

# THE SUTRA IN 42 SECTIONS

Translated from Chinese by:  
**The Buddhist Text Translation Society**



Explained by:  
**Master YongHua**

REPAYING KINDNESS TEMPLE: PL. 2555 – DL. 2011

## Sutra in 42 Sections

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Repaying Kindness Temple  
7509 Mooney Drive  
Rosemead, CA 91770, USA  
Tel: (626) 280-2327  
Fax: (626) 288-2182  
Second edition, ISBN 978-0-9835279-2-3  
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## Sutra in 42 Sections

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### SUTRA PREFACE:

We can start with a brief overview of the sutra through the use of the Tian Tai 5-fold profound meanings **五重玄義** :

1. (Explain) Title **釋名**: Person and Dharma classification.

2. (Discern) Substance **辨體**: True Mark (both True Emptiness & Wonderful Existence; the Middle Way).

3. (Clarify) Doctrine **明宗**: Emptiness as substance (Dharma Door of emptiness), brightness as nature.

4. (Describing) Function **論用**: Observe Precepts, Sever Desires.

5. (Ranking) Teaching **判教**: Vaipulya period.

Let's take a closer look at the title of the sutra.

The complete title of sutra is: The Buddha Speaks of the Sutra in 42 Sections **佛說四十二章經**.

Buddha: is Sanskrit for “the Enlightened One”. There is nothing that he does not understand.

“Enlightenment” can be of three kinds:

1. Self: enlighten oneself, as opposed to ordinary people who are not enlightened.

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2. Others: enlighten others, as opposed to the Two Vehicle practitioners (who can only enlighten themselves).

3. Perfect: he's perfected enlightenment, as opposed the Bodhisattvas (who have not yet perfected their enlightenment).

'Buddha' is one of the ten titles of the Buddhas. For this sutra, it refers to Shakyamuni Buddha, the teaching host of our Saha World.

The Buddha was born in India, in the country of Kapilavastu 迦毗羅衛國. When the crown prince was born, there was a bright light shining from the West that shone on the entire world. The Chinese emperor Zhao 昭王 consulted with his adviser 太史蘇由 about that never before seen manifestation. The adviser used the Yi Jing and informed the emperor that he drew the hexagram for a "dragon flying in the sky 龍飛在天", meaning that a great sage was born into the world. The emperor ordered it to be recorded by engraving onto stones.

The Buddha was born into an Indian royal family. His father was the Pure Rice King (淨飯; Sanskrit: Suddhodana, Chinese: 輸頭陀那). His mother was Lady Maya (摩耶夫人). Seven days after his birth, Lady Maya passed away. Her own sister, Mahaprajapati (摩訶波蘭波提), who was also married to the King, reared him like her own son until he became an adult.

When the prince was born, he was very handsome.

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The king father was very pleased and invited physiognomy experts to take a look. They declared that if the prince decided to enjoy the worldly pleasures, he would become a Wheel Turning King; whereas if he were to leave home and learn the Way, he would attain the Unsurpassed Wisdom. Greatly pleased, the king father thus named him as Siddhartha (悉達多), which is Sanskrit for accomplishing all principles (一切義成就).

The best Brahman teachers were invited to tutor the crown prince. Within a few years, he became well versed in all studies, warfare, and martial arts.

Since the king was worried that the crown prince might choose to leave the home life, he made sure to surround the prince with the loveliest maids at his many luxurious palaces. And at the age of 17, the prince was married off to his cousin, a princess of a neighboring country whose name was Yasodhara (耶輸陀羅).

Although he lived in total peace and leisure, the crown prince felt unease in his mind.

Once, the crown prince tagged along with his father to go on a field trip. He saw farmers with barren shoulders toiling away under the hot sun, their bodies drenched with sweat. And the oxen that were plowing the fields were constantly whipped by the farmers. As they soil was tilled over, a lot of bugs were scrambling about, trying to escape becoming food for the birds, swallows and ducks that quickly flew over to

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prey on them. As he witnessed this, the crown prince felt deep pity and compassion.

Later, he went out on his own with his charioteer. He witnessed the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death. Each time, he became very distressed and quickly lost interest in enjoying himself and returned to the palace.

Since he no longer could find joy in his daily life, he made up his mind to leave the home life in order to find a way to end suffering.

He therefore stole away in the night and abandoned his royal position to become a sramana (left home person). The father sent five people to pursue the prince to convince him to return. But they could not talk him out of his decision, so they themselves also left the home life to cultivate with him, since they could not muster the courage to face the king without securing the prince's return.

The prince went to two well-renowned Brahmins and bowed to them as teachers. He quickly surpassed them and yet realized that he still did not put an end to suffering.

His last resort was to undertake ascetic practices which were believed to be the ultimate way to attain liberation. He and his five attendants went to Snow Mountain where he stayed for six years. He ate one grain of sesame seed and one grain of wheat per day (一麻、一麥). He became just skin and bones. His five companions could not handle the hardship and

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deserted him.

Realizing that ascetic practices were not the solution, the prince abandoned them. He then went to Magadha (摩竭陀國), chose a bodhi tree, used grass to fashion a mat to sit on, crossed his legs in full lotus and made the vow: if I don't accomplish the Way, I will not leave my seat even if my body breaks down (若不成道，寧可碎身，決不離座).

On the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the twelfth lunar month, he saw a bright star and became enlightened. He realized that all living beings are endowed with the Buddha nature and can become Buddhas too. It's only because of attachments that they become confused and cannot realize their potential.

After the Buddha realized the unsurpassed right and proper enlightenment, he was requested to teach living beings how to end suffering and attain bliss. He thus spent the remaining 50 years of his life to propagate the BuddhaDharma.

Speak: with his own mouth. The Dharma was first transmitted by mouth and written down later.

“Speak” also has two connotations: a) from Samadhi, thus others also share in bliss b) his purpose is to teach and transform living beings.

“Speak” is replete with: 4 eloquences and 8 sounds.

8 Sounds: also known as eight kinds of pure sounds, eight kinds of Brahman sounds. The Budd-

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ha's voice is very clear and refined; replete with eight virtues which are:

1) Extremely good-sounding (極好): of all living beings (humans, gods, bodhisattvas etc.), He is very pleasant to listen to, and people don't get tired of hearing.

2) Soft: (柔軟) his voice can subdue all living beings; generates joy in listeners (Buddha's kindness) and makes them let go of their inflexibility and intransigence.

3) Suitable (和適): for each type of living being, time, place are proper, reflecting the Middle Way, facilitating the listeners to understand the principles.

4) Venerated & wise (尊慧): inspires respect (Buddha's virtues higher than the mountains) and imparts wisdom (Buddha's wisdom brightens up every place).

5) Not female (不女): awe-inspiring (can subdue the heavenly demons and externalists); masculine; listeners feel like taking refuge with and following.

6) Not wrong (不誤): from beginning to end; it is very clear, and well enunciated; He speaks the truth and enables listeners to obtain the proper views.

7) Profound & pervasive (深遠): in meaning. It can reach all places; not too loud when close, just right when heard from afar, enabling living beings to grasp profound principles.

8) Unending (不竭): in meaning and time; aiding

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the listeners to get enlightened, because his great vast vows are also unending in nature.

When the Buddha speaks Dharma, it is for the express purpose of crossing over living beings when their good roots mature. He is also known as the Great Physician, dispensing medicine to cure (specific) diseases **應病與藥**.

5 teaching periods: (19 years old: left home, 29 years old: enlightened, 80 years old: entered Nirvana)

1. Avatamsaka period: 21 days (Perfect teaching)
2. Agama period: 12 years (Store teaching)
3. Vaipulya period: 8 years (Connective teaching)
4. Vajra period: 22 years (Separate teaching)
5. Dharma Flower – Nirvana period: 8 years (Perfect teaching).

3 Accordances:

1. With words
2. With the principles
3. With the meaning/intention

Sections: aggregate meaning; Buddha's teachings anthology; clarify principles for disciples (among his existentialist disciples, there were 42 of them with various misunderstandings and doubt).

Sutra: from Sanskrit **修多羅**; general name for Buddha's discourses. It was not translated because it carries several meanings:

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1) String together (結璽): the principles in a most adorned fashion like a string of pearls; pearls symbolizing the principles.

2) Produce (出生): give rise to all kinds of good dharmas.

3) Gather in/attract (攝): those ready to be taught and transformed.

4) Constant (常): the principles contained are unchanging through time and space.

5) Method (法): of practice that helps us ascend.

6) Bubbly spring (湧泉): within the sutra there are limitless Dharma flavors, like a bubbly spring.

7) Carpenter's plumb line/marking line (繩墨): to help make things straight and round; enabling us to differentiate between proper and deviant, understand the principles of cause and effect and thus not commit offenses.

8) Path (徑): from common mortal to sagehood and finally to Buddhahood.

9) Clarify (顯示): the enunciated principles, teaching us how to sever afflictions and certify to Bodhi.

10) Door (門): through which we can reach Buddhahood.

11) Proper (正): proper and bright, proper and not deviant, not one-sided or crooked.

**Co-translated by Kashyapa-matanga and**

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### Gobharana of the Later Han Dynasty.

First to be transmitted to China: during the Later Han dynasty, the emperor sent 18 people to

洛陽. The emperor built White Horse monastery to do the translation. These two venerable Dharma Masters were from Central India and co-translated this sutra into Chinese.

Shakyamuni Buddha's appearance in our world was recorded in the Chinese historical records.

