such beings” by inspiring compassion in them. Note, too, that like *yakṣa* and *rākṣasa*, but not *dānava*, *asuras* are singled out as having a king (Vemacitra) who leads them to the expected great decease with offerings.
- ²⁴ This is the first mention of *icchāntikas*, a class of beings that are guilty of a number of moral and spiritual crimes, such as disrespecting the Mahāyāna teachings and violating the rules of morality. They will figure prominently below.
- ²⁵ A reference to seven types of sinful behavior that binds one to saṃsāra. These are divided into forms of bad action (killing, stealing, and improper sexual activity) and bad speech (lying, idle talk, slander, and offensive language).
- ²⁶ This alludes to the six *pāramitās* or “perfections” that are the normative basis for the practice of a bodhisattva: 1) charity (*dāna*), 2) morality (*śīla*), 3) patience (*kṣānti*), 4) assiduousness (*vīrya*), 5) meditation (*dhyāna*), and 6) wisdom (*prajñā*).
- ²⁷ A reference to *prajñā-caḥṣus*, the doctrine of the five kinds of “seeing as understanding.” That is, seeing through the physical organ (*carma*), through the eyes of a deity (*divya*), by means of the teachings (dharma), as a buddha does (buddha), and by means of wisdom (*prajñā*).
- ²⁸ The MPNS has lists of three or four māras that represent a symbolic list of “demons” as the basic sources of *duḥkha*. Namely, the defilements as demon (*kleśa-māra*), the five aggregates as demon (*skandha-māra*), death as demon (*mṛtya-māra*), and the demon of Māra as a deity ruling over Paranirmitavaśavartin, the sixth heaven in the

- world of desire, who tries to prevent living beings from doing good (*devaputra-māra*). These are listed on p. 42; see also note 18 regarding the term *māra*.
- ²⁹ *Udumbarapuṣpa*. The flower of the *udumbara* (glomerate fig tree) was thought to bloom only once in three thousand years.
- ³⁰ A reference to the sixth and highest heaven in the world of desire (*kāmadhātu*), one of the triple worlds. The triple world is discussed in note 3.
- ³¹ These are physical or spiritual changes that signify the transformation of someone from a living being (*sattva*) to the status of buddha. The thirty-two and eighty marks are physical changes that happen to the body; the last refer to eighteen characteristics that are religious qualities with which a buddha is endowed.
- ³² The *sārasa* is a water bird, usually translated as “crane” and identified in the Pāli Text Society Dictionary as *Ardea sibirica*.
- ³³ The mythical Lake Anavatapta (P. Anotatta), one of seven great lakes, appears in the *Āṅguttaranikāya/Ekottarāgama*, in the *Jātaka* and *Divyāvadana* compilations, in the *Paramatthajotikā* II commentary on the *Sutta-nipāta* (see Murakami and Oikawa, *Pāri Bukkyō jiten* [Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2009], p. 132), the *Lotus Sutra*, *Dazhidulun*, and so forth. See *Hōbōgirin* I.33 under Japanese pronunciation Anokudatsu. A *nāgarāja* (serpent/dragon king) lives there who is mentioned in the first chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, and in the *Anavataptanāgarājaparipṛcchā-sūtra* he is saved by means of studying the Prajñāpāramitā. The *Anavatapta gāthā* appears in both Sarvāstivāda and Pāli sources and is linked to this sutra: just before the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa* five hundred of his disciples fly to Lake Anavatapta to proclaim how their karmic history led them to liberation. See Richard Salomon and Andrew Glass, *Two Gandhari Manuscripts of the Songs of Lake Anavatapta (Anavatapta-gāthā)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009). Mention of the lake in the *Divyāvadāna* also suggests a link to a monk named Subhadra, who lives at Kuśinagara but also frequents Lake Anavatapta; this monk then describes a disciple of Śāriputra named Cunda, who also spends time there. In the first chapter of his *Datang Siyuji*, Xuanzang mentions the same myth mentioned here, naming the four great rivers whose waters originate from it: Gaṅga, Sindhu, Vakṣu, and Sītā, and adding that Lake Anavatapta is eight hundred *li* in circumference.
- ³⁴ The eight inopportune births, or *akṣana*, are a list of eight forms of birth in existential or saṃsāric conditions that make it extremely difficult to see a buddha or hear his teachings. These are: 1) to be born in a hell realm, 2) to be born in the hungry ghost realm, 3) to be born in the animal realm, 4) to be born in a heaven where life is long and pleasurable, 5) to be born in the Uttarakuru region (where there is similarly too much pleasure), 6) to be born human but with sensory impairment, 7) to be born as a philosopher wedded to the ways of the world, or 8) to be born in a time between buddhas. See Edgerton 2.
- ³⁵ The word *kāṣāya* means defect or impurity, and refers to a mixture of dyeing agents used to color the cloth of monastic robes. This distinguished them from the white

robes of laymen and masked the often disparate origins of abandoned fabrics collected and sewn together to make them.

- ³⁶ This refers to the letter “i” in the Brāhmī script, which is written with three dots in the shape of an equilateral triangle as ∴ or some variation thereof. The long vowel “ī” is written as ∴∴, four dots in the shape of a square.
- ³⁷ This is a curious simile. There is no question that *qi ye* 七葉 translates *saptaparṇa* (“seven leaves”), as the same Chinese form is used in *saptaparṇa-guha*, the name of the cavern near Rājagṛha where the First Council was held. The *saptaparṇa* tree is known for its medicinal qualities in Āyurveda and is still used for that purpose today. But “*saptaparṇa* flower” never occurs in the Chinese canon outside the MPNS, with one exception as the name of a tree (T. 721) with no metaphorical meaning. In addition, *saptaparṇa* is widely identified as *Alstonia scholaris*, a tree that typically grows leaves in clusters of seven but whose flowers are quite fragrant. Yet mention of *saptaparṇa* flowers as having no scent occurs three times in Dharmakṣema’s translation, twice in comparison to the very fragrant *vārṣika* flower, ruling out the possibility of a scribal error. The term *saptaparṇa* flower does not occur in Faxian, but it is found in the Tibetan translation, rendered clearly as *sab ta par na yi me tog* (D 142a7), in the section corresponding to Dharmakṣema’s usage at 424b19. So however nonstandard for the tree in general, perhaps in the location where the MPNS was written a species of *saptaparṇa* grew in which the flowers had no scent.
- ³⁸ The term “*brahmacarya* practices” in general refers to a pure monastic lifestyle in which the precepts are carefully kept, sometimes with specific reference to celibacy, but it also alludes to the way a man of the brahman caste is supposed to comport himself during his student period, when a similar set of precepts are required.
- ³⁹ This refers to the elder monk who many saw as receiving the mantle of leadership for the sangha as a whole after the Buddha’s passing. Remember, however, that like in the original *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, Mahākāśyapa is not present in the assembly at the time the Buddha is delivering the *Nirvana Sutra*, but is on his way. This raises the question of how Mahākāśyapa is to be the caretaker of the Buddha’s dharma and teach it to others if he is not present to hear this discourse, particularly when the point is made repeatedly that this supersedes all previous sutras.
- ⁴⁰ *Ba zhong shu*. This represents eight areas of medical training in the Āyurvedic tradition (**aṣṭāṅga-āyurveda*). Today the classical list is of 1) surgery, 2) diseases of the head, 3) medicine, 4) spirit possession, 5) pediatrics, 6) toxicology, 7) preventative measures, and 8) aphrodisiacs. But the Tang dynasty *Yiqie yinyi* (T.54:466c) presents a slightly different list that appears to represent the received tradition in medieval China: 1) the internals of the body, 2) ophthalmology, 3) dermatology, 4) pediatrics, 5) spirit possession, 6) toxicology, 7) gynecology and fertility, and 8) astrology.
- ⁴¹ Thus the half-phoneme *ardhākṣara* became a “half-character” in the Chinese translations, and though the Chinese reader would naturally interpret this to mean an incomplete or partially written character probably without the intended phonetic

meaning, the intended metaphorical meaning of a complete versus incomplete expression was still communicated. We know this because Zhiyi uses these terms in his influential essays *Moho zhiguan* and *Fahua xuanyi*, which in turn resulted in its lasting presence in the East Asian Buddhist lexicon. In this translation, because it generally takes two or more characters in English to produce a syllable, depending how these terms are used, the translation will render “half-characters” either as “the alphabet” when the context is a metaphoric one about language learning (pp. 137–139), or “half-syllables” when the discussion is about phonemes (pp. 254, 260–261).

- ⁴² For *sārasa*, see note 32. A *kācilindī*, also called *kācilindika*, is thought to be a white crane known for its soft feathers.
- ⁴³ The five moral precepts (*pañcaśīla*) are injunctions to refrain from: 1) taking life, 2) taking what is not given, 3) engaging in improper sexual activity, 4) prevaricating or using false speech, and 5) ingesting intoxicants. The ten aspects of good character (*daśakuśala*) are comprised of the first four of these five precepts, along with refraining from slandering, using divisive or harsh speech, using intentionally affected speech, greed, anger, and holding right views.
- ⁴⁴ The *upavāsa/upoṣadha* (P. *uposatha*) ceremonies were formal events where various communal religious activities took place. Sometimes referred to as the Buddhist sabbath, these ceremonies were held anywhere from two to six times a month. Here the scene is a ritual recitation of the precepts when the personal confessions of individuals who had violated them also occurs, but other services involve monastics’ preaching to lay followers and observance of stricter precepts. In East Asia, under the influence of the MPNS, refraining from consuming animal products became one of these lay observances. The *uposatha* is still observed in Theravādin countries, and Chinese Buddhist laypeople still abstain from eating meat and fish on designated *upavāsa* days.
- ⁴⁵ Guhyapāda Vajrapāṇi is a deity empowered to protect the religion. Though thought of by many as a Vajrayāna deity, he appears in the early Āgama scriptures as well.
- ⁴⁶ This list represents a version of the so-called *sapta-karman* (P. *satta-kamma*) punishments. The contents of this list differs somewhat in the vinayas of different schools, and as it is not clear at this time if the MPNS had a single or multiple vinaya lineages, this could help clarify its vinaya roots. The following reconstructions are based primarily on the Chinese interpretations of this section in the representative commentaries by Huiyuan, Zhanran, and others, projected back onto similar vinaya material found in Chinese translations, in this case specifically the Sarvāstivādin and Mūlasarvāstidīn Vinayas: **pravāsaṇīya-karman*, **niḡarhaṇīya-karman*, **niśrāya-karman*, **pratisāraṇīya-karman*, **adarśana-utkṣepaṇīya-karman*, **nāśaṇīya-karman*, and **pāpikā-dṛṣṭi-anutsarga-karman*. Note that there is no one vinaya text in Chinese translation that contains this entire list in this form, and Huiyuan and Guanding used various materials in their glosses, among them the Sarvāstivādin Vinaya translated by Kumārajīva (*Shisong lu*, T. 1435), the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* (*Wufen lu*, T. 1421), and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* texts translated by Yijing, especially T. 1442 and T. 1453. Note that while all seven are called *karman*, here transliterated *jiemo* 羯磨,

in the usual vinaya context only the first four are called *karman* and the latter three are instead called *pravṛjāna*, usually rendered *binchu* 擯出, meaning expulsion or exile from a sangha. Some read these punishments as permanent, others do not, but the general purpose of these rulings is to reform wayward individuals rather than expel them.