In the Eastern Han (also known as Later Han dynasty), during the third year of the Yong Ping reign period (“永平 Always Peaceful”, A.D. 62), Emperor Ming (明帝) dreamt that a golden man with a halo above his head flew into the imperial palace. He consulted with his advisors.

His astrologer (太史), Fu Yi (傅毅) told him that it was probably the Buddha, a holy sage in India. Furthermore, a scholar (博士) named Wang Zun (王尊) also told the Emperor of a book written in the Zhou (周) dynasty called Records of Strange Events (異記).

It states that the Buddha was born in the Zhou dynasty during the 26<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Zhao (昭王, approximately 1024 B.C.) . At that time, the creeks and rivers overflowed their banks, the earth quaked and a five-colored auspicious light pierced the heavens. A courtier then consulted (占卦) the Yi Jing

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(易經, the Book of Changes) and got the hexagram qian (乾卦九五), nine in fifth place: flying dragon in the heavens (飛龍在天). He therefore ascertained that a sage was born in India and transmitted a teaching that would come to China a thousand years later.

King Zhao ordered the details of the event to be carved in stone and recorded.

Later in the Zhou dynasty, during the reign of King Mu (穆王, 1001-946 B.C.), a massive earthquake shook the earth and heaven. A white rainbow with twelve rays could be seen extending across the sun, during the daytime. That corresponded to the time that Shakyamuni Buddha was about to enter Nirvana. This event was also confirmed by an astrologer of the time.

A thousand years later, Emperor Ming of the Han dynasty dreamt of the Buddha and sent three courtiers along with their assistants to India to seek the Buddhadharma. Three years later, they all came back with the two venerable elders from India. They used a white horse to carry their sutras. That's when the Emperor built the White Horse Monastery.

Four years later, the Taoists of the Five Mountains (五嶽山) grew jealous of the thriving of Buddhism. They convinced the Emperor to hold a contest that consisted of putting the Taoist and Buddhist sutras into a pile and setting them on fire. Whichever books burned would belong to the false religion.

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The Taoists thus gathered in great numbers at the East gate of the White Horse Monastery. They came and showed off their spiritual powers. Some came riding the clouds and fog. Others sailed through the heavens and hid in the earth. Some appeared and vanished into thin air at will. Just in case, they also prayed to their Lord, Ven. Lao Zi for assistance.

The Buddhists gathered at the West gate.

When the fire was lit, the Taoist sutras burned into ashes whereas the Buddhist sutras did not. Instead they emitted a five-colored light that brilliantly shone over the world.

Furthermore, the Taoists lost all of their spiritual powers. Those who came and showed off their spiritual penetrations no longer could. At that time, the two venerable Indian monks ascended into the sky and revealed the 18 spiritual transformations of the Arhats: they walked in space, lied down in space, emitted fire and water from their bodies.

As a result, many Taoist practitioners defected to Buddhism. The Emperor and many others became believers. That was how Buddhism got its start in China. This sutra played a critical role in its development.

Quick overview of the 42 sections: it includes all the Mahayana and Hinayana Dharmas (all Three Vehicles' doctrines are included: Sound-hearers, Enlightened to Conditions and Bodhisattvas)

Sections 1-3: common Three Vehicles doctrines,

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practices and fruitions; seeking to end birth and death as basis.

Sections 4-8: transcendental good and evil causes and effects.

Sections 9-38: Mahayana uncommon superior practices, encompassed in the six paramitas and 10,000 practices.

Sections 39-41: clarification of teachings [that we should have faith in], principles [that we should understand] and practices [that we should be cultivated].

Section 42: The Buddha's wisdom illuminating all worldly and transcendental dharmas.

Some may wonder why this exact number of sections, not fewer or more. It has to do with the number of steps toward Buddhahood. In all there are 42: 10 dwellings, 10 practices, 10 transferences, 10 grounds, Equal Enlightenment and Wonderful Enlightenment.

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Sutra text:

**When the World Honored One had attained the Way, he thought, "To leave desire behind and to gain stillness and tranquility is supreme." He abided in deep meditative concentration and subdued every demon and externalist.**

**In the Deer Park he turned the Dharma-wheel of the Four Noble Truths and took across Ajnata-Kaundinya and the other four disciples, who all realized the fruition of the Way.**

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**Then the Bhikshus expressed their doubts and asked the Buddha how to resolve them. The World Honored One taught and exhorted them, until one by one they awakened and gained enlightenment. After that, they each put their palms together, respectfully gave their assent, and followed the Buddha's exhortations.**

Sutra commentary:

Each sutra's preface meets the following requirements: 6 realizations (六種證信):

1. Dharma (法體): The Four Noble Truths
2. Audience (能聞): Ajnata-Kaundinya and the others
3. Time (機感): When He obtained the Way and saw that his disciples' good roots had matured
4. Speaker (教主): World-Honored-One
5. Place (處樣): Deer Park
6. Faith (信): "Thus I have heard"

**When the World Honored One had attained the Way.** "World-Honored-One": comes from the Sanskrit Baghavan 薄伽梵, one of ten titles of all the Buddhas. In this instance, the sutra is referring specifically to Shakyamuni Buddha, the teaching host of our world.

"World" contains various (遷流) connotations, with both time and space aspects. Time wise, it refers

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to the three times: past, present and future. Space wise, it refers to the insentient world (器世間), sentient world (情世間) and enlightened world (覺世間). The insentient world consists of all things: mountains, rivers, trees. ‘Sentient world’ refers to all living beings of the four births (born from egg 卵, womb 胎, moisture 濕 and transformation 化) with emotions (有情感): animals, humans, ghosts etc... And the enlightened world is that of the enlightened beings such the Arhats, PratyekaBuddhas, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

“Honored”: respected and admired in all the worlds (in all the ten directions, three periods of time and three spaces). His Way virtue, character, wisdom, kindness and compassion are unmatched.

“Attained the Way”. “Attain” means to accomplish, to realize and to succeed. “The Way” refers to the Buddha Way. In other words, he has successfully completed, perfected the Buddhist practices. After learning the best of the worldly practices, he still did not attain liberation. Then, underneath a bodhi tree, he meditated and obtained great enlightenment.

What did he awaken to? He realized that all living beings are endowed with the Buddha nature. They can all become Buddhas if they can be rid of their attachments. Yes, it’s that wonderful! We can ultimately become a Buddha once we purify ourselves of defilements. We should not settle for less!

The truth of the matter is that it’s not the first time

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that Shakyamuni became enlightened. He already became a Buddha countless kalpas ago. Furthermore, in the Lotus Sutra “Thus Come One lifespan” chapter, during the time of Kashyapa Buddha 迦葉佛, when the lifespan was 20,000 years, he already was the incoming Buddha dwelling in the Tushita Heaven’s inner court. He had to wait for our era to manifest becoming a Buddha.

**He thought.** Buddhas do not “think” the way we do. Ordinary people “think” with their conscious mind, also called the sixth consciousness. This is done while we are not in samadhi. In contrast, Buddhas use their later gained wisdom (後得智) to think. This is done while he is in samadhi.

**"To leave desire behind and to gain stillness and tranquility is supreme."**

“Leave desire behind”: Common sense shows that our human existence revolves around satisfying our desires. In particular, residents of the Desire Realm where we are pursue five kinds of desires:

1. Fame: in the United States, people feel entitled to their “fifteen minutes of fame”. In other words, who does not want to be noticed?

2. Food: the world seems to be struggling with obesity. We can’t resist the comfort foods.

3. Sleep: not only is sleep necessary for our body to shut down and affect repairs, it can be quite pleasant because it gives us a break from the constant stress of our daily life.

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4. Sex: one of the best pleasures of life.

5. Wealth: so important because that's how we tend to keep score. At the very least, wealth gives us a false sense of security.

Desire is a normal part of life for ordinary people. However, enlightened beings know something we don't: they can "leave desire behind". As long as we still have desires, our mind still moves: we get excited by externals. On the other hand, if we can "see through it and put it down", we can be free from desires (e.g. our car gets nicked and yet we don't get upset), then we can "gain stillness and tranquility". "Stillness" refers to the inside; "tranquility" refers to the outside. Inside our mind does not move; outside nothing can get us excited. This is called samadhi.

To be in samadhi is very blissful. It's often referred to as "Dhyana bliss". We use the term bliss to differentiate it from the "happiness" of worldly people.

Ordinary people pursue their desires and when their desires are fulfilled, they feel happy. However, that happiness has unfavorable residues. For example, enjoying sensual pleasures excessively makes us tired, worn-out and age prematurely. In contrast, samadhi bliss makes us feel better, more energized and can prolong our life.

This is one thing that the Buddha realized; namely, that cultivation brings about samadhi, which in turn gives us bliss. There is nothing better that we can do:

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it is “supreme”. Nothing is more rewarding or more worthwhile! In fact, if you cultivate samadhi power, the more samadhi power you have, the more blissful it can be. Sensual pleasures are so coarse compared to the higher samadhis’ bliss!

**He abided in deep meditative concentration and subdued every demon and externalist.** The Buddha is constantly in samadhi whereas we are in and out constantly. How come?

It takes a lot of blessings to be able to enter samadhi and experience its tremendous bliss. It’s the parallel of getting pleasure from buying an expensive sports car. When we are out of money, we have to get rid of that car because we can no longer afford it. Similarly, when our blessings run out, we have to exit samadhi.

Unlike us, however, Buddhas have limitless blessings. That’s why they are always in samadhi. It’s not the common kin, but rather is a very “deep meditative concentration”.

Actually, a Buddha can enter many kinds of samadhi. For example, if He enters the “supreme Shurangama samadhi”, the king of samadhis, he can “subdue every demon and externalist”. This Shurangama samadhi is invincible (against every opponent).

“Subdue”: as opposed to crush or eliminate. To crush the opposition creates resentment. To eliminate them deepens their hatred: they’ll come at us again with a vengeance! To subdue is to keep them under

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control, in check so that they behave themselves. They are not harmed and their hearts are conquered by virtue.

### **“Demon & externalist”.**

Demon comes from the Sanskrit term Mara 魔羅, which has the connotations of obstructing 障礙, killing and harming 殺害, being deviant and evil 邪惡 and invading and robbing 侵奪. They are big trouble makers. They have tremendous spiritual powers and worse yet, they intend to inflict harm upon us: they should be feared!

Externalists are non-Buddhist practitioners. They are called externalists because they search for answers outside the mind. In particular, they are confused about the principles, and very attached to spiritual powers. They often feel threatened by Buddhist practitioners and therefore often challenge and compete for followers.

### **In the Deer Park he turned the Dharma-wheel of the Four Noble Truths.**

“Deer Park”: located in the country of Varanasi 波羅奈國. Many deers were freed in the park and multiplied. It was very secluded and quiet, perfect for cultivation. That was a popular spot where externalists gathered to cultivate, including the Buddha’s former five attendants. It was thus the very first location where the Buddha

### **“Turned the Dharma Wheel”:**

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The “Dharma Wheel” is the symbol of the BuddhaDharma; it carries several meanings.

1) Round exterior and spoke interior: principles & practice jointly.

2) Round shape: no beginning or end, perfect from beginning to end.

3) Network of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas teaching throughout Dharma realm.

The phrase “turn the Dharma Wheel” means that the Buddha preaches his sermon.

### “The Four Noble Truths”.

The four (unalterable) truths of: Suffering, Accumulation, Extinction and the Way.

Suffering is the worldly fruition 世間之果; pointing specifically to the triple realm, six paths, form (body), mind and five skandhas.

Accumulation is the cause for the world 世間之因; referring to view and thought delusions/afflictions, with outflow, good and evil unmoving karmas 有漏善惡不動等業.

Extinction is the transcendental fruition 出世之果; so called “because the cause is extinguished, the fruition is extinguished 因滅故果滅”; one thus obtains stillness, tranquility, unconditioned peace and bliss 無為安樂.

The Way is the cause for transcendental liberation 出世之因; briefly, the three non-outflow studies of precepts, samadhi and wisdom; expanding: the ten

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paramitas and 10,000 practices.

The Buddha had three turnings of the Dharma Wheel:

1. “Revelation turning 示轉”: he points out that what we endure all sorts of suffering, the nature of which is oppressive. It’s all self-inflicted, stemming from our own ignorance. Furthermore, there is the Way of practice that can liberate us and enable us to attain Nirvana. When Ven. Ajnata-Kaundinya heard this, he certified to Arhatship.

2. “Exhortation turning 勸轉”: we should recognize it as suffering; we should cut off our afflictions; we should realize Nirvana; we should cultivate the Way. Hearing this, two more of his former attendants, Ven. Asvajit 阿濕婆 and Badrika 跋提 certified to Arhatship.

3. “Certification turning 證轉”: I’ve already certified to all the four truths. The last two former attendants, Ven. Kashyapa 迦葉 and Mahanama 拘利 certified to Arhatship.

Suffering: can be of eight general kinds

1. Birth
2. Aging
3. Sickness
4. Death
5. Being apart from loved ones

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6. Being near those detested
7. Not getting what one wants
8. The raging blaze of the five skandhas

The first four belong to body; the next three pertain to mind; the last one pertains to both. The first seven are result of past karmas: now we must undergo retribution; the last one is karma being created and causing future retributions: cause and effect follow each other ceaselessly.

Suffering can also be classified into five kinds:

1. From the body's perspective: sickness, aging, death, hunger, thirst, fatigue, ugliness, paralysis, etc.

2. From the mind's perspective: greed, hatred, stupidity, arrogance, jealousy, enmity, worry, pity, fear etc...

3. From the external world's perspective: disasters may be associated with the four elements (floods, tornados, volcanoes, avalanches, corresponding to water, wind, fire, and earth), or with beasts (such as poisonous snakes, tigers, etc.)

4. From the human affairs' perspective: war, robbery, intimidation, insult, heartbreak etc.

5. After death there is the suffering of possibly falling into the three evil paths.

**Took across Ajnata-Kaundinya and the other four disciples, who all realized the fruition of the Way.**

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“Took across”: from the shore of afflictions across the sea of suffering to the other shore of Nirvana.

“Ajnata-Kaundinya”: first to awaken. In a past life Shakyamuni was a Patient Immortal, Ajnata-Kaundinya was King Kalinga 歌利王 who subjected Shakyamuni Buddha to dismemberment and torture. Instead of getting upset, the patient immortal remained unperturbed and made the vow to make sure to save the King first after he accomplishes the Way. Now the conditions have ripened and Shakyamuni Buddha spoke Dharma for Ajnata-Kaundinya who was the first to be awakened. He is thus the most senior-seated monk in the Buddha’s disciples.

“And the other four disciples”.

When the Pure Rice King discovered that his son the crown prince Siddhartha stole away to cultivate, he sent five of the Buddha’s cousins to pursue and talk the prince into coming back. Three of them Asvajit 阿濕婆, Badrika 跋提 and Mahanama 拘利 were from the King’s side. The other two, Ajnata-Kaundinya 憍陳如 and Kashyapa 迦葉, were from the queen mother’s side. They caught up with the prince but the prince made the vow not to return. That’s why they too accompanied the Buddha and cultivated alongside Him. When the Buddha was practicing the ascetic practices at Snow Mountain, two of them could not take the hardship and left. Later the remaining three left as well. All five went to the Deer Park to continue their cultivation.

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After the Buddha became enlightened, he decided to come to the Deer Park to help his former attendants.

After hearing the Buddha's first sermon, all five became awakened. They then vigorously cultivated under the Buddha's guidance and all certified to fourth stage Arhatship: "the fruition of the Way".

**Then the Bhikshus expressed their doubts and asked the Buddha how to resolve them.**

The Buddha then allowed those former attendants to become the first five "Bhikshus" the first members of the Buddhist religious order (the Sangha).

Bhikshu 比丘: is Sanskrit for monk. It has three meanings:

1. Destroyer of evil
2. Frightener of Mara
3. Mendicant

Five kinds of terms not translated:

1. Multiple meanings, 多含不翻 e.g. Bhikshu
2. Venerated words e.g. Baghavan
3. Things not found in this country
4. Accord with ancient usage (e.g. Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi: saying it creates a lot of merit and virtue)
5. Secret meanings: e.g. mantras

Later, the sangha welcomed more monks, totaling more than 1,200 of them who are constant compa-

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nions of the Buddha. There were even more bhikshus who also came to study with the Buddha.

As they cultivated, they were unclear and “expressed their doubts” about some of the Buddha’s teachings.

This is bound to happen because the teachings were dispensed for specific audiences or specific times of cultivation. For example, one of my students asked: “Two months ago, you told me to mind my business and not to try to help my daughters. Now you tell me to take on their problems. Why make the change now?” I said: “Two months ago, you had no samadhi power and yet you wanted to help. That was not advisable. Now that you’ve got a little bit of (mental) strength, you can help a little bit”. The advantage of having a live teacher is that he or she can help make the adjustments that are appropriate with the time and circumstances.

The monks “asked the Buddha how to resolve them”. “Resolve” is translated from the Chinese 進止. Some meanings did get lost in the translation.

進 means to: 1. Progress (march forward) 2. Enter (the Dharma Door) 3. Strive forward (practice vigorously).

止 means to: 1. Stop (evil) 2. Prohibit (mistakes) 3. Safely dwell (reside).

Simply said, smart cultivators know when to proceed 進 further along the path and when to regress 止 and find a better route. Another possible combination

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amongst the many possibilities: sometimes one should jump right into the midst of the enemy's camp whereas at other times one should wait until the storm blows over.

**The World Honored One taught and exhorted them, until one by one they awakened and gained enlightenment.**

The Buddha “taught and exhorted them”. He gave them the appropriate instructions on how to resolve their problems. He exhorted them to put these instructions into practice.

Herein lies the process of cultivation: one gets transmitted a Dharma Door (“taught”) and then one is then encouraged to make the efforts to execute the instructions (“exhorted”). In other words, make sure that you receive specific instructions from your good knowing adviser before you start cultivating!

“Until one by one they awakened and gained enlightenment”. Until each and every one of them understands the principles. They all can understand what the Buddha taught them. This is a great advantage of learning under a Buddha: His instructions will bring us straight away to enlightenment.

**After that, they each put their palms together,**

Once the Bhikshunis clearly knew what to do, they indicated so by showing respect for the Buddha and gratitude for his instructions: “they each put their palms together”.

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They **respectfully gave their assent**, they promise to execute.

**And followed the Buddha's exhortations.** Remember the earlier section where “the World Honored One taught and exhorted them”? Now that they’ve been taught, they next follow the Buddha’s exhortations to cultivate. Many of them know by now that the Buddha’s instructions are like a compass needle: following in that direction without any deviation is the fastest way to the end goal.

You have probably noticed that we have made some minor changes to the original BTTS translation in an attempt to adhere more closely to the meaning of the original Chinese text.