- ⁴⁷ The Ganges River flows east from the Himalayas, emptying into the Indian Ocean at Calcutta (Kolkata). The Yamunā River, measuring eight hundred and fifty-one miles in length, is the largest tributary of the Ganges and joins it at Allahabad. The Sarayu River (Sarabhū in Pāli) runs through Uttar Pradesh and is also a tributary to the Ganges. It is thought to be where the ancient city of Ayodhyā was located and frequently figures in ancient myth. In the great Indian epic the *Rāmāyāna*, Rāma bathes in the Sarayu to return to his supernatural state. The city of Śrāvastī was located on the Ajiravatī (also called Ajitavatī) River. Śrāvastī was the capital of Kośala and the Buddha retreated to the nearby Jetavana monastery during the rainy season. Mahī is a river mentioned in the Āgamas as located near the city of Vaiśālī, but not much is known about it today, though W. Hoey tried to track it down in his article “The Five Rivers of the Buddhists” (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* [1907]: 41–46). Sindhu is the Sanskrit name for the river that is now called the Indus and the basis for the name of Sindh province in Pakistan, site of a prominent pre-Aryan civilization of the Indian subcontinent. The Indus flows more than one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four miles from Tibet through the Karakoram Range and the whole of Pakistan, eventually entering the sea at Karachi. The Vakṣu (or Pakṣu) is generally accepted as the name used for the Oxus River (Mizutani 1971, 8b; Edgerton 1953, 466b), which is now known as the Amu Darya. But it may also refer in a more limited way to what is known today as the Vakhsh River in Tajikistan, a tributary of the Oxus. Most likely the two rivers were not universally distinguished as one flowed into the other. Known to the Greeks and Romans, the Oxus is one of the longest rivers in Central Asia, flowing eight hundred and seventy miles from the Pamir Mountains west to the Aral Sea, today serving as Afghanistan’s northern border with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Finally, the Sītā River is identified with the Tarim River, which flows east from Tibet through the Tarim Basin. There are various references to other lists of “great rivers” scattered throughout the canon but it appears that only the MPNS has this list of eight.
- ⁴⁸ The five supernatural powers (*pañcābhijñā*) are: 1) the power to see what others cannot, 2) the power to hear what others cannot, 3) the power to discern the thoughts of others, 4) the power to know past events, and 5) the power to go and come anywhere.
- ⁴⁹ The term “ordinary person,” translates *prthagjana* (P. *puṭhujjana*), essentially a non-specific term used to indicate the perspective of common folk. But as a technical term in Mahāyāna literature, at times it also embodies varying degrees of pejorative nuance, going beyond its original meaning of someone who has not committed to a religious life or does not understand religious thinking to indicate someone who obstinately

refuses to recognize the value of either. Although it has appeared earlier in the sutra, this is the first example of the somewhat idiosyncratic way in which the MPNS uses the term by linking it with its doctrine of *icchantika* when specifically applied to errant Buddhists. In this particular usage, the “ordinary people” are Buddhist followers guilty of misusing and misrepresenting the Buddha’s teachings, implying the danger of passing on a distortion of the truth to future generations.

- ⁵⁰ Note that I have translated the phrase *fei you wei, fei wu wei* 非有爲非無爲, based on the usual Chinese reading of *you wei/wu wei*, as representing *samskrta/asamskrta*. However, the Tibetan here is *yod pa ma yin pa*, suggesting instead *asti/na asti*, meaning simply “it is and is not.”
- ⁵¹ The Dharmakṣema translation uses *gong de* 功德 to translate both *guṇa* (virtue, quality) and *puṇya* (merit). But based on the Tibetan *yon tan*, in this section it appears to represent *guṇa*.
- ⁵² The question is about people who have not formally joined the sangha but who nevertheless study the sutras and preach on the benefits of the Buddhist teachings to others. They are something like self-ordained popular preachers operating outside the proper ecclesiastical channels of authority.
- ⁵³ The lion’s roar is a metaphor for the power and authority in the voice of the Buddha. In this context, it implies the authority of someone who has attained full understanding of the Buddha’s teaching. In other words, these people can preach and help others in their work, but they are limited in what they can do because they have not attained *bodhi* and therefore cannot be a source of refuge for a Buddhist.
- ⁵⁴ That is, a layman. The tradition in India at this time was that lay men and women wore white robes, whereas monastics, ascetics, and yogis wore colored robes. Skt. **avadāta-vasana*.
- ⁵⁵ A *pārājika* offense is the most serious category of precept violation for a monk or nun. Pruitt and Norman (*The Pātimokkha*, 2001, p. 9, etc.) and others translate it as “defeat” or “entailing defeat.” To be accused of a *pārājika* violation requires adjudication and if found guilty, one is “deserving of expulsion.” Whether this resulted in permanent expulsion, temporary expulsion, shunning but not losing monastic status, and so forth, is not always clear, as the number of violations considered *pārājika* increased dramatically from the original four, and as a result the severity of their criminality diminished. The original four *pārājika* offenses were murder or causing another’s death, theft of a serious nature, sexual intercourse, and false claims of supernatural ability. This notion was quite fluid throughout the tradition, especially in the Mahāyāna, and is taken up in detail below, where we find many other offenses regarded as *pārājika*.
- ⁵⁶ The readings in this paragraph are based on Sanskrit fragments 12.8 to 12.12 in Habata (2007). Although this sutra at times distinguishes between cooled, solid clarified butter (*ghṛta*) and the froth that forms on top of heated, liquid clarified butter (*sarpis*)

or *sarpirmaṇḍa*), based on a comparison with the Sanskrit fragments and Tibetan translations, it turns out that the Chinese term *tihu* 醍醐 (Jp. *daigo*) is used for both. In this case, *tihu* corresponds to the Middle Indic form *grta*, which is the equivalent of the Sanskrit *ghṛta*.

- ⁵⁷ This is a rare example of sarcasm in a Buddhist sutra. Clearly the Buddha is ridiculing the potential donor whose motives for giving are rooted in vanity rather than empathy. It is also worth noting, however, that in his response we see that the Buddha's choice of an example to illustrate his category of what is essentially "fitting the question to the questioner" shows that he does not preach one message to everyone, and that he will not hesitate to withhold his teaching from someone who is not ready or capable of receiving it.
- ⁵⁸ This refers to the monastic precept concerning the restrictions on meat preparation that, if met, permitted Buddhist monks to eat meat. In Chinese they were known as *bujian*, *buwen*, *buyi* 不見不聞不疑: meat that was not seen by the monk to have resulted from an animal killed expressly for him, meat that the monk did not hear to have resulted from a killing done for him, and meat that the monk did not suspect came from a killing done for him.
- ⁵⁹ Although the sutra does not list the nine animals whose flesh was previously deemed "pure" and therefore edible, in Fascicle XVIII (T.12:473c1–2) a list of ten kinds of meat is given that the Buddha had not permitted his monks to eat, and thus most likely represents the mention of "impure" meat. The ten forbidden meats are that of humans, snakes, elephants, horses, donkeys, dogs, lions, pigs, foxes, and macaques. But this category of nine kinds of pure meat is not mentioned again in the MPNS and does not appear in any other extant sutra in Chinese. Huiyuan offers an unnamed person's interpretation (37.665a17–20) that it refers to the dried meat of animals that had died naturally, and meat from birds.
- ⁶⁰ Monks were forbidden from requesting better quality foods or an abundance of food, a violation labeled *praṇīta-vijñāpana* at *Mahāvvyutpatti* 8462. See P. *paṇīta*. What Kāśyapa is therefore inferring is that by disallowing meat and fish the Buddha has reclassified them as *praṇīta-vijñāpana*.
- ⁶¹ In other words, do not take this rule to the extreme of refusing all offers of material support. The Nirgranthas were one sect of the competing Jain religion. They were known for refusing to wear any clothes out of an extreme devotion to asceticism and a desire to avoid killing even the microbes that live in clothing and would be destroyed each time a garment is washed.
- ⁶² "Downfall" translates *duo* 墮. This is probably **pāṭayantika*, one of three grades of monastic transgression along with *saṃghāvaśeṣa/saṃghādiśeṣa* and *pārājika*. In the northern tradition there are thirty relatively serious offenses called *niḥsargikāḥ pāṭayanikā dharmāḥ*, where *niḥsargika* means "forfeiture" of sangha rights, followed by ninety offenses called *pāṭayanikā dharmāḥ*. Note that the strong language of the

sutra here refers to falling into hell for these transgressions only if they are not confessed to, repented of, and atoned for.

- ⁶³ These are the eight traditional divisions of the precepts or rules guiding the lives of the monks (there are six divisions of the rules for nuns) within the vinaya of the Dharmaguptaka school as translated in the *Sifunli* (Taishō no. 1428) and the ritual texts based on it (Taishō nos. 1429 and 1430), which had been translated just a few years before Dharmakṣema's arrival. See Satō Tatsugen's study of Gyōnen's summary of the Dharmaguptaka vinaya, *Gendaigo yaku Risshū kōyō* (1994), p. 163.
- ⁶⁴ The *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra* is an early Mahāyāna text, obviously predating the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, which extolls the special nature of this particular *samādhi*, explained as attainable only by bodhisattvas at the tenth and final stage (*bhūmi*). It is famous for explaining the lifetime of Śākyamuni as merely a performance undertaken by him for the purpose of teaching, akin to the description in this sutra, and for its many depictions of supernatural events in which enlightened beings are able to manifest themselves in other forms to spiritually aid others. See *The Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sutra*, translated from the Chinese of Kumārajīva by John McRae (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1998), and a study of the miracles in this text by Kajiyama Yūichi, *Bukkyō Daigaku Sōgō Kenkyūsho Kiyō II* (1995).
- ⁶⁵ That is, the *uṣṇīṣa*, one of the distinguishing physical marks of a buddha.
- ⁶⁶ This distinction rests on the function of the prefix *an* as a negation in Sanskrit. So the opposite of *anāgāmin* (nonreturner) would be *āgāmin* (returner). This is unclear because while the term *anāgāmin* is an established Buddhist term, *āgāmin* is not.
- ⁶⁷ This refers to the four general class divisions or castes in India, and the fact that in the prevailing religious system referred to today as Brahmanism, the brahman priests (*brāhmaṇa*) believed they were entitled to a hereditary monopoly on ritual language as a source of power. The other three castes mentioned are warriors and kings (*kṣatriya*), farmers and merchants (*vaiśya*), and workers and servants (*śūdra*).
- ⁶⁸ As confirmed in SF 16, *vaitulya* is the Sanskrit word rendered by Dharmakṣema in the MPNS as *fang deng* 方等, which is translated here as “well-balanced.” The term is code for the Mahāyāna sutras and teachings as distinguished from what this sutra regards as pre-Mahāyāna. This is actually the second appearance of the term but when it was used earlier (p. 76) that context did not include specific reference to the Mahāyāna, although the knowledgeable reader would have inferred it. This note is here because this passage clearly names the *vaitulya* scriptures as Mahāyāna for the first time in this sutra and does so in a way that implies that the word *vaitulya* also represents a new and expanded conception of the Buddhist canon as somehow more complete. This is made more explicit below where the word *vaitulya* alone is used to identify sutras as Mahāyāna in nature.
- ⁶⁹ This verse is from *Dhammapada* 92 and *Udānavarga* 725. “Full knowledge of food” (*parijñātabhojana*) refers to the ideal of repugnance toward food in the mind of an

arhat, traditionally understood as threefold in nature. According to the *Dhammapada athakathā*, these are knowing exactly what one is eating (*ñāta-pariññā*), knowing that food is repulsive (*tīrana-pariññā*), and taking no pleasure in eating (*pahāna-pariññā*).