**Section 1:**  
**LEAVING HOME AND BECOMING AN**  
**ARHAT**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "People who take leave of their families and go forth from the householder's life, who recognize their mind and penetrate to its origin, and who understand the unconditioned Dharma are called Sramanas. They constantly observe the 250 precepts, and they value purity in all that they do. By practicing the four true paths, they can become Arhats."**

Sutra commentary:

This is the first section of the Sutra in Forty-two Sections. It says that a Sramana can become an Arhat.

The typical Buddhist Sutra has 3 sections: preface, text proper and transmission/circulation. This was first devised by Great o An (道安).

This Sutra has only the first two.

The first section talks about the fruitions of a sramana.

**The Buddha said, "People who take leave of their families and go forth from the householder's life,**

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“Family” represents what ties you (wife, children, money, girlfriend, car, dogs...), whereas “leaving it behind” means detaching from all of these things. This is the narrow scope of leaving home.

“Leaving Home” can mean leaving behind:

1. Our worldly home where emotions bind us.
2. Our three realms where the force of reincarnation draws us.
3. Our afflictions (such as love and desire) which normal people accept as part of their existence.

From a broader scope, we can think in terms of leaving and entering:

1. Leaving Worldly home; entering the True Principles home (emptiness Dharma Door). The worldly home is bound by time (our lifespan is limited) and space (we are constrained by our physical limitations). The True Principles world is not bound in any way. We therefore go from the bounded to the unbounded.

2. Leaving five Skandhas home; entering the Dharma Body home. The five skandhas are: form, feeling, thinking, activity and consciousness. They are the five different layers of confusion that are associated with our human body. They cause us to revolve in the wheel of reincarnation, migrating from body to body through the cycles of birth and death. In contrast, the Dharma Body is permanent and free from delusions. We therefore go from the impermanent to the permanent.

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3. Leaving Afflictions (worldly) home; entering (transcendental) Wisdom home. Humans seem to be resigned to a life of afflictions. Their emotions fluctuate widely from displeasures and unhappiness to pleasure and joy. Life's ups and downs arise from the wide swings of our emotions. We can leave the home life to concentrate on transcendental pursuits so as to open our Prajna Wisdom and end afflictions.

4. Leaving Death home; entering the Non-Birth home. We thus come to have real control. Since the day we were born, we inexorably started the march toward our eventual demise. That is because what is produced or born must be destroyed or die. You can opt out of this production and destruction cycle by cultivating the many Dharma Doors that can end birth and death. For example, the Pure Land Dharma Door is one of many such expedients enabling us to attain this.

Traditionally, if the parents do not give their consent, then one cannot leave home (because after all, we owe our parents the gift of our own body!). This is why, the text says that one “takes leave of the family” which is translated from “say goodbye to relatives 辭親” in Chinese. It also symbolizes severing family ties.

Throughout the ages, cultivators found that in order to be able to give it a real good go, they've had to leave the home life. It pays to sever family ties because:

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1. One renounces deep emotional attachments: it's very helpful because stirred up emotions cloud one's judgment.

2. One forsakes reliance on others. To obtain liberation requires learning to make do and do away with the unnecessary. It is much easier to make it without the help of the family and relatives.

Furthermore, those **who recognize their mind and penetrate to its origin** see that all things arise from the mind. To “recognize the mind” is to understand that outside of the mind there is no dharma. In other words, the mind creates all dharmas: everything is created from the mind alone.

“Penetrate to its origin”. If the mind is the instigator, then we ought to know where it came from, we ought to know “its origin”. Originally, the mind is empty. The process of cultivation is to refine the mental process until one reaches emptiness. One can then understand that the nature of the mind is false.

Plainly put, cultivators uncover the secrets of the inner workings of the mind. They attain such understanding by refining their own mental processes instead of researching the books and engaging in intellectual discussions and deliberations.

“Mind” is often used interchangeably with “Nature” with in Buddhist texts.

There are two mental processes:

1. Nature (Mind) everywhere calculating and at-

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taching. This is the kind of mind that advertisers excel at exploiting. They like to expose us to their products and make our calculating mind determine the benefits and pleasure that can be derived from them. Once started, we can't help but become attached and feel that we must "have" these products.

2. Nature (Mind) arising dependent on others. For example, we see a rope from a distance and mistake it for a snake. The thought of a snake only exists because of the presence or perception of a snake.

Both types of mind are false and empty.

**And who understand the unconditioned Dharma.**

Enlightenment is the perfectly accomplished nature.

A "conditioned dharma" is anything that relies on something else for its existence. For example, bread depends on flower, water, heat, labor, baking utensils etc. Lacking any of those elements ("conditions"), it cannot come into being.

The "unconditioned dharma" is that which is not conditioned. It relies on nothing for its existence.

To "understand the unconditioned Dharma" is to awaken to non-duality, True Suchness, True Emptiness or Buddha Nature. It is to realize that True Suchness and all dharmas are not the same and not different (不一不異). That is to certify to the perfect attainment of the true nature (證圓成實性).

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For those of you who are curious, you can discover the unconditioned by learning to not rely on your conscious (thinking) mind. Worldly people such as the great philosophers and scientists eventually run into a wall when they rely on their conscious mind.

### **Are called Sramanas.**

If you can understand the unconditioned, then you can be called a sramana.

Before Buddhism, all left-home people in India are called “sramanas”, which is Sanskrit for Diligently Extinguish (勤息). Sramanas diligently cultivate the three non-outflow studies of precepts (Buddhist rules of morality), samadhi (concentration) and wisdom (transcendental wisdom), and extinguish the three poisons of Greed, Anger and Stupidity.

The Vinaya says that there are four kinds of sramanas:

1. Awesome comportment sramanas 威儀沙門 who strictly adhere to the precepts and awesome comportments, inspiring respect and admiration.

2. Robe wearing sramanas 形服沙門 who don the left home people’s garments but don’t measure up to the standard of left home people (their substance is really not that of left home people).

3. Famous sramanas 名聞沙門 who are well-known throughout the lands.

4. True cultivator sramanas 實行沙門 who earnestly cultivate and consistently manifest both the ap-

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pearance and substance of true left home people.

### **They constantly observe the 250 precepts.**

They diligently cultivate morality. They start out by first studying the precepts. Traditionally, left home people must spend the first five years after receiving full ordination to study the precepts. That's how we all learn how to "observe the 250 precepts". The "250" number refers to the total of precepts for bhikshus (monks). The bhikshunis (nuns) have a total 348 precepts. The numeral is to designate the total number: left home people are to observe all the precepts that were transmitted to them at full ordination.

"Constantly" observe means to not have a single infraction. When we have any infraction, then our precept substance is "damaged"; we therefore need to go through repentance procedures to restore it and make it whole again. This is the honest truth folks: we are not perfect and do make a lot of mistakes. It's about constantly trying to observe precepts!

I feel that precepts are about truthfulness: we must admit our mistakes and take corrective measures. Others may feel differently about precepts (e.g. feeling constrained by them or it's so easy to have infractions), but I feel that observing precepts makes us more honest. It's about honestly going about fixing our mistakes.

**And they value purity in all that they do.** To observe precepts is to "stop doing any evil and do all kinds of good". Precepts keep the stains, defilements

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away. That's how left home people maintain purity. The very lifestyle of left home people is to maintain "purity in all that they do".

Why do they "value" purity? Purity is virtue. They consider virtue as foremost. This is why we are "ranked" by precept age instead of oratory skills, fame, temple size etc. This can be observed at the temple: highest precept age Sanghans line up at the head of the lines.

**By practicing the four true paths, they can become Arhats.**

By diligently "practicing the four true paths", i.e. the Four Noble Truths (Truths of Suffering, Accumulation, Extinction and the Way), they diligently practice Wisdom. The Four Noble Truths is one Dharma for accomplishing the fourth stage Arhatship.

"Arhat": has three meanings

1. Killer of thieves **殺賊**. Thieves here refer to afflictions. They have no more afflictions.
2. Worthy of offerings **應供**. They deserve to receive offerings from humans and gods.
3. Non-birth (share section) **不生**. They no longer have to revolve in the wheel of reincarnation (undergo future births).

They thus certify to the position of "Beyond Study **無學之果**" (4th stage Arhat) versus "Having More to Study" (second through third stage Arhats).

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Sutra text:

**"Arhats can fly and transform themselves. They have a life span of vast eons, and wherever they dwell they can move heaven and earth."**

Sutra commentary:

**Arhats can fly and transform themselves:** Notice the “can”. They can have a range of spiritual penetrations. They may have no spiritual powers at all: zero. Or they may have a lot: six spiritual powers (“flying” is one of them) and 18 transformations (e.g. emitting water from lower body and fire from the upper body).

**They have a life span of vast eons.** Fourth stage Arhats have mastered their own birth and death. They can live as long as they want. “Eon” refers to a long time. They can also die any time they wish.

**And wherever they dwell they can move heaven and earth:** they are revered and protected by the spirits and gods. Their virtues are so lofty that they “can move heaven” (the gods) “and earth” (spirits).

Fourth Stage Arhats undergo no more birth (我身已盡): certify to the truth of Suffering; pure conduct already established (梵行已立): certify to the Truth of Extinction; what must be done has already been done (所做已辦): certify to the Truth of the Way; no longer undergo future existence (不受後有): certify to the Truth of Accumulation.

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They've obtained liberation (from suffering). In the Buddhist parlance: they've crossed over (from this shore of birth and death) to the other shore (of Nirvana).