- ⁷⁰ If the message in this passage is a bit unclear, it is because the Buddha is taking a different tack toward his śrāvaka disciples than he usually does in this sutra. Elsewhere in the *Nirvana Sutra* the Buddha complains that some of the taboo things listed here are in fact kept by some sanghas, so here he is speaking of the śrāvakas positively in terms of both their proximity to him and his ideal for them. Nonetheless, the last comment is the Buddha's recognition that many of them have indeed succeeded in leaving their worldly values behind, but they have yet to arrive at the truth as embodied in this sutra.
- ⁷¹ Here the sutra draws an important distinction between *parinirvāṇa* and *mahāparinirvāṇa* in the context of the Buddha's passing away. It would appear that his *parinirvāṇa* refers to the famous scene of his death, in which he is shown lying on his right side between sal trees; that is, the death of Siddhārtha Gautama as a buddha in a transformation body (*nirmāṇakāya*). In contrast, *mahāparinirvāṇa* refers to the continual, unchanging existence of the Buddha as a dharma body (*dharmakāya*). Key to this passage is that both bodies are present simultaneously; thus the meaning of the death of the body is to be understood as occurring within the context of the much larger picture of the dharma-body Buddha in which there is neither birth nor death.
- ⁷² Skt. *aṣṭa-mahāpuruṣa-vitarka*; P. *aṭṭhamahāpurisa-vitakka*. This doctrine is derived from the *Anuruddhamahāvītakka-sutta* in *Aṅguttara-nikāya* 8:30, where the Buddha praises Anuruddha for displaying a list of eight attitudes or mental observances that are typical of a "great person" in the sense of a committed spiritual adept. The list thus represents mental guidelines for all followers of Śākyamuni: 1) desiring little (Skt. *alpeccha*; P. *appiccha*), 2) feeling content (*saṃtuṣṭa*; *santuṭṭha*), 3) seeking solitude or seclusion (*pravivikta*; *pavivitta*), 4) acquiring heroic zeal (*vīrya-ārabdha*; *āradha-viriya*), 5) maintaining mindfulness (*upasthita*; *upaṭṭhitassati*), 6) practicing meditative concentration (*samāhita*), 7) having wisdom (*prajñā*; *paññā*), and 8) being free of false or contentious speech (*niṣprapañca*; *nippapañca*). Note that this last item, *niṣprapañca*, is somewhat unclear as it is used for a wide array of ideal mental states, such as thinking without conceptualization, without objectification, and so forth.
- ⁷³ This is the first of eighty-eight descriptions of the nature of liberation, probably translating *mokṣa*, *vimokṣa*, *vimuktī*, or something similar. Many of these statements include figurative expressions. Some are *disanologies* in that they offer analogical examples that do share something with the initial statement but in the end are false, and thereby serve to clarify what the descriptive language should not be inferred to mean.
- ⁷⁴ This refers to the heaven reached in deep meditation or *dhyāna* called *naiva saṃjñā na asaṃjñā āyatana*. Behind this discussion is the tradition that there are two versions of this realm, one experienced in the so-called "realm of form" without desire (*rūpadhātu*), and one in the "formless realm" without either form or desire (*ārūpyadhātu*).

The two heavens thus reflect different levels of attainment, but what is surprising about this passage is the fact that the nirvāṇa reached from the higher attainment in the formless realm is what is taught to the Hīnayāna disciples, but the lower attainment of the realm of form is what is described here as the nirvāṇa for buddhas. This appears to be the sutra's attempt to overturn conventional Mahāyāna wisdom up to that point by asserting the primacy of form or nonemptiness (*aśūnya*) over nonform or emptiness (*śūnya*).

- ⁷⁵ The phrase “four hundred and four illnesses of the body” seems to be a metaphor for all the known illnesses a person could possibly have, calculated on the basis of there being one hundred and one different ills that can potentially arise from each of the four basic elements (earth, water, air, and fire) that make up the physical body, when they lose their natural balance working together, and increase or decrease disproportionately. This is an ancient notion found in the Āgamas. See Nakamura, 529b.
- ⁷⁶ The *vārṣika* (*Jasminum sambac*) is a beautiful flower that blooms during the monsoon season and summer, white in color and sweetly fragrant. Called Arabian jasmine in English, it is a national flower in Indonesia and the Philippines, and used in making jasmine tea. It is also known for its medicinal qualities.
- ⁷⁷ *Khadira* is a kind of acacia, identified as *Acacia catechu*, a hardwood tree whose resin has medicinal qualities. *Candana* is the sandalwood tree, *santalum album*, still used for making perfume and incense. *Aguru*, or *agaru*, is a form of aloe tree also called *tagara* and identified as *Aquilaria agallocha*; *aguru* was known for its fragrance and medicinal qualities.
- ⁷⁸ *Āmalaka*, which Monier-Williams identifies as *Emblis myrobalan*. Probably the same fruit called *amla* today, it yields an oil that is used in Ayurvedic medicine to treat intestinal disorders and as a cosmetic. It resembles a gooseberry in appearance and grows on trees throughout South Asia.
- ⁷⁹ *Harītakī* is Yellow Myrobalan, from the myrobalan tree, which was used as a purgative.
- ⁸⁰ Together with the previous entry, these two descriptions present two different sides of lust or desire, one negative and one positive. Thus desire or yearning for the dharma is explained here as a positive manifestation of empathy for other living creatures. The goal is therefore not the suppression of desire but rechanneling it toward a higher purpose.
- ⁸¹ The *Atharvaveda* mentions four poisonous snakes: *asita* (black), *tirashiraji* (cross-lined), *svaja* (a kind of viper), and *babhru* (dark-brown or reddish-brown). This seems to correspond to the more common list of the four most dreaded poisonous snakes in India: cobra (Skt. *kālasarpa*; Latin *Elapidae naja* or *Naja naja*), krait (*kālaka*; *Bungarus caeruleus*), Russell's viper (*Daboia russelii*), and saw-scaled viper (*bhujyu* or *prḍāku*; *Echis carinatus*). This allusion is probably meant as a metaphor for the “three poisons” (mentioned in the previous line) of craving, anger, and delusion, to which is added the defilement of arrogance. Another possible gloss is the four elements of the physical body (*mahābhūta*).

- ⁸² Here buddha-nature, *fo xing* 佛性, corresponds to the Tib. *sangs rgyas kyi khams*, or *buddha-dhātu*, suggesting both a relic of a buddha and a realm where a buddha resides.
- ⁸³ In other words, rather than it being simply a self-improvement methodology, people are expected to turn to Buddhism for help with serious problems in their lives; or, put another way, from a perspicacious insight into *duḥkha*. It is uncertain what the reference to the evil hunters suggests beyond this being a predatory symbol from the simile about deer. On the four māras, see note 28.
- ⁸⁴ This is probably the same bird that appears on p. 19, however the orthography differs: *qipoqipo niao* 耆婆耆婆鳥 in the earlier instance and *mingming niao* 命命鳥 here. Also written *jīvajīva*, *jīvajīvaka*, etc., the mythical form of this bird has two heads, and in one *avadāna* story they represented a feuding Śākyamuni and Devadatta. See Changhwan Park, “The Sautrāntika Theory of Seeds Revisited,” Ph.D. dissertation, (Berkeley: University of California, 2007), p. 209, n. 505.
- ⁸⁵ The number eight here signals the eighth stage for a śrāvaka, but this is generally also interpreted to be the equivalent of either the third of the ten bodhisattva stages (in the *daśabhūmi* scheme), or the fifteenth of the *darśana-mārga* (“path of seeing”) stages.
- ⁸⁶ I interpret this to indicate positions in the *daśabhūmi* scheme. According to the *Dazhidu lun*, the fourth *bhūmi* corresponds to the completion of the *srotāpanna* level, and for bodhisattvas this stage is designated as nonretrogressive; the fifth *bhūmi* is defined as the completion of the *sakṛdāgāmin* (once-returner) stage.
- ⁸⁷ *Ju shi luo jing* 瞿師羅經. This sutra appears to be lost, and the name may be either Ghoṣila or Ghoṣita. In Pāli we have two similar names, written Ghosaka and Ghosita; Ghosaka is the name of a *deva*, and Ghosita appears in the name Ghositasetṭhi, a wealthy merchant who donates a park in Kosambī with residences for the Buddha and his disciples, in Sanskrit called Ghoṣitārāma (“Goṣita’s grove”), in Pāli Ghositārāma. While there is text called the *Ghosita-sutta* in the Pāli canon (*Samyutta* IV.129; PTS IV.71), it is concerned with diversity in the physical world and shows no trace of the passage quoted here. Moreover, the use of the character *luo* 羅 in transliterations generally represents an “l” or “r” sound, and the personal name Ghoṣila appears in the *Divyāvadāna*, so although there is no *Ghoṣila-sūtra* in the Āgamas extant in Chinese, it appears likely that Ghoṣila and Ghoṣita were two different people.
- ⁸⁸ The *garuḍa*, though best known as the mount for Viṣṇu, also has a dangerous aspect to his mythical profile. Derived from the verb “*gr*,” meaning “to devour,” the *garuḍa* was “originally identified with the all-consuming fire of the sun’s rays” but is also known as an “enemy of the serpent race” (Monier-Williams, 348). Interestingly, the secondary form *gāruḍa* is an antidote against poison.
- ⁸⁹ This is the first usage of a word containing the character *bai* 稗, which is used in the *Nirvana Sutra* to indicate either an edible grain or a noxious weed. The usage here represents the former, where *bai zi* 稗子 represents millet. Specifically this is kodo

millet (L. *Paspalum scrobiculatum*, Skt. **kodrava*), a kind of poor man's grain still grown in the Deccan plateau. Elsewhere, in compounds such as *ti bai* 梯稗 and *bai hui* 稗穢, I take *bai* to be "barnyard grass" (L. *Echinochloa crus-galli*, Skt. **varuka*), as it represents a weed injurious to crops. Note that *ti bai* also occurs in the *Zhuangzi*, ch. 22, as an example of something worthless that the Dao nevertheless inhabits; James Legge (1891) rendered it "panic grass."

- ⁹⁰ SF 16 here has various iterations of this formula, but the basic form is *na punar arthaṃ sampūrṇaṃ vijñāsyanti*, "however their understanding of its meaning will not be complete."
- ⁹¹ Originally *caṇḍālas* were defined as the offspring of mixed-caste couples (traditionally defined as between a *brahman* woman and a *śūdra* man), but it then developed into a kind of taboo caste of its own. Many ended up as slaves or in polluting occupations in cemeteries or animal slaughter. Buddhism had a spotty record on accepting them, and the MPNS is similarly ambivalent: there are allusions to excluding them from ordination as well as to their potential for buddhahood.
- ⁹² The capping ceremony was a public ritual in China that marked the transition from adolescence to adulthood for twenty-year-old men.
- ⁹³ Here the word "dharma" refers to the social obligations of his family and clan, alluding to rules of propriety that prevented the other *brahmins* from recognizing a *caṇḍāla* as king.
- ⁹⁴ The four necessities are four standard items that are supposed to be included in formal offerings to monks: clothing, food and drink, bedding, and medicines.
- ⁹⁵ This mention of the eight impure things monastics are not supposed to possess or store at their residences is one of the more famous lines in the *Nirvana Sutra*, but the sutra itself never delineates what they are. Chinese commentaries on the sutra have ferreted out their own lists, three of which are given by Mochizuki, at 10.815. Two lists commonly cited are: gold, silver, male and female slaves, cattle, stores, and farmed crops; and cultivated lands, personally farmed crops, stores of grain or cloth, servants, animals or birds, money or jewels, cushions or pans, and furniture decorated with ivory or gold.
- ⁹⁶ See note 15.
- ⁹⁷ The word *kālaka* means "black" or "dark blue" and is used to name a wide variety of phenomena, including a snake that appears in this sutra. Monier-Williams (277) gives different usages of the term for plant matter, but probably most relevant here is some kind of *Terminalia* tree. The *tinduka* is either a *Diospyros embryopteris* or *Diospyros peregrina* Gürke, a kind of persimmon or mangosteen tree that grows up to fifteen meters in height.
- ⁹⁸ The different paths pursued by different kinds of Buddhists are figuratively labeled "vehicles" (Skt. *yāna*), as in the term Mahāyāna ("Great Vehicle"), because they are

the conveyance that brings a person to liberation or awakening. As in the *Lotus Sutra*, the major contrast here is between the *śrāvakayāna*, representing the Buddhist communities that do not recognize the Mahāyāna sutras, and the *bodhisattvayāna*, which do. In addition, in this section the discussion of which sutras are “definitive” alludes to a paradigm called *nītārtha/neyārtha* in Sanskrit. This distinction is used variously within the canon and in the commentarial traditions of each Buddhist culture as a hermeneutic to establish authority among conflicting doctrines, scriptures, and interpretations, expressing the notion that the *neyārtha* teachings are not fully expressed or revealed and are therefore preliminary, incomplete, or require additional explanation.

⁹⁹ See note 28 for the usual usage of the term “four māras.” The term is clearly not being used in the way it has appeared thus far in the text, but the precise usage here is not well explained. Huiyūan (T.37:687a2–11) suggests we take the text literally, designating a māra who preaches a false set of sutras, one who accepts those sutras, one who preaches a false set of vinayas, and one who accepts those teachings. But I rather think the key to understanding this is the narrative flow from the previous fascicle. I believe the text assumes that readers still have in mind the previous discussion of the four types of Buddhist believers (monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen) who uphold, protect, and promote the religion, and thus the four māras here refers to those who adopt the guise of the same four “heroic” supporters of the religion but whose real intention is to weaken it.

¹⁰⁰ Sanskrit reconstruction tentative, but if correct, *Nālījaṅgha is mentioned in the *Piṅgajātika-sutta* as a brahman sent by Mallikā to the Buddha to confirm the Buddha’s statement that loved ones bring sorrow and tribulation. See *Majjhima-nikāya* 87, at M.II.108. Other possible reconstructions are Nalakuvāla, Nālīkīra, Nālīkera, or Narada.

¹⁰¹ The name Gu di de 羆羆德 is highly enigmatic, with some modern scholars taking it to be a phonetic transcription, others a translation. It could be a sobriquet for the previously mentioned Nālījaṅgha, for example. I read it as a translation because phonetic renderings usually use well-known characters but the first two here are extremely rare; this is supported by the Tibetan reading *lug dpal*, which mirrors the Chinese exactly if *gu di* is read as “sheep.” If read phonetically, this name might represent something like Ghāṅṅika, Ghatikāra, or perhaps Ghosita or Kotira.

¹⁰² Skanda is a relatively new deity in India, alternatively described as the son of Agni and Śiva. He is often depicted with six heads on one neck, wearing red garments and riding a peacock. Skanda is a powerful war god, leading armies, whose spear always hits its mark and then returns to him miraculously. Kātyāyana is alternatively called Mahākātyāyana in SF 17. He is known as a great sage who also has a female form called Kātyāyanī (or Kātyāyinī), better known as Durgā. The defining myth of Kātyāyana reenacted in rituals begins with his disciple, Maḥiṣāsura, who himself takes a female form to disturb a fellow disciple’s practice, causing Kātyāyana to curse him, promising his future destruction by a woman. Later Maḥiṣāsura grows in power and causes havoc among the gods, whereupon a ten-handed Kātyāyanī dramatically appears riding a lion to fight and kill the demon Maḥiṣāsura.

- ¹⁰³ This line alludes to an anti-Buddhist polemic derivation of the epithet *tathāgata* probably as *tatha + agata* rather than the standard *tatha + āgata*, such that *agata* functions as a negation of the root *gam* and thus means “unable” or “unsuccessful.”
- ¹⁰⁴ The *sthūlātyaya* is the second most serious group of precept violations after the *pārājika* offenses. Generally these are “attempted offenses,” in the sense that they are planned and instigated but never completed. *Stūla* means “rough” or “crude.” *Sthūlātyaya* may be serious offenses like necrophilia, or minor infractions like petty theft. The Sarvāstivādin vinaya lists four types of *sthūlātyaya* offenses.
- ¹⁰⁵ The concept of nine sections or divisions of the canon is a code word for the Hīnayāna canon. The full Mahāyāna canon was usually conceived of as containing twelve parts, but here the contrast is between the numbers nine and ten, with the single difference being the well-balanced (Mahāyāna) sutras.
- ¹⁰⁶ The point here is that the former individual is not motivated by any insight into the truth of the Mahāyāna teachings but views them merely in an instrumental way, that is, as an effective mechanism to gain the glories of liberation. His statement of acceptance is narcissistic and does not express the Mahāyāna value of deliverance for all living beings.
- ¹⁰⁷ The allusion here is to the fact that when the top of a *tāla* tree is cut off it does not grow back, a metaphorical reference to irreparably cutting one’s ties with the sangha.
- ¹⁰⁸ This is probably the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*, Taishō nos. 666 and 667, perhaps the earliest known sutra professing the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine; or it may be Taishō no. 821, whose title has been reconstructed as *Tathāgatagarbha-guhyakośa-sūtra*. Although the title of the latter text looks closer to the one given here, the passage quoted is not found within it, and in fact Taishō no. 821 does not mention buddha-nature or residing among buddhas, as is stated here, and contains very little that suggests *tathāgatagarbha* doctrines.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Duṣkṛta* offenses are the lightest of all infractions; essentially misdemeanors, they are reparable by confession to another monk. The allusion to how time is felt in the heavens denotes a temporal slowing down, and thus a longer period of punishment.
- ¹¹⁰ In other words, the entire system of moral responsibility that is the basis of karma is threatened if people feel they need not fear retribution. The system of teaching and enforcing the precepts, therefore, including penalties for violations, represents a commitment to the proper operation of a sangha.
- ¹¹¹ The narrative here suggests 1) that sexual or gender insecurity in an individual may explain why a person acts with exaggerated self-interest, and 2) that if someone has a bisexual identity and acts upon those feelings with partners of both sexes, then the rule in effect is that they are to be excluded from both joining the sangha or even being accepted as a member of the Buddhist lay community.
- ¹¹² Monier-Williams gives *rañku* as a species of deer or antelope, and the term *mahārāñkava* appears to indicate garments made from the wool of this animal. This

is glossed as *da jia yi* 大價衣 in the *Yiqie jing yinyi* (Taisho 54.469b29), suggesting they were very expensive. It is forbidden in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya for renunciants to wear clothing made of this material.

- ¹¹³ This section on the four inversions or misperceptions of truth (*viparyāsa*, *viparīta*, *viparyasta*) is one of the most prominent discussions of the MPNS. Luis Gómez (unpublished paper) translates this notion as a “backward way of understanding.” The Faxian translation treats it as a separate chapter, and the Southern Edition of this translation does the same.
- ¹¹⁴ The personalist viewpoint was considered heretical within the Buddhist community, for there was one lineage of interpretation that advocated a notion of self called *pudgala*, meant to render something like “person,” as opposed to the taboo notion of “self” as in the term *ātman*. These people were known as *pudgalavādins*. In Chinese, however, both *pudgala* and *ātman* are both generally translated as *wo* 我, a first-person pronoun, so this line is somewhat ambiguous.
- ¹¹⁵ This begins a series of five parables given to explain the relationship between buddha-nature as one’s true (but difficult to perceive) self, and the earlier teaching of nonself. In the Faxian translation and the southern edition of this translation, it constitutes a separate chapter. I have added the numbering of each parable.
- ¹¹⁶ This is a list of the differing caste statuses of beings based on past karma—warriors (*kṣatriya*), priests (*brahman*), craftsmen (*vaiśya*), workers (*śūdra*), mixed caste (*caṇḍāla*), and animals.
- ¹¹⁷ The question pertains to a certain anxiety that accompanies acceptance of the doctrine of karma, which in fact had a profound affect on developments in Buddhism, and is particularly evident in Mahāyāna thought. To wit, though one may know that he or she has karmic information from the past stored within themselves that has not yet manifested, one does not know what that karmic fruit will be. Even more troubling is the pressure this principle places on one’s decisions now because he or she cannot be certain how current actions will bear fruit in the future.
- ¹¹⁸ That is, how is it that the three refuges as external expressions of the Buddhist truth in society and the buddha-nature within oneself all represent or contain the same essence?
- ¹¹⁹ Skt. **uccheda-dṛṣṭi*, literally, “annihilationist perspective.” Also referred to as the nihilist position, though without the existentialist overtones, this represents the idea that karma is meaningless and that there is no moral consequence for one’s actions.
- ¹²⁰ Skt. **śāśvatā-dṛṣṭi*, literally, “eternalist perspective.” This is the opposite of the annihilationist position, i.e., the claim that all existence is permanent.
- ¹²¹ The two extremes here refer to being and nonbeing, permanence and impermanence, suffering and bliss, even self and nonself, and so forth.