Sutra text:

**"Prior to the Arhat is the Anagamin. At the end of his life, an Anagamin's vital spirit will rise above the nineteenth heaven, and he will become an Arhat."**

Sutra commentary:

**Prior to the Arhat is the Anagamin 斯陀含:** Third Stage Arhats have cut off thought delusions in the Desire Realm. They are known as “non-returners 不還”.

**At the end of his life** the Anagamin's Eighth Consciousness 阿賴耶識 (vital spirit 靈神) will rise to the 20<sup>th</sup> heaven (“Heaven of No Afflictions 無煩天” at the top of the Five Heavens of No Return 五不還天/五淨居天 of the Form Realm), where they **become** Fourth Stage Arhats. They don't have to come back to the human realm to attain the fourth fruition.

**Nineteenth heaven:** six Desire heavens, three 1<sup>st</sup> Dhyana heavens, three 2<sup>nd</sup> Dhyana heavens, three 3<sup>rd</sup> Dhyana heavens, four 4<sup>th</sup> Dhyana heavens, making a total of 19 heavens.

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There is an enormous gap of wisdom between the Fourth Stage Arhat and Third Stage Arhat.

Sutra text:

**"Prior to the Anagamin is the Sakridagamin, who ascends once, returns once more, and thereafter becomes an Arhat.**

Sutra commentary:

**Prior to the Anagamin is the Sakridagamin 斯陀含**, who has severed the first six thought delusions in the Desire Realm, **who ascends once, returns once more**. They are also called "Once Returners 一來". They ascend to the heaven once 一上欲天, after which they return to the human realm **and thereafter becomes a Fourth stage Arhat**.

Thought delusions: when face with a situation/state, one is confused about the principles and gives rise to discrimination. There are 81 grades of thought delusions.

Second and Third stage Arhats are also called positions "having more to study 有學位". First Stage Arhats are called "seeing the Way 見道位".

Sutra text:

**Prior to the Sakridagamin is the Srotaapanna, who has seven deaths and seven births remaining,**

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**and then becomes an Arhat. Severing love and desire is like severing the four limbs; one never uses them again."**

Sutra commentary:

**Prior to the Sakridagamin is the Srotaapanna 須陀洹.** “Srotaapanna” is Sanskrit for “entering the flow 入流” or “opposing the flow”. They no longer fall into the three evil destinies.

**Who has seven deaths and seven births remaining, and then becomes an Arhat.** They cut off all view delusions (view delusions are coarser than thought delusions, and give rise to greed and love in the face of externals; there are 88 grades of view delusions in all). First Stage Arhats are reborn to the Heavens seven times and the human realm seven times before becoming fourth stage Arhats.

They use the 8 patiences 忍, 8 wisdoms 智 –, and the 16 non-outflow minds to cut off the Desire Realm’s 88 view delusions.

**Severing love and desire is like severing the four limbs; one never uses them again:** view and thought delusions arise from love and desire. Once cut off, they are just as the Shurangama Sutra says: burning wood, once burned can’t be reused: we are liberated!

There was a man who left the home life. Even after he became fully ordained, he would come back to

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his house to visit his wife and children, once a month. When his wife asked him why, he said: “I really love my life as a monk. However, I am also very attached to you and our children. You’ve always the anchor of my life and our years together were the happiest time of my life.”

The following month, on the day that the monk said that he’d come for a visit, she dug up a big pit in front of at the gate to the house, filled it with sharp-edged stones and covered it up. The unsuspecting husband monk fell into it and was almost killed.

He made it into his wife’s house and said: “Did you know that there is a pit out there? It nearly killed me!”

She replied: “Now that you know that coming home is truly that perilous, why do you insist on doing it?”

A light went on in the monk’s brains. He took his leave from his wife and immediately returned to the monastery and never came back to visit his wife again. He cultivated very vigorously and ultimately certified to Arhatship.

Left home people, you’ve taken the vow to end love and sever family ties. Please stop relying on your family and relatives. If they wish to provide assistance to you, let it be in the form of an offering to the Triple Jewel, not a helping hand from your family member to their loved one.

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**Section 2:**  
**ELIMINATING DESIRE AND ENDING**  
**SEEKING**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "Those who have left the home-life and become Sramanas cut off desire, renounce love, and recognize the source of their minds. They penetrate the Buddha's profound principles and awaken to the unconditioned Dharma. Internally they have nothing to attain, and externally they seek nothing. They are not mentally bound to the Way, nor are they tied to karma. They are free of thought and action; they neither cultivate nor attain certification; they do not pass through the various stages, and yet they are highly revered. This is the meaning of the Way."**

Sutra commentary:

This section details the wisdom of the Buddhist Sages (Arhats and above). The sagehood fruitions are different but the principles they realize are the same. How so? The difference is in the depth of their understanding.

**The Buddha said, "Those who have left the home-life and become Sramanas cut off desire:**

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Buddhist cultivation is essentially to lighten the load. Desire is to seek pleasure. The mind hopes and seeks for pleasure. Desires bog down one's practice. For instance, while sitting in Chan: thoughts arise as a result of desires and attachments.

In the secular life, people are engaged in the pursuit of fulfilling their desires. In contrast, left-home people chose to do just the opposite: lessen desires. One lessens desires by gradually cutting off desires for things that one does not really need. For example, when I was a novice monk, I was helping a bhikshu fix something in the monastery. He was newly ordained. We lacked some tools and therefore we hopped on his car to go to the hardware store to buy them. He paid for them from his own money. When we came back, the head monk called us in and gave us a good scolding. He said that monks were not like lay people. We should not go out and buy things. We needed to learn to make do. Nor can we drop hints to the laity so that they "volunteer" to offer to buy them for us. I'm still very grateful for that lesson. To this date, I still try to follow that venerable monk's teaching: do everything myself and learn to make do. That is to lessen desires.

Desire can be of three kinds:

1. Good desires **善欲**: desire for good things.
2. Evil desires **惡欲**: evil designs.
3. Neutral desires **無記欲**: neither good nor bad, such as when we dream.

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They **renounce love**.

Why does the Buddha separate desire from “love”? Desire is a coarser form of love. Desires springs from love. Notice the progression here. We start with cutting off desires before we can get to the heart of it: love.

What is love? That is that bond between people. In particular, it refers to sexual desire and emotional love. Both are pretty sticky. Physical love drains us while emotional love clouds our mind.

What are we to do with love? It depends on who you are.

For ordinary folk, to love is to be human. To be loved and to be able to love are just our inherent rights. For many, the quest for love is equivalent to the quest for happiness. People are simply miserable when they lack love (whether they are willing to admit it or not!) In addition, sexual gratification is one of the most wonderful things in life!

For left home people, it's not the same. They understand that love is what binds people together and causes them to revolve in the sea of birth and death, ceaselessly. The only way to escape is to sever love. That's why left home people choose to “renounce love”.

They choose to renounce love for their spouse, children, parents, brothers and sisters, lovers, neighbors etc. They know that they are certainly entitled to love. Yet, it's better to cut it off because it gets in the

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way of cultivation. And even after they've become left home people, they still need to continue to renounce all kinds of love until they obtain liberation.

However, do not think that we left home people are weird and ignorant because we renounce love. Trust me, left home people learn to sacrifice small and selfish love for gigantic and generous love. We only renounce the small in order to seize the large.

**And recognize the source of their minds:** once they are less confused by love, they begin to understand the workings of their minds. (心源: nature).

It's easier said than done.

Before leaving the home life, we are used to thinking and scheming to get an edge. After we leave the home life, those habit energies are very hard to undo.

That's why our training program emphasizes work and study before doing Chan (meditation). Case in point, I started teaching a lay woman to do Chan. She's very smart and a devout Buddhist. She loves to volunteer and has been helping at temples for over a decade. She finally went to our temple and asked for help with her ailment. I taught her how to meditate and it went away after two months. That's how blessed and talented she was. Do you know what she thinks of Chan? She finds that sitting there and doing nothing is just so hard. She gets bored!

And that is part of the training. Patiently endure getting bored until you understand why you are bored.

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You patiently sit there and observe how your mind works: what makes it move.

This is also called back-tracking. We observe how our mind moves. As long as we don't give up (e.g. out of "boredom"), we have the chance to trace it all the way back to the "source of the mind".

For those of you who are impatient and can't wait to know the source of the mind ... you'll have to wait. Because even if I tell you about it, it's only the source of my mind, it's not yours.

You're still impatient? Can't wait?

Ok, it's no secret: it came from True Emptiness.

Now that you know, you'll really have to cultivate to find out what it looks like. Believe me; it is well worth the effort! How do I know? I don't. I just believe in my teachers and the venerated sages. They all say so.

**They penetrate the Buddha's profound principles and awaken to the unconditioned Dharma:** Buddhist teachings are very "profound". The more gongfu you have the more you'll penetrate the concepts and "principles".

Someone asked Great Master Xuan Hua, "Why did the Buddha teach only Four Truths, not five?" He answered, "Because in the Four Noble Truths are contained the rest of the Mahayana teachings that he expounded later through the Lotus and Maha Nirvana sutras".

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Bodhisattvas can readily explain Mahayana principles buried under the Hinayana teachings. That's why true Buddhists do not differentiate between Hinayana and Mahayana. There is only one Buddhism: One Vehicle.