- ¹²² In the Faxian version (885c21) the same metaphor refers to ordinary people who cannot follow what the Buddha is explaining, and in Faxian's rendering the weakened person takes the medicine too quickly and becomes disoriented, i.e., his condition worsens.
- ¹²³ This line begins a long section of parallel constructions in which a series of standard doctrines are expressed without naming the speaker, the purpose of which is to communicate how these doctrines should be interpreted from a Mahāyāna perspective. Although there is no speaking subject given, the doctrines themselves are found in the sutras, and the Faxian translation names the speaker as the Buddha by using the first person pronoun "I," so the translation here reflects that perspective.
- ¹²⁴ *Yiqie gongde chengjiu jing* 一切功德成就經. Unclear referent, but appears to be self-referential praise for the current discourse, i.e., the MPNS. The Faxian translation gives a similar but not identical title, *Yiqie gongde jiju jing* 一切功德積聚經 (*Sutra that Accumulates All Merit*) but makes no specific allusion to the sermon in progress, however. Neither text is mentioned again in the respective translations of the MPNS, nor indeed anywhere else in the Chinese canon.
- ¹²⁵ This reflects an Abhidharma argument about identity that questions the presumption of a certain degree of similarity in something that exists unchanging over "a continuity of time" (**saṃtāna*, *saṃtati*, *samāna-pravāha*). In other words, coming into being is either a momentary event or, if not, then the identity of something has always been there, an "intrinsic nature" (*svabhāva*) inherently existing in its "continuity of time."
- ¹²⁶ The idea conveyed here is that there is an essential flavor component in milk that continues to appear in all products made from milk and that thereby characterizes them as dairy products, i.e., products of milk.
- ¹²⁷ *Pinus longifolia*. *Snigdha* means viscous, but this may be the red castor-oil plant, also called *maricapattraka*, *pīḍa*, *manojña*, *sarala*, and so forth. It grows at elevations of fifteen hundred to seventy-five hundred feet in the Himalayan range. See Waku #245, pp. 66–67.
- ¹²⁸ In other words, while it cannot be ascertained decisively that whatever it is that is the root cause of milk curds is present in the milk *before* it is processed to make curds, the fact that curds arise from milk and only from milk, together with the fact that as a common, daily occurrence the making of curds from milk is not merely a random occurrence, means that there must be some causality involved even if it cannot be fully clarified. If obtaining curds from milk occurred only randomly, then a number of other random possibilities would have to be considered that either never occur (like rabbit horns arising from milk) or only occur in the rare instance that something is deliberately created for that purpose (like milk being poisoned). This argument alludes to *satkāryavāda*, the doctrine of the effect preexisting in the cause, associated in Buddhist writing with the Sāṃkhya school, a rival heterodox religious philosophy in India.
- ¹²⁹ In other words, when raised in a particular way, any cow will produce exceedingly excellent milk; it is not that one cow is inherently superior or inferior to another.

- ¹³⁰ I have corrected a scribal or translator error here, where “prince” was given instead of “king.”
- ¹³¹ This section or chapter break does not appear in the Dharmakṣema original translation, or northern edition, but due to the unique nature of the discussion that begins here and the fact that it does not fit well into the flow of the sutra’s narration, the traditional reading of the sutra in East Asia has always added a sectional division here, and I have done so as well. Moreover, it was marked as a separate chapter in Faxian (no. 14) and in the southern edition (no. 13), where it was called *Wenzi pin* 文字品, “Chapter on the Letters/Written Characters.” I have avoided using this section title so as not to violate Dharmakṣema’s original chapter structure. Instead I have used a translation of the Sanskrit term for this kind of presentation, that is, a *varṇamālā*, or “garland of letters.” Note, too, that the sounds listed here reflect the arrangement used by the Brahmī script, best known in East Asian by the orthographic form called Siddham. The following discussion presents religious significance to the letters and syllables and parts of syllables in the Sanskrit language. Most of these meanings are constructed from phonetic symmetry between the phonetic topic and glosses in Sanskrit or Prakrit, and the Chinese translation team working with Dharmakṣema made no attempt to duplicate this effect among the Chinese words selected to represent them. Since this entire section is intelligible only in terms of Sanskrit phonemes and morphemes, to the degree possible, speculated Sanskrit reconstructions from the Chinese for these words and letters are given.
- ¹³² The form *ñāna* is a Middle Indic variation of *jñāna*.
- ¹³³ The reference to the shape of the letter alludes to the half-circle that forms the letter *ṭa* in the Brahmī script, including the Siddham form.
- ¹³⁴ Like the example above, the shape of the letter alludes to the full circle that forms the letter *ṭha* in the Brahmī script, including Siddham.
- ¹³⁵ *Anāriya* is a constructed Prakrit form of *anārya*.
- ¹³⁶ Probably this is also a reference to the Brahmī syllable *tha*, which generally takes the form of an oval with a dot inside, reminiscent of silkworm inside a cocoon.
- ¹³⁷ The three darts or arrows is a metaphor for the three implacable *kleśas* (defilements) that are also referred to as the three poisons, three errors, and so forth: greed or desire, anger or enmity, and delusion or ignorance.
- ¹³⁸ The order of these three items has been changed based on T.414a26n7, following the Song, Yuan, and Ming editions.
- ¹³⁹ The heaven of nonideation refers to one of the blissful states of trance so serene they were known as meditation heavens. In this one, the normal operations of consciousness cease.
- ¹⁴⁰ This is the highest stage one can reach before attaining nirvāṇa, that is, the fourth meditation heaven of the formless realm.

- ¹⁴¹ This is an allusion to chapter 11 of the *Lotus Sutra*, “The Apparition of the Jeweled Stupa,” in which a stupa miraculously rises from the earth and stands there in the sky (Skt. *vaiḥāyasam antarīkṣhe*). Notice how the rhetoric plays with the tension between mythic sutra knowledge and practical experience. The last phrase in which the nature of the sky or air is described as offering no support is based on reading *wu zhu* 無住 as *nirāśraya* rather than the more common *apraṭiṣṭha/apraṭiṣṭhita* because the subject here is the place where abiding or residing may or may not occur, rather than the non-abiding nature of the subject itself.
- ¹⁴² That is, like the sky, the nature of a buddha extends forever.
- ¹⁴³ This is based on the Indian myth of eclipses as caused by Rāhu as “the seizer” who grabs the sun and moon and yanks them off course. The traditional cause of eclipses in China was based on an entirely different myth, in which one of the heavenly orbs is debilitated as the result of being eaten by insects.
- ¹⁴⁴ That is, although it varies from heaven to heaven, even in the lowest heaven one day lasts for fifty human years. As part of saṃsāra, the life span of everyone thus reborn as a “god” (*deva*) in a heaven is finite, yet they are always much longer than the human experience, lasting anywhere from nine million human years to eighty-four thousand eons (*kalpas*).
- ¹⁴⁵ That is, the four types of followers of the Buddhist path: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.
- ¹⁴⁶ Skt. **maṇi-ratna*. A miraculous gemstone that is often depicted in religious art, the *maṇi* jewel has the power to grant wishes. One of its qualities is that it turns muddy water clear.
- ¹⁴⁷ The meaning or purpose of this analogy appears to be that the tree’s largesse is not discriminatory. In the same way, the listener is encouraged to take whatever is needed from listening to this *Nirvana Sutra*.
- ¹⁴⁸ The logic of this passage is difficult to follow because Dharmakṣema’s translation is missing a crucial line from the initial description of the medicine, which is a caveat to its magical ability to cure all illnesses. Thus it cannot help those for whom death is already determined because of the nature of the illness with which they are afflicted, translated in Tibetan as an incurable disease (*gsor mi rung ba nad*). The line does appear in the Faxian translation (892a25), however, and with it the analogy to the sutra’s universality that still has limitations in the case of the *icchantikas* is much clearer. This is one of the most serious indictments against *icchantikas*, as in this instance they are unable to receive even the blessing bestowed on those who have committed the most serious moral transgressions of patricide, matricide, and so forth.
- ¹⁴⁹ Here we have another example of the MPNS’s use of poison as a metaphor for strong spiritual medicine. That is, the deconstructive nature of the teachings in this sutra is ultimately curative but also pernicious in that it may destabilize the identity of the person who considers them. *Ichchantikas* are impervious to anything so dangerous

because they are careful to keep their distance from anything that threatens their complacency. The name of the medicine is derived from reconstructing the Chinese *du yao* 毒藥 as *Tiaridium indicum* or *Heleotropium indicum*, a poisonous plant used in Ayurvedic medicine. Known in English as “scorpion’s tail,” it has at least twenty names in Sanskrit, though probably *viṣauśadhi* or *kumbha* are more likely here.

¹⁵⁰ Probable equivalents are as follows. Purslane is the equivalent of the modern *ma chi xian* in China; also called pigweed, it is either *Portulaca oleracea* or *Portulaca quadrifida*; since this is a translation rather than a transliteration, the Sanskrit is unclear, but for “purslain” (sic) Monier-Williams gives *ghola*, *maṅṭapa*, *prabālika*, and *śākavīra*. The *śallakī* tree is known as olibanum, or *Boswellia thurifera*. The *karṇikāra* tree is somewhat unclear. Monier-Williams (257) identifies it as either *Pterospermum acerifolium* or *Cathartocarpus fistula*, but Apte (57) recognizes it as *Cassia fistula*. The *karṇikāra* is generally known for its bright yellow flowers with no smell, but they may also have red flowers at times. The *tāla* is a palmyra tree, or *Borassus flabelliformis*.

¹⁵¹ For the *khadira*, see note 77. For the *tinduka*, see note 97.

¹⁵² See note 40.