Sages “awaken” to the unconditioned (“dharma”): they comprehend with their mind and experience it with their body. Notice that in section 1, the Buddha used the word “understand” (the unconditioned). Here he uses “awaken”. To understand is with the conscious mind. To awaken is to realize with your true mind. If you want to know the difference, look it up in the Shurangama sutra.

What is the “unconditioned?” It means not created (from the mind) or acted (out with the mouth or body) **無造作**. (Nor is it not created.) It is the opposite of “conditioned”: created or acted on from causes and conditions.

What are conditions? They are aiding causes for the creation of something. For example, if the seeds are the (direct) causes for the growth of a tree, then the tree also requires aiding causes (conditions) such as water, fertilizer, weeding, sun etc. Therefore, a tree is a conditioned dharma. It arises from conditions without which it would not come into being.

We preserved the “acted” part of the original definition from the Chinese because it denotes another aspect of the conditioned, namely that of coming from our mind, being acted on by our mind. The more

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we investigate the BuddhaDharma, the more chances we will have to investigate this “acting” concept.

Conditioned dharmas are characterized by production and extinction (生滅), change and transformation (變化). On the other hand, unconditioned dharmas are absolute (絕對) and permanently dwelling (常住).

Simply put, everything that you can perceive with your sense organs is a conditioned dharma. Only our Buddha Nature is unconditioned.

Ultimately, free yourself from duality by awakening to the Unconditioned Dharma (which is not dependent on anything).

**Internally they have nothing to attain, and externally they seek nothing:**

This refers to sages of the fourth fruition and higher. They enlighten to the emptiness of the self. If “internally” there is no self, who is there to attain? There is no one who can attain, internally.

Externally, they can see that everything (all conditioned dharmas) are false. Everything will change and will be transformed (come into existence from nowhere). This is true wisdom: they can see through things and put them down.

This is not that easy. When I explained about the self being empty, one of my engineer disciples jokingly commented: “I’m certainly willing to accept that I’m intrinsically empty; and that my wife also is, as

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long as she still cooks for me”. In his case, the wife is empty but the delicious food she cooks is not. He is still “seeking” externally.

The Buddha fears that some advanced cultivators might misunderstand him. That’s why he quickly added: **They are not mentally bound to the Way.**

At a higher level, unlike the Arhats who still see there is a Nirvana that can be attained, Bodhisattvas understand that there is nothing that can be attained. That’s the difference between Arhats and Bodhisattvas. Arhats still seek Nirvana, Bodhisattvas do not.

### **Nor are they tied to karma:**

Karma is Sanskrit for action or creation 造作. It’s anything created from our mind, body or mouth.

Wise people are not “tied to karma”: with wisdom one has clarity of mind:

1. Not to create bad karma
2. Not to be confused by karmic retributions.

**They are free of thought and action:** their conscious mind ceases to cause trouble. They no longer need to instigate “thought and action”. They have neither false thinking nor improper behavior. This is true wisdom.

**They neither cultivate nor attain certification:** they cultivate and yet it’s as if they are not cultivating. For us, cultivation is so unnatural (as opposed to watching TV or gabbing with friends on the phone). For them, it’s just being. Please do not think that they

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take it easy! They work very hard indeed (as compared to us) and yet they feel they are not working.

Ask them why they cultivate. They probably say that they don't know. Ask the Arhats why they cultivate, they will say it's because they want to certify to Nirvana. Ask the Bodhisattvas why they cultivate, they'll tell you that they just do, without hoping to "attain" anything. They've awakened to True Emptiness.

Lao Zi says: the Way, it cannot be left even for a moment. If it can be then it's not the Way **道也者，不可以須臾離也，可離非道也**. Once you understand, you no longer discern between the Way and not the Way, between cultivation and non-cultivation. There is no more discrimination.

**They do not pass through the various stages** (this refers to sudden enlighten) **and yet they are highly revered.**

"Stages" refers to the various milestones from the position of common mortals to sagehood, passing through the first four dhyanas, the four samadhis, the four fruitions of the Arhat Vehicle, the 42 positions of the Bodhisattva Vehicle etc.

Hinayana understands emptiness through the extinction of causes (the Four Noble Truths). Therefore these practitioners go "through the various stages" before they reach emptiness. But this emptiness is not yet True Emptiness. Those who have attained to the Middle Way no longer see stages that must be

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passed through to get to Buddhahood. That's why "they are highly revered" by the lower realms for their wisdom and virtue.

"Highly revered" is one possible translation of the original Chinese text "而自崇最". Another possible translation is "naturally attain the highest fruition". At their level, they naturally progress toward the Buddha fruition.

**This is the meaning of the Way.** Such is the Dharma for attaining the Buddha Way. Please double check with this section again as you progress through your cultivation. It lists out very important milestones!

When I was still a lay person, I remember asking a left home disciple of Great Master Xuan Hua what he did as a monk. He proudly said: "I eat, I sleep and I drink. That's all I do".

I was most intrigued because he was putting on such airs of great importance. And not surprisingly, his retinue appeared to be so obsequious and reverent toward him.

Now as I look back, I probably should have replied to him, "And you should put an end to the self". That's why many of us choose to leave the home life.

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Section 3:

**SEVERING LOVE AND RENOUNCING GREED**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "Shaving their hair and beards, they become Sramanas who accept the Dharmas of the Way. They renounce worldly wealth and riches. In receiving alms, they accept only what's enough. They take only one meal a day at noon, pass the night beneath trees, and are careful not to seek more than that. Love and desire are what cause people to be stupid and dull."**

Sutra commentary:

This section extols the ascetic practices that enable certification to the Way. It is intended to rule out laziness (since the prior section states that cultivators should be "Not doing, not certifying").

**The Buddha said, "Shaving their hair and beards,** cutting off attachment to appearances and looks. This saves a lot of money that we'd have to spend on barbers and hairdressers. At a more serious level, it can do away with a lot of afflictions associated with hair and beards.

In the old days, there was a belief that hair and beards is god given or at least given to us by our parents. Therefore we should not touch them. Actually,

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they tend to make us vainer.

**They become Sramanas who accept the Dharmas of the Way:** when “they become sramanas”, they take on a transcendental appearance and comportment. In receiving the “Dharmas of the Way”, they take on a new life style. They are then motivated by the desire to put an end to birth and death. They are taught about the 37 wings of enlightenment that can help them accomplish the Way. The Buddhist Way is that of poverty. That’s why the sramanas **renounce worldly wealth and riches** which make one tend to wish to hoard. They no longer seek for personal comfort and luxury. Left home people should be careful not to take pride in the size of their temple or bank account or nice cars.

**In receiving alms, they accept only what's enough** to quell their hunger and nourish their body. Left home people have alms bowl with specific sizes. Traditionally, left home people used to go on alms rounds to collect food offerings. They usually stop accepting food offerings when their alms bowl is full. They usually stop at seven consecutive houses for food offerings. If they receive none, they simply go back with their empty bowls. The smart ones will “*accept only what’s enough*” to get their fill.

**They take only one meal a day at noon.** The Buddha decreed that his left home should not eat past noon. They usually eat lunch, no dinner or breakfast. However, out of compassion, the Buddha later allowed his left home disciples to eat breakfast too if

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they so choose to. These is because for some left home people, eating one meal a day makes them look too emaciated and lose too much weight, potentially having adverse effects on their general health.

According to the Buddhist sutra (毗羅三昧經), a king asks the Buddha why he eats at noon. The Buddha replied that gods eat in the morning, the Buddhas of the three periods of time eat at noon, animals eat in the afternoon and the ghosts and spirits eat in the evening. Therefore, left home people eat at noon to plant the seeds for Buddhahood.

The Vinaya describes the suffering of over-eating:

1. Having to go to the toilet often 大便數.
2. Having to urinate often 小便數.
3. Sleepiness 多睡.
4. Excess weight causing myriad health problems 身重不堪修養.
5. Many troubles and difficulties with the digestion 多患不消化.

At night, Sanghans used to **pass the night beneath trees**. This is one of the 12 ascetic practices. They used to live out in the open. They took shelter under trees, making sure not to linger more than two nights so as to avoid creating attachments/conditions.

In the old (and glorious days), left people were known as:

One bowl for 1,000 families' food, the solitary sanghan travels 10,000 miles 一鉢千家飯，孤僧

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**萬里遊.** Meaning the left home person uses only one bowl to beg from a thousand households and travels by himself ten thousand miles (actually it is Chinese li which is about thirteen US miles).

### **And are careful not to seek more than that.**

The rule of thumb for left home people is to: “lessen desires and know contentment”. We “are careful” to minimize our daily needs and learn to be content with just enough. We resist self-indulgence and avoid storing things because it feeds the greedy mind. That’s why left-home people were taught not to cook for themselves; they did not need to store things for the food preparations; leftovers are given to others or the animals.

Why? Because **love and desire are what cause people to be stupid and dull.** Inside: stupid; dull: covered by external things.

It’s not unlike an old mirror. In order to restore its original brightness and clarity, one needs to clean and re-polish.

People keep asking about eating meat. Yes, the Buddha decreed that there are five kinds of meat that left home people can eat. Five pure meats:

1. Not see killed for me
2. Not hear killed for me
3. Not suspect killed for me
4. Natural death
5. Killed by predators.

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In this day and age, if you are a left home person and still make excuses for eating meat and fish, perhaps from citing one of the above five reasons. These five types of pure meats simply are expedients that the Buddha used to allow us to cultivate. It is applicable for those who live on regions where it is not possible to do agriculture or plant things.

For those proponents of eating meat and eggs, I have bad news for you: you are still so attached to flavor: how can you possibly get anywhere with your cultivation?

Bon appétit!

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**Section 4:**

**CLARIFYING GOOD AND EVIL**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "Living beings may perform Ten Good Deeds or Ten Evil Deeds. What are the ten? Three are done with the body, four are done with the mouth, and three are done with the mind. The three done with the body are killing, stealing, and lust. The four done with the mouth are duplicity, harsh speech, lies, and frivolous speech. The three done with the mind are jealousy, hatred, and stupidity. Thus these ten are not in accord with the Way of Sages and are called the Ten Evil Deeds. To put a stop to these evils is to perform the Ten Good Deeds."**

Sutra commentary:

Good and evil have no fixed nature: they are defined relative to each other, like flipping one's hand. Be careful not to think it's OK to create offenses because one should be "not attached to karma" (in prior section). Karmas can be the causes for the attaining of the Way or for us to revolve in the reincarnation wheel.

**The Buddha said, "Living beings may perform Ten Good Deeds or Ten Evil Deeds with their body**

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(three), **mouth** (four) and **mind** (three). These deeds are the seeds for reincarnations, making us revolve in the Wheel.

“Living beings” : have multiple meanings:

1. Born from the multitudes of dharmas 眾法生. We are the aggregation of past causes so that now we can get our body to undergo our retribution whether good or bad.

2. Born from the multitude of species 眾類生. We cycle through the six (common mortal) realms of existence: from the hells to the heavens.

3. Undergo the multitude of births and deaths 受眾多生死. We are called living beings because we can't escape revolving in the wheel.

“Body karmas”:

**Killing**: take another living being's life.

**Stealing**: take what is not given.

**Lust**: deviant sex:

1. With wrong partner.

2. Wrong process: a. time (e.g. daytime, when sick), b. wrong place (outside of bedroom), c. wrong orifice, d. wrong frequency.

“Mouth karmas”:

**Duplicity**: misrepresent the facts to two parties with the intention to cause them to fight each other.

**Harsh speech**: cursing, scolding, slander etc.

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**Lies:** mouth and mind are in contradiction. You say something that you clearly know that is untrue.

**Frivolous speech:** unprincipled or unnecessary words e.g. sophistry.

“Mind karmas”:

**Jealousy:** dislike other’s good fortune or good things, invoking unwholesome retributions.

**Hatred:** harbor rancor or weave up anger. It’s like a fire that can harm others.

**Stupidity:** not aware/understand of manifestations or principles as if blind. For example, they take suffering as bliss.

The seven body and mouth karmas belong to offenses creation. The three mind karmas belong to afflictions.

**Thus these ten are not in accord with the Way of Sages and are called the Ten Evil Deeds.** The above-mentioned “ten evil deeds” cause one to fall, and are thus “not in accord with the Way of Sages”. Sages do not approve of these actions because they are done from delusions, will surely bring on future retributions of suffering and bind us to the triple realm.

**To put a stop to these evils is to perform the Ten Good Deeds.** To be good is to do no evil. In other words, the absence of malice is goodness. To act in contradiction to the principles is to do evil.

At the phenomenon (manifestation) level:

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1. Lower grade goodness: cause for asura realm,
2. Middle grade goodness: cause for human realm,
3. Superior grade goodness: cause for god realm.

At the noumenon (principle) level:

1. Emptiness Truth goodness: cause for Two Vehicles,
2. Mundane Truth goodness: cause for Bodhisattva Vehicle,
3. Middle Truth goodness: cause for Buddha Vehicle.

	<b>Flower Store (World) Retribution</b>	<b>Fruition Retribution</b>
<b>1. NO KILLING</b>		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Will give universally to all beings without fear</li> <li>2. Often have compassionate thoughts towards all beings</li> <li>3. Permanently sever all anger habits</li> <li>4. Free from illness</li> <li>5. Longevity</li> </ol>	<p>Attain the Buddha's as-one-wishes, self-mastery and lifespan</p>

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	<p>6. Constantly protected by non-humans</p> <p>7. Free from nightmares</p> <p>8. Will eradicate the entanglement of enmity and free from all hatred</p> <p>9. Free from the dreaded evil destinies</p> <p>10. Reborn to the heavens after death</p>	
<b>2. NO STEALING</b>		
	<p>1. Will accumulate wealth</p> <p>2. Many love and be mindful of</p> <p>3. Humans will not slight</p> <p>4. Be praised from the ten directions</p> <p>5. Free from worries of being injured</p> <p>6. One's good name widespread</p>	<p>Attain the pure great wisdom.</p>

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	<p>7. Fearless in the multitudes</p> <p>8. Wealthy, have good complexion, safety &amp; bliss</p> <p>9. Always mindful of giving</p> <p>10. Reborn to the heaven after death</p>	
<b>3. NO SEXUAL MISCONDUCT</b>		
	<p>1. One's faculties are all regulated and well-adjusted.</p> <p>2. Free from turmoil and excitement</p> <p>3. Be praised and extolled by the world</p> <p>4. One's wife cannot be encroached upon by anybody</p>	<p>Attain the Buddha's hallmark of a concealed organ.</p>
<b>4. NO LYING</b>		
	<p>1. One's mouth is always purified and fragrant</p> <p>2. Trusted and obeyed by the world</p>	<p>Attain to the true speech of the Tathagata</p>

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	<p>3. One's words are always sincere and certified</p> <p>4. Always comfort beings with loving words</p> <p>5. Mind will obtain superior bliss</p> <p>6. Faultless and always joyful</p> <p>7. Respected and venerated by humans and gods</p> <p>8. Superior wisdom</p>	
<b>5. NO DOUBLE-TONGUE</b>		
	<p>1. Free from bodily harm</p> <p>2. Retinues cannot be broken</p> <p>3. Always being trusted and accorded with</p> <p>4. Able to practice the Dharma</p> <p>5. Able to meet Good Knowing Advisor</p>	<p>Demons and externalists will not harm, Bodhi retinues</p>

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<b>6. NO HARSH SPEECH</b>		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. One's words will always be proper</li><li>2. One's words will be beneficial</li><li>3. One's words will accord with the principles</li><li>4. One's words will be beautiful and wonderful</li><li>5. One's words will be accepted by others</li><li>6. One's words will be credible</li><li>7. One's words will not be ridiculed</li><li>8. One's words will be cherished and loved by others</li></ol>	Attain the Brahma's sound of the Tathagata
<b>7. NO FRIVOLOUS SPEECH</b>		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Will be loved and respected by the wise</li><li>2. Be able to answer questions truthfully</li></ol>	Attain the Buddhas' prediction and nothing is ever in

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	3. Unsurpassed virtue	vain
<b>8. NO GREED &amp; JEALOUSY</b>		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Self-mastery of the three karmas and faculties are perfect.</li><li>2. At ease with material possessions, enemies and thieves cannot encroach</li><li>3. At ease with blessings and merits</li><li>4. At ease with position or status</li><li>5. Will have more than one seeks</li></ol>	Will be respect and venerated by worthy beings in all three realms
<b>9. NO HATRED &amp; ANGER</b>		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. No harmful and angry mind</li><li>2. No hatred</li><li>3. No desire to fight and sue</li><li>4. Character is direct,</li></ol>	Will never be disliked when seen

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	<p>gentle and harmonious</p> <p>5. Obtain the sages' mind of kindness</p> <p>6. Mindful of benefiting all beings</p> <p>7. One's appearance will be upright and adorned</p> <p>8. Soon be reborn to the Brahma World</p>	
<b>10. NO DEVIANT VIEWS</b>		
	<p>1. Will attain true goodness and bliss</p> <p>2. Will deeply believe in cause and effect</p> <p>3. Will take refuge with the triple Jewels</p> <p>4. Will have a straight mind and the proper views</p> <p>5. Will often be reborn as humans or gods</p> <p>6. Blessings and wisdom increase and superior</p>	<p>Obtain spiritual powers and self-mastery</p>

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	<p>7. Will often leave the deviant paths</p> <p>8. View of body will not arise</p> <p>9. Will abide in unobstructed views</p> <p>10. Will not encounter any difficulties</p>	
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Section 5:

**REDUCING THE SEVERITY OF OFFENSES**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "If a person has many offenses and does not repent of them, but cuts off all thought of repentance, the offenses will engulf him, just as water returning to the sea will gradually become deeper and wider. If a person has offenses and, realizing they are wrong, reforms and does good, the offenses will dissolve by themselves, just as a sick person who begins to perspire will gradually be cured."**

Sutra commentary:

This section introduces the Buddhist repentance Dharma. One needs to repent offenses if one wishes to start anew.

To repent is to admit one's fault and make changes.

**The Buddha said, "If a person has many offenses and does not repent of them:** if a person has a multitude (three or more; meaning many) of offenses and yet chooses not to repent of them. Occasionally, we are not aware that we make mistakes. Typically, we all know when we commit offenses. This is what people normally do (saying we're not Saints!) Why

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exhibit one's own shortcomings?

To "repent" is to:

1. Admit it (make it known, especially with others),
2. Make changes to remedy situation.

To admit it is to recognize that we have leaks, flaws or "outflows." In other words, we are incurring losses. The advantage of admitting it brings light to the problem: other people's scrutiny creates a thorough examination of the problem.

Once we understand the nature of the problem, then the next step is to plug the leak or stop the loss (that golden business rule). The beauty of publicizing our fault is that now we have to answer to all the concerned parties until they are satisfied with the fix.