¹⁵³ There are eight categories of causes of fever (*aṣṭa-jvara*) in the Ayurvedic healing tradition in India, categorized on the basis of their causes: namely, fever caused by wind (*vāta*), by bile (*pitta*), by phlegm (*kapha*), by wind and bile, by bile and phlegm, by an aggregate of wind, bile, and phlegm, and fever resulting from external causes.

¹⁵⁴ See Chapter 13, titled “Fortitude” in the Kumārajīva translation (T9.35c270) of the *Lotus Sutra*, in the Hurvitz translation on p. 202. In the *Lotus Sutra* they are identified not specifically as śrāvakas but as “learners (*śaikṣa*) and those who had nothing more to learn (*āśaikṣa*).” In SF 21, they are called *mahāśrāvakas*.

¹⁵⁵ Note that in this passage the word “body” also implies self or identity, and indeed the Chinese word used here, *shen*, could be read in an entirely nonphysical way. One could thus translate each use of “body” here as “self,” but I have left the literal reading intact because the metaphor of the bamboo tree and water bubbles also suggest physicality. It would seem that a kind of fusion of identity in both a mental and physical sense is going on.

¹⁵⁶ In other words, the imminent death of Śākyamuni is to be understood in the way that a snake sheds its skin. It is thus only the Buddha’s body that is dying, he himself does not pass away. This is an expedient means of transitioning the Buddha into a non-physical presence in the world.

¹⁵⁷ The *āmra* tree is identified as *Mangifera indica* and the *jambu* as *Eugenia jambolana*.

¹⁵⁸ The notion of *mi yu* 密語 (*saṃdhāvacana* in SF 1 and 21), or “recondite language,” designates the fact that sometimes the intended meaning of what the Buddha is saying is not immediately apparent or may appear abstruse. Unlike the later, “esoteric” form

of Buddhism, the true or essential meaning in the MPNS is never intentionally hidden as to make it impossible for noninitiates to understand. Rather, the sutra is referring to the fact that as nonbuddhas, we are often unable to immediately fathom which meaning the Buddha wishes to impart when he uses language that can be interpreted in different ways. Here the key to achieving understanding is explained as grasping the way in which what is expounded is contextualized; thus the emphasis is on *upāya*, or expediency. Faxian (894b1–3) emphasizes the abstruseness of the Buddha far beyond Dharmakṣema here. Whereas Dharmakṣema only mentions the Buddha’s speech as recondite or difficult to fathom, Faxian adds phrases with the same adjective *mi* to describe the Buddha’s body and teachings (though not his mind) as well. In addition, in the phrase *fangbian mi jiao* 方便密教 he clarifies the Buddha’s “recondite teachings” as a form of expediency. Finally, he specifically describes the manner in which the king gives orders to his staff as “secretly coded instructions,” or *yinmi zhi jiao* 隱密之教.

- ¹⁵⁹ Although we do not have any Sanskrit text for this, I am fairly confident that the word in question is *saindhava*, meaning “the Sindhu one,” alluding to the region or province called Sindhu, where the Indus River flows into the sea. The parable exploits the different associations people had to the place and the word *sindhu* itself; *sindhu* is a literary reference to the number four, and thus there is also a play on words here in calling four different things by a secondary formation of the word *sindhu*. In general, *saindhava* refers to various things associated with the Indus River, e.g., water, sea, floods, Varuṇa as the god of the sea, the land around the Indus, the people living on that land, even a serpent demon believed to have lived in the river. Today, Sindh is the name of the province in which the city of Karachi is located in present-day Pakistan.
- ¹⁶⁰ This reading aided by SF 22, transcribed in Matsuda (1988), p. 65, as A-6 (Recto), part 2.
- ¹⁶¹ This may refer to the “minor” and “middle” *parinirvāṇas* just mentioned above or, more likely, the two types of nirvāṇa known as “nirvāṇa with residue” (*sopādhiśeṣa nirvāṇa*)—the attainment of complete enlightenment with a physical body, that is, while still living; and “nirvāṇa without residue” (*nirupādhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*)—the final attainment of nirvāṇa when the physical body is lost, i.e., at death. Note that the Faxian translation here (895b8–11) gives a very different reading, stating that śrāvakas do not attain nirvāṇa at all, only buddhas do, as nirvāṇa is a realm only for buddhas, and “this is why this sutra is called the *Great Nirvana Sutra*,” implying that the MPNS has now clarified this point.
- ¹⁶² That is, because arhats also have buddha-nature, they will eventually become buddhas as well, and therefore they potentially can attain the *mahāparinirvāṇa* state that is exclusive to buddhas.
- ¹⁶³ Although the text does not say so explicitly, in Faxian (895b15), the question pertains not to the general nature of each group but specifically to buddha-nature, which fits the context, though this may have been inferred by Faxian. The answers that follow,

if read in this way, suggest that the metaphor of milk is intended to show that different stages of its processing reflect different degrees of refinement, yet all are nonetheless forms of milk, meaning that people at different spiritual stages experience buddha-nature differently but their buddha-natures all stem from the same source.

¹⁶⁴ From SF 23 we know this is *sukhāvātīloka dhātu*, the buddha land of Amitāyus or Amitābha Buddha.

¹⁶⁵ The work “bushel” translates *hu* 斛, which at this time was equal to ten *dou* 斗, and a *dou* is usually translated as “pint.” So this amounts to eighty pints of rice, a considerable amount, particularly if this refers to a quantity of uncooked, dry rice.

¹⁶⁶ This refers to the *daśabhūmi*, or the final ten stages of attainment for a bodhisattva approaching the final goal of buddhahood. It marks a major achievement in Cunda’s spiritual progress to have reached this first of the ten stages without a regimen of monastic praxis, and the implication of Cunda seeing the miracle of the Buddha manifesting himself in so many forms for what is described as bringing joy to people may be an allusion to Cunda’s achievement, for the first *bhūmi* or stage is similarly characterized as one of joy, or *pramuditā*, usually translated with the same word used here for joy, *huan xi* 歡喜.

¹⁶⁷ The apparent disconnect between the comment on these two verses quoted by Cunda and the verses themselves suggests a textual corruption in the second verse. Cf. the Faxian translation (897a28–29): “In all cases of giving donations, there is no criticizing the donor. But the merit of donating to a precept violator is lesser, and the merit of donating to a precept keeper is greater.” Moreover, in the following discussion here the Buddha alludes to “The precept violators that Cunda asks about,” referencing these same two verses quoted by Cunda but where, in fact, there is no mention of precept violators. There are no alternative forms of this in the other extant recensions of the Dharmakṣema translation.

¹⁶⁸ *Godānīya* is one of many names for the continent west of Mount Sumeru, also called *Aparagodānīya*, *Aparagodāna*, or *Aparagoyāna* in Pāli.

¹⁶⁹ This would appear to be a reference to the sutra, but Faxian (898a8) suggests otherwise in his rendering: “peace and happiness in the nirvāṇa of the powerful,” suggesting his reading of this as a statement about the different natures among the various forms of nirvāṇa. Therefore I have avoided putting any interpretive reading into the translation.

¹⁷⁰ These verses seem to be based on *Udānavarga* 18.9 or *Dhammapada* 50.

¹⁷¹ Although a number of sutras mention ninety-five or ninety-six non-Buddhist paths, none actually name them. What is consistent is the notion of six heretical teachers or founders of those schools of thought, so some have speculated that this is a multiple of the number six, but though this works for the total of ninety-six, it is problematic for ninety-five. It is therefore quite possible that this number is used figuratively only to suggest a large quantity. See Mochizuki, pp. 671–672.

- ¹⁷² Although there are, strictly speaking, twenty-five possible existences where one can be reborn, it was common practice to speak simply of fortunate and unfortunate (translated by some as “evil”) rebirth destinies. While the fortunate category generally includes only two—human and heavenly—even within this sutra the unfortunate category at times designates three, four, or even eight different rebirths. The common denominator of the latter is hells, hungry ghosts, and animals, but at times *asuras*, or even discriminated caste destinies such as *caṇḍāla*, are included. There is also a list of what I have translated as eight “inopportune” rebirths, listed in note 34.
- ¹⁷³ This is the first mention of Ajātaśatru’s crime and the Buddha’s conversations with him. He appears in Fascicle I but only as a participant in the assembly that has gathered for this, the Buddha’s last sermon, and there he is described only as a sitting king. Ajātaśatru will appear numerous times later in the narrative and become one of its central characters.
- ¹⁷⁴ In other words, the simple adage in the verse that dependence brings suffering but independence brings happiness does not always hold true. Some students are hampered by the precedent and authority of their teacher, yet some never succeed even when they throw that off and go their own way.
- ¹⁷⁵ Although I have not added this interpretation to the translation, this passage only becomes understandable if the reader adds that the person who commits the *pārājika* violation is otherwise regarded as a “wise and gracious” monastic. In addition, the passage seems to confuse wisdom and decency with the practice of obeying the precepts; the Sanskrit text may have been corrupted here. In fact, the southern edition and the Faxian translation both offer quite different versions of what is supposed to be going on here: in Faxian (898c29) the offending wise person is unloved by other violators of the rules but there is no talk of being forced out of the sangha; in the southern edition (668c25), the witness to the crime is the one to be driven out. None of these are readily intelligible.
- ¹⁷⁶ This passage can be read in two quite different ways. One is as a statement about the totality of the Buddha’s teachings; that is, as a whole they are enough in and of themselves, but there are other meanings embedded in them that will become apparent only as one’s sensitivity and understanding deepen. Another is as a statement about the need to discriminate different levels of authority in the teachings themselves; that is, some teachings are complete in and of themselves, while others require additional explanation or unpacking to reveal their true import. The latter reading reflects something akin to the hermeneutic of *nīārtha* and *neyārtha*, or “complete” and “incomplete” (i.e., *upāya*), which appears earlier in the discourse but only in reference to categorizing individual sutras rather than doctrines.

Glossary

adventitious defilements (Skt. *āgantukakleśa*): Psychological impediments to awakening that are not deep-seated within the mind but occur as a result of one's thinking being corrupted by external factors.

Ajātaśatru: A powerful king of the state of Magadha during Śākyamuni's lifetime, infamous for murdering his father Biṃbisāra to usurp the throne eight years before Śākyamuni's death, and then proceeding to conquer neighboring kingdoms.

Amitāyus: Also known as Amitābha or Amida Buddha, the focus of the Pure Land form of Buddhism in East Asia.

Ānanda: The cousin of Śākyamuni who served as his attendant; he is the purported author or narrator of most of the sutras because of his continual presence at the Buddha's side and his famed skill in memorization. In the MPNS, however, Ānanda is not present. Like Mahākāśyapa, he is en route to the Buddha's location with a group of his followers.

anuttarā samyaksambodhi: Literally, "unsurpassed perfect awakening/enlightenment," this signifies the completion of the path.

apsaras: Celestial nymphs.

asaṃkhyeya: A unit of measurement that means "incalculable." Also written as *asaṃkhya*.

aśoka flowers (Skt. *aśokappallava*): The red flowers of the *aśoka* tree.

aspiration for awakening. *See bodhicitta*.

asura: Titan kings or a class of occult warriors that convert to Buddhism but still retain a militaristic manner; sometimes recognized as a sixth realm of rebirth in saṃsāra.

Āyurvedic medicine: A general name for the ancient Indian science of medicine and healing.

bāhīka: A type of heron. Appears in SF 2.

bhikṣu: A male Buddhist monastic (monk).

bhikṣuṇī: A female Buddhist monastic (nun).

bhūta: Chthonic deities generally (but not always) of a fearful nature, described variously as ghosts or demons, as flesh-eating, polluting, disease-causing, and so forth. More

commonly found in Jainism than in Buddhism. Hinduism they are attendants of Śiva.

bodhi: Spiritual awakening or liberation; enlightenment.

bodhicitta: The resolution to attain *bodhi*. Because the phonetics of the Sanskrit word are nearly always rendered in transliterated form in this Chinese translation of MPNS, it is often translated here as “*bodhicitta* resolution.” Over time bodhisattvas cultivate and deepen their understanding of the ramifications of their resolution through practice, but the importance of the first occurrence of *bodhicitta* to the individual (*bodhicittotpāda*) is particularly prominent in this sutra. It is treated as a personal commitment to the faith that karmically motivates the believer to pursue practices that not only lead to final liberation on a personal level but also serve to maintain a robust form of the Buddhist faith in society in the future when the disappearance of Śākyamuni from history creates challenges to its very existence (e.g., pp. 176–177).

Brahma Heaven: The heavens in the realm of form (*rūpadhātu*), presided over by the deity Brahmā. *See also* three realms.

cakravartin: An emperor or world king, or a powerful person of monumental historical significance. From a Buddhist perspective a king can be called a *cakravartin* only when he rules according to the principles of the buddha-dharma. The term is also applied to Śākyamuni himself.

created (Skt. *saṃskṛta*): This refers to anything that comes into being by means of cause and effect. Because it has a beginning, it also has an end, so this term always implies impermanence. *See also* uncreated.

dānava: A class of demons often identified with a similar group called *daityas* who function in opposition to the wishes of the gods.

defilement (Skt. *kleśa*, *niṣkleśa*, *saṃkleśa*, etc.): The various kinds of aberrations of thought that produce the habitual mental errors, which in turn are the causes of suffering. Terms such as *fannao* in the Chinese that typically translate a form of *kleśa* are translated here as “the defilements” to indicate this specific meaning. The number of defilements typically total one hundred and eight, though at times the sutras allude metaphorically to thousands or uncountable numbers.

duṣkṛta: Misdemeanors or minor offenses; the lightest category of precept violation in the vinaya. *See also* vinaya.

eight ideal qualities of water (Skt. *aṣṭāṅga upeta ambhas*): The eight qualities found in the ideal form of water—sweet, cool, soft, light, clear, odorless, not harmful to the throat, and not harmful to the stomach.

eighteen distinctive characteristics of a buddha: 1) Unmistaken thought, 2) unmistaken word, 3) unmistaken action, 4) mind of equality toward all beings, 5) stable mind in meditation, 6) all-embracing mind that rejects nothing; the power of not backsliding in terms of 7) aspiration, 8) diligence, 9) mindfulness, 10) concentration and 11) wisdom toward

- the salvation of all beings, 12) the power of not falling back from freedom into bondage, 13) the power of wisdom in thought for the purpose of saving all beings, 14) the power of wisdom in word for the purpose of saving all beings, 15) the power of wisdom in deed for the purpose of saving all beings, 16) complete knowledge of the past, 17) complete knowledge of the present, and 18) complete knowledge of the future.
- four major elements (Skt. *mahābhūta*): Earth, water, fire, and air. These are the physical components of which most forms of existence are made.
- four unfortunate realms: *See* unfortunate realms.
- five moral precepts (Skt. *pañca-śīla*): Abstinence from taking life, taking what is not given, improper sexual activity, prevarication, and ingesting intoxicants.
- four immeasurables (Skt. *catur-apramāṇa*): Friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Also called the *brahmavihāras* (“noble abodes”).
- gandhahastin*: Fragrant elephant kings.
- gandharva*: Demigods that are usually seen in the role of celestial musicians but who also play a role in the fertilization of embryos.
- garuḍa*: Mythical birds with a long history in Indian mythology, associated with the Hindu deity Viṣṇu.
- great trichiliocosm (Skt. *trisaḥsra-mahāsāhasra-lokadhātu*): Literally, one billion worlds, this is a metaphor for all possible worlds in the realms of desire and form that constitute the domain of the Buddha. This amount is arrived at by presuming one thousand worlds in one system, multiplying that world-system by another thousand, and then by another thousand again.
- guardian deities of the four directions (Skt. *lokapāla*, *caturmahārāja*): Ancient deities in Indian mythology that were converted by the Buddha and thereafter served as protectors of the Buddhist religion.
- half-syllable, half-character (Ch. *banzi* 半字): A figurative expression for an introductory or incomplete level of expression.
- icchantika*: A rubric for living beings who reject the basic tenets of the Mahāyāna canon and specifically the MPNS. Until they reform their thinking, they are perceived to have no chance of gaining liberation.
- inversions (Skt. *viparyāsa*): Erroneous thinking that is the reverse of what is true. In the MPNS this dictum is famously applied in four ways pertaining to the qualities associated with the buddha-nature or *tathāgatagarbha*: permanence, bliss, self, and purity. But mistaken opinions, reflections, and so forth may also be called inversions.
- jīvaṃjīvaka*: A pheasant or partridge, often depicted as having two heads. Also written variously as *jīvajīva*, *jīvaṃjīva*, *jīvajīvaka*, *jīvakajīvaka*, etc.
- kādam̐ba*: A dark grey goose.

Glossary

kakkolaka flowers: Aromatic flowers, probably identical to those of the *kakkola* plant.

kalaviṅka: A Himalayan weaver or finch famous for its beautiful song. In cave paintings at Dunhuang and in Pure Land mandalas, the *kalaviṅka* is often depicted as having the body of a bird with a human head.

karman: 1) action or behavior; 2) a monastic ordination ceremony; 3) punishment for violating a monastic precept.

kālaka: A tree known for its poisonous fruit. *Valeriana-jatamansi*.

kāraṇḍava: A type of duck.

kiṃnara: A celestial chorister or musician.

kleśa. See defilement.

kovidāra: A type of bauhinia tree called mountain ebony and also referred to in Sanskrit as *kāñcanāra*. Identified as either *Bauhinia variegata* or *Bauhinia purpurea*, *kovidāra* populate the heavenly realm of Śakra.

Lake Anavatapta: A mythical lake located north of the Himalayas described by Xuanzang as eight hundred *li* in circumference; said to be the source of the Ganges, Indus, Oxus, and Sītā rivers.

Licchavis: A regal and powerful *kṣatriya*-dominated clan in India at the time of the Buddha whose capital was the city of Vaiśālī, the site of the Second Buddhist Council, held approximately one hundred years after Śākyamuni's death. In early Buddhist literature the Licchavis are depicted having a republican government and as devout followers of the Buddha; they are selected to receive a portion of his relics following his cremation. But in other literature they are described as following other teachings. Part of the Vṛjji confederacy, they were attacked and defeated by Ajātaśatru and had their lands confiscated.

Mahākāśyapa: The Buddha's most senior disciple. Consistent with the original MPNS, he is not present at the final sermon that precedes the Buddha's disappearance.

mahoraga: Literally "great serpent," this is one of the eight types of dangerous celestial beings who have been converted by the Buddha and now function to protect his dharma.

Mallas: A clan affiliated with the Licchavis in the Vṛjji confederacy, also thought to have had a republican government. Located northwest of Magadha, one of the Malla capitals was Kuśinagara, where this sutra takes place.

mandārava: A kind of celestial flower, identified by Monier-Williams as a "coral tree." Also "large" or "great" *mandārava* (*mahāmandārava*).

mañjūśaka: Like the *mandārava*, a celestial flower existing in normal and large (*mahā*) sizes.

Mañjuśrī: A bodhisattva of advanced wisdom who often speaks for the Buddha.

manojñā: Flowers of the senna plant, a type of jasmine.

Māra Pāpīyas: This demonic figure is typically depicted in Buddhist literature as an enemy of the Buddha who represents an opposing set of values, such as indulgence in desire or violence in the service of personal ambition. He famously appears right before the Buddha is about to attain complete awakening in an attempt to dissuade him from completing the path. In this sutra there is a decided ambivalence toward him. In the opening section, he is described as a kind of enforcer god of hell who, when faced with the Buddha's imminent disappearance, responds with compassion and effort directed to helping the beings in the hells gain liberation. But elsewhere the name Māra is used in a thoroughly pejorative manner, reflecting its usual role in the tradition. Note how the term "four māras" is used both in its usual doctrinal sense (pp. 34, 161; n. 23) and also metaphorically in a nonstandard way in fascicle seven (p. 201) to critique Buddhists who have been misled by illegitimate sutras and vinayas created by a multitude of māras.

Mount Sumeru: a mythical mountain considered the tallest on earth, located at the center of the land mass where human civilizations dwell, on each side of which are the four major continents. Used metaphorically in the MPNS for a variety of superlative concepts, such as the Buddha, liberation, or the Three Jewels.

nāga: A snake or serpent. Capitalized, the term refers to an ethnic group in India that supported the Buddhist community.

ninefold canon: The Buddhist canon or tripiṭaka was conceived of in various ways, but this notion of the Buddha's teachings being divided into nine divisions or parts (**nava-aṅga-śāsana*) is one of the oldest, and is typically contrasted in the Chinese canon with the twelvefold canon. More commonly encountered in Pāli, the nine divisions in Sanskrit and some common Chinese representations are *sūtra* 契經, *geya* 祇夜, *vyākaraṇa* 授記, *gāthā* 伽陀, *udāna* 優陀那, *itivṛtaka* 如是語, *jātaka* 本生, *vaidalya* 方廣, and *adbhūtaadharmā* 未曾有法. In this sutra, "ninefold canon" is used consistently as an allusion to the totality of the Buddha's teachings as understood by the śrāvakas, and defined as incomplete because it does not include the doctrine of *tathāgatabarbhā*. However, the *Lotus Sutra* mentions only nine divisions and there are non-Mahāyāna texts that speak of a twelvefold canon, so this division does not form a consistent dividing line between pre-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism. (See K. R. Norman, *A Philological Approach to Buddhism*, p. 112.) See also twelvefold canon.

Nirgrantha: A member of the Jain ascetic community, followers of the Mahāvīra Nirgrantha Jñātiputra, one of many competing religious orders that Śākyamuni found heretical. Also referred to as naked ascetics, they competed with the Buddhist *bhikṣus* for the donations of the lay populace and the support of kings. In the MPNS they are included in a formulaic list of the followers of six heretical teachers; the Nirgranthas

are also singled out when the need arises to clarify similar but incorrect views of emptiness, the monastic precepts, and other problematic topics.

pārājika: The most serious class of offenses in the monastic precepts, requiring adjudication. Usually results in some form of suspension or exile from a sangha community for a period of time. There were originally four of these major transgressions: sexual activity, stealing, murder or contributing to the destruction of human life, and overstating one's religious achievements. But the list grew significantly over time. In the *Nirvana Sutra*, most discussions of *pārājika* point to the original four serious crimes, but there are varying interpretations and other violations are discussed under this rubric in fascicle 7. For example, any misrepresentation of the teachings, such as denying the presence of the buddha-nature or preaching a false interpretation of it, is declared to be a *pārājika* offense.

parinirvāṇa: Final emancipation, usually understood to mean the death of a saint.

poṣadha ceremony: A biweekly ritual involving the recitation of the *prātimokṣa*, which serves as a venue for confession of precept violations. For laypeople, a ritual day of fasting or abstinence from foods considered impure. Also called *upoṣadha*.

Prasenajit: A king of the Kosala kingdom, located in present-day Oudh province, who was an early supporter of Śākyamuni and his movement. He married a woman from the Śākya clan, and his sister was Vaidehī, the wife of King Biṃbiṣāra. After Vaidehī's death due to Ajātaśatru's cruelty, Prasenajit forcibly retook the land given as her dowry. He was then attacked and defeated by Ajātaśatru, but subsequently raised another army and routed Ajātaśatru's forces, capturing him in the process but ultimately sparing his life after Śākyamuni appealed for clemency. Buddhist tradition credits Prasenajit for sponsoring the creation of first Buddha image.

prātimokṣa: The monastic precepts; the code of discipline and regulations for monastics.

pravāraṇa: Also written *pravāraṇā*. A ceremony held at the end of the ninety-day rainy season retreat centered on the confession and repentance ritual for monastics, after which food and cotton cloth is offered by the laity in processions.

rākṣasa: A type of demon with its own culture, best known by the tale of the infamous Rāvaṇa in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Like *yakṣa*, in Buddhism they remain frightening but often play positive roles.

realm of desire, realm of form, realm of formlessness. *See* three realms.

Śakra Devānām Indra: A high deity in the *R̥g Veda*; in Buddhism, he presides over the second heaven in the realm of desire. Also called simply Śakra or Indra.

sal (Skt. *śāla*): The Indian tree *Shorea robusta*.

saṃghāvaśeṣa: Literally, "injuries (*avaśeṣa*) against the sangha (*saṃgha*)."
Thirteen violations of the monastic precepts that bring suspension and require adjudication.

sarpirmaṇḍa: The cream on the surface of clarified butter, considered a rare flavor of extraordinary quality, and therefore used as a metaphor for something of the highest value. Used in the MPNS to represent liberation.

saptaparṇa: A tree commonly identified as *Alstonia scholaris*. For the metaphorical use of its flower, see pp. 58 and 344, n. 36.

sthūlātyaya: A category of precept violation, glossed as “attempted offenses,” in that they are often not completed. The second most serious form of transgression after those classified as *pārājika*.

Sukhāvātī (“Land of Bliss”): The paradisiacal land or realm where the buddha called either Amitāyus or Amitābha resides, considered an ideal postmortem destination not only because of its beauty and access to this buddha, but also because anyone reborn there will not retrogress to other, less favorable existences. Also called the Western Paradise.

Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra: A sutra presented through a series of dialogues between famous Buddhist mythical figures (Śakra, Brahma, Maitreya, Mañjuśrī, etc.), with the core discussion occurring being between Dṛḍhamati and the Buddha about the the religious benefits of attaining this particular *samādhi*, specifically the attainment of the tenth *bhūmi*. One of a group of Mahāyāna sutras extolling the religious benefits of attaining named *samādhis*. It is best known from the extant translation by Kumārajīva, the *Shoulengyan sanmei jing* (T. 642), but the Chinese catalogs mention at least eight translations, the earliest being a lost translation by Lokakṣema that dates its creation to sometime prior to 150 CE. See Étienne Lamotte, *Traduit et Annoté, La Concentration de la Marche Héroïque* (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1975), pp. 63–112, for this discussion, as well as an introduction to the ninth-century Tibetan translation by Śākyaprabha and Ratnarakṣita, and a French translation of the Kumārajīva text. Note that in East Asia there is another sutra similarly called *Shoulengyan jing* (T. 945), known today as the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra*. This is a completely different work written in China in the Tang period and has little in common with the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra* mentioned here in the *Nirvana Sutra*.

tathāgatagarbha: Literally, “womb/embryo (*garbha*) of a buddha (*tathāgata*)”; the name given to the normally hidden buddha-essence or buddha-nature within each living being. Reflecting Chinese renderings, in this translation this is often represented by the figurative phrase “hidden treasury.”

ten good acts: Refraining from 1) taking life, 2) taking what is not given, 3) improper sexual activity, 4) prevaricating, 5) slandering, 6) divisive or harsh speech, 7) intentionally affected speech, 8) greed, 9) anger; and 10) holding right views.

three realms (Skt. *triloka*): The three realms of reality inhabited by living beings: the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*), in which beings possess desires that produce karma, physical form, and consciousness; the realm of form (*rūpadhātu*), in which beings

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have physical form but no desires, and therefore have transcended the normal impetus that produces karma; and the realm of formlessness (*ārūpyadhātu*), in which physical form and desire have been completely transcended. *See also* triple world.

tinduka: A tree thought to be within the genus *Diospyros embryopteris*, a type of ebony. In MPNS it is used metaphorically for its edible fruit, here often contrasted with the *kālaka* tree.

Trāyastriṃśa Heaven: The name of a mythical heaven located above Mount Sumeru, in which thirty-three deities reside, presided over by Śakra. *See also* Mount Sumeru; Śakra Devānām Indra.

Tripiṭaka: The three “baskets” (Skt. *piṭakas*) or collections that make up the Buddhist canon: Sūtras, the discourses of the Buddha; vinaya, the monastic codes of discipline; and Abhidharma, scholastic treatises.

triple world: A term used to indicate all forms of existence; that is, the realm of desire, the realm of form, and the realm of formlessness. *See also* three realms.

true-dharma: This translates *saddharma*, the Buddhist term for “good teaching” or “good religion,” defined as that which was taught by Śākyamuni, as opposed to the dharmas taught by other, heretical teachers. In this discourse, “true-dharma” is frequently used to signify what is regarded as orthodox Mahāyāna doctrine as defined here in this sūtra itself.

twelvefold canon: A different conception of the Buddhist canon, distinguished from some texts that saw a ninefold canon. In MPNS usage, the ninefold canon represents the Hinayana perspective, whereas the twelvefold is an expanded canon that contains the *saddharma* as extolled only in the well-balanced (*vaitulya*) Mahāyāna notion of Buddhism. This list of the twelve categories is given in the sūtra in a later section that will appear in volume 2 of this translation: *sūtra* 修多羅, *geya* 祇夜, *vyākaraṇa* 授記, *gāthā* 伽陀, *udāna* 優陀那, *nidāna* 尼陀那, *avadāna* 阿波陀那, *itivṛttaka* 伊帝目多伽, *jātaka* 闍陀伽, *vaipulya* 毘佛略, *abhidharma* 阿浮陀達, and *upadeśa* 優波提舍. *See also* ninefold canon.

twenty-five forms of existence: A term used to mean any and all possible life forms in the triple world, or saṃsāra as a whole. Specifically, there are fourteen in the realm of desire, seven in the realm of form, and four the formless realm. *See also* saṃsāra; three realms; triple world.

udumbara flower: Also written *uḍumbara*. A symbol of extreme rarity, the flower of the *udumbara* was thought to bloom only once in three thousand years. The *udumbara* tree is a kind of ficus, with Latin names given variously as *Ficus racemosa*, *Ficus glomerata*, etc.

uncreated (Skt. *asaṃskṛta*): This refers to anything that does not come into being by means of cause and effect. In other words, phenomena that have always existed, such as space, nirvāṇa, and, according to this sūtra, the buddha, dharma, and sangha as well.

unfortunate realms: Realms of rebirth in *saṃsāra* that reflect varying degrees of karmic punishment. There are commonly three unfortunate realms, or “destinies,” those of the hells, animals, and hungry ghosts (*pretas*); when four are enumerated, the realm of *asuras* is included.

upavāsa: Prior to the rise of Buddhism, a general term for a religious ceremony. In Buddhism, it usually indicates the formal gathering of monastics every fifteen days to recite the *prātimokṣa*, or list of precepts, and then formally accept confessions of any violations. Reflecting its core meaning of “fasting,” in East Asia the same term is used for six calendrical days per month designated as a special devotional time for laypeople to abstain from eating meat and observe the lay precepts more diligently.

ūpoṣadha. *See upavāsa*.

Uttarakuru: One of the traditional nine geographical divisions of the world in ancient India, located north of Mount Sumeru. *See also* Mount Sumeru.

vaiḍūrya: A blue-green gemstone variously identified as cats-eye, aquamarine, beryl, blue beryl, white beryl, or lapis lazuli. When used to refer to beryl, the term usually designates a stone from the Lake Baikal region. *Vaiḍūrya* is also used to represent something made of glass.

Vaiśālī: The capital city of the Licchavi kingdom. *See also* Licchavis.

vaśavalāhaka: Deities who rule the clouds and rain.

vātadeva: Wind deities.

vinaya: Canonical literature pertaining to the administration of monastic communities and rules of conduct for monastics; part of the Tripiṭaka. *See also* Tripiṭaka.

well-balanced sutras: This term translates the Chinese rendering of *vaitulya* sutras as *fang deng jing* 平等經. Thought to be synonymous with *vaipulya*, in the MPNS the term *vaitulya* is an epithet for sutras considered Mahāyāna in content and thus “well-balanced” itself is code for Mahāyāna.

wheel-turning sacred king. *See cakravartin*.

yakṣa (“demigod kings”): Originally tree spirits, this term came to denote a broad category of powerful beings of the spirit realm. They can be dangerous to humans, but when converted to Buddhism, they serve as strong supporters of the religion.

yojana: An Indian unit of measure, calculated variously as something between four and eight miles. The Chinese understood one *yojana* to equal forty *li* 里, a measurement that itself seems to have grown longer over time.

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Abbreviations

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<i>Skt.</i> :	Sanskrit
<i>Jp.</i> :	Japanese
<i>Eng.</i> :	Published title

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