**But cuts off all thought of repentance:** thinking that we can get away with it. Here the Buddha describes a most common reaction for most people: "immediately" or "automatically" cover up or practice denial.

**The offenses will engulf him, just as water returning to the sea will gradually become deeper and wider.** The Buddha uses an analogy to describe the consequence of not repenting of one's offenses. To refuse to repent is to allow one to continue to create offenses. Eventually, these offenses are like water running into the sea, making it gradually become deeper and wider. We dig ourselves a hole dee-

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per and deeper until we can no longer get out of. Danger increases imperceptibly until one gets trapped or loses one's life.

Lighter offenses: when there is no intention to commit. Offenses do not come from the outside (Avatamsaka Sutra: “not from the East, not from the South, West or North, not from the four intermediate directions, but from upside-down thinking and accumulate in the mind 菩薩知諸業，不從東方來，不從南西北四維上下來，而共積集止住於心，但從顛倒生，無有住處”).

However, **if a person has offenses and, realizing they are wrong, reforms and does good, the offenses will dissolve by themselves.** If once can realize that one is wrong (one is somewhat wise here). One brings forth the thought of repentance (admit and confront one's errors) and “reforms” one's ways: stop doing evil and do only good.

Mahayana has many wonderful repentance dharmas to help us repent and therefore make our offenses “dissolve by themselves”. They will be erased and we're whole again: the leaks have been plugged.

It's **just as a sick person who begins to perspire will gradually be cured.** Perspiration is the analogy for repentance dharmas: it helps expel toxins from our system and thus cure us from all sorts of ailments.

Wonderful, wonderful Dharma that is counter intuitive. Why it is not taught yet? No one wants to admit one's faults, especially the grave ones!! It takes

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fortitude and high morals to be able to utilize this Dharma.

Confucius says: I resolve to:

1. Study at the age of fifteen 吾十有五，而志於學，
2. Be self-supporting at the age of thirty 三十而立，
3. Have no more confusion at the age of forty 四十而不惑，
4. Understand heaven's command (and my role in it at fifty) 五十而知天命，
5. Have no afflictions upon hearing others' words at the age of sixty 六十而耳順，
6. Can follow my heart's desire at seventy and yet not violate the rules 七十而從心所欲，不逾矩。

As you can see, even for a sage like Confucius, it takes quite a while (he had to cultivate from the age of 15 to 70) before he is free from errors. The West has a saying: "to err is to be human". Let's be more humble, learn to use the repentance dharma and purify ourselves.

The repentance dharma is among the ten limitless practices advocated by Universal Worthy Bodhisattva in order to practice the Bodhisattva path. It allows us to wipe the slate clean and start anew after we make mistakes.

**Section 6:**

**TOLERATING EVIL-DOERS AND AVOIDING  
HATRED**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "When an evil person hears about your goodness and intentionally comes to cause trouble, you should restrain yourself and not become angry or blame him. Then the one who has come to do evil will do evil to himself."**

Sutra commentary:

Therefore, the Buddha warns us against dwelling on negative reactions. Ultimately, good will prevail over evil. Stay on the right side!

**The Buddha said, "When an evil person hears about your goodness and intentionally comes to cause trouble. When you decide to do good, usually, the test immediately comes.**

My students used to come and complain to me: I've been doing good as you taught us, how come I still get in trouble? I would answer: they come to hassle you so that you can become better and do even more good.

The nature of the test is this: it's designed to disturb 擾 you and/or to create confusion 亂 in your

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mind.

If you can recognize that it's a test, **you should restrain yourself and not become angry or blame him**. Learn to “restrain yourself”. This is translated from the Chinese 禁忌, to prohibit and stop oneself. We should learn to prohibit ourselves from making mistakes or commit evil no matter how justified it may seem. Furthermore, we should also stop any evil we've already started to commit (as soon as we become aware of it).

“And not become angry or blame him”, don't lose your cool; do not retaliate or lose your head. You become angry because you can't get satisfaction. Another common reaction is to blame others for the problem. Have you ever noticed that whenever you lose your temper, it is always because it is someone else is at fault?

Let **the one who has come to do evil will do evil to himself**. Like one who comes fully loaded to pick a fight. If you don't engage, what is she going to do with the built-up energy? Most likely, they misuse it and end up getting in trouble.

It's like within a bright mirror comes an ugly face, it scares itself without the mirror having to do anything about it.

The typical approach would be to learn to be patient and not lose our temper. No matter how difficult it is, we should learn to be even more patient and not get angry. That is the patience paramita.

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Another approach that I like to teach my pupils is to cede 讓. It means to allow your opponent have his/her way. This evokes in my mind that Chinese virtue: yielding 讓.

What is the difference between being patient versus yielding? One can be patient but one tends to resent it. I'm trying to teach my students to yield, take a loss and NOT BECOME RESENTFUL. Once we've paid up our debts, the problem will go away by itself. To put up a fight or to be resentful only encourages our creditors to linger a while longer.

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Section 7:

**EVIL RETURNS TO THE DOER**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "There was a person who, upon hearing that I observe the Way and practice great humane kindness, intentionally came to berate me. I was silent and did not reply. When he finished abusing me, I asked, If you are courteous to people and they do not accept your courtesy, the courtesy returns to you, does it not?"**

**"It does," he replied. I said: Now you are scolding me, but I do not receive it, so the misfortune returns to you and must remain with you. It is as inevitable as an echo that follows a sound, or as a shadow that follows a form. In the end you cannot avoid it. Therefore, be careful not to do evil.' "**

Sutra commentary:

The Buddha further elaborates the previous section by giving his personal example.

**The Buddha said, "There was a person who, upon hearing that I observe the Way and practice great humane kindness, intentionally came to berate me. Note here that the Buddha states that even though he already accomplished Wonderful Enlightenment, he still "observes the Way": he still upholds**

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precepts. And the Buddha was practicing “great humane kindness”. He lived by the principles and practiced great kindness (giving joy to others).

The Buddha’s reputation spread far and wide. His externalist competitors lost a lot of disciples and colleagues to Buddhism. As a result, there were a lot of people who were jealous of the Buddha’s success.

Therefore, once someone “intentionally came to berate” the Buddha. This would be a test to see if He can still observe the Way and practice great humane kindness toward someone who criticizes him.

What did the Buddha do? He **was silent and did not reply**. He avoids adding fuel to fire. He stays “thus, thus unmoving.” This is when you need real Samadhi power!

**When he finished abusing me, I asked, If you are courteous to people and they do not accept your courtesy, the courtesy returns to you, does it not? It does,' he replied** After that person finishes scolding the Buddha (i.e. all test are limited in time), the Buddha points out to him that when one is courteous one does not lose one’s courtesy even though it is not accepted.

**I said: Now you are scolding me, but I do not receive it, so the misfortune returns to you and must remain with you.** Similarly, since the Buddha did not accept the scolding, it naturally reverts back to its originator (return to sender).

**It is as inevitable as an echo that follows a**

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**sound, or as a shadow that follows a form.** Such recoil is easily observed just like shadows or echoes.

**In the end you cannot avoid it. Therefore, be careful not to do evil.** Not only does the evil return to the evil-doer (instantaneously; force=reaction!) but the bad person already bore the brunt of the consequences already: not take his garbage and make it yours. Please be careful not to do evil!

In the past, there was an Indian lady who treated her mother-in-law very well in front of her husband. As a result, her husband totally trusted her. She however had a bad habit: she liked other men's attention. Her mother-in-law's presence in the household therefore made it difficult to indulge herself.

She thus had a talk with her husband. She suggested to him that since the old lady had difficulties moving about because of her advanced age, it'd be best to send her to the heavens to put an early end her suffering and difficulties while allowing her to enjoy heavenly blessings. The husband naively asked his wife on how to about it.

The devious wife said that the Brahma religion has a fire pit dharma that can help send people to the heavens.

So they constructed a big fire pit that belled out fire and dense smoke and brought the old woman to the edge of the pit to carry out the ceremonies. The evil daughter-in-law then sneaked up to her and pushed the old lay into the fire pit.

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Perhaps the old woman's time was not up yet, she fell into an area of the pit that had no fire. By the time she managed to climb out of it, it was totally dark. She could not find her way home in the pitch darkness. She therefore climbed on top of a tree to pass the night. Then two burglars came along to the tree, carrying with them the many jewels they just looted from the village. The old woman made some noise which scared these two burglars away.

The following day, she climbed down and discovered the loot. She grabbed a few and managed to make it back to her son's household by dark.

Her son was very happy to see her again but the daughter-in-law was scared out of her wits thinking that it was her mother-in-law's ghost coming to claim her life.

The old lady did not say a word. She opened her bag and brought out the gems. The daughter-in-law's greedy mind got the better of her. She thought that the old lady went to the heavens and came back to help them out. The wicked wife immediately claimed credit for pushing her mother-in-law into the fire pit.

The old woman understood it all and coolly told her daughter-in-law: "you too should try the fire pit dharma because the truth of the matter is that there are a lot more of these gems where I came from".

The wicked wife greedily agreed and threw herself into a fire pit and died.

Evil people invariably end up harming themselves!

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Confucian books quote: 儒書亦言：One can evade heaven's mistake, but one cannot avoid one's own mistake 「天作孽猶可違，自作孽不可逭」。 Humans are under the command of the heavens. We can avoid getting into trouble because they sometimes make mistakes. However, if we create offenses, then we will for sure have to undergo the retributions.

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**Section 8:**

**ABUSING OTHERS DEFILE ONESELF**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "An evil person who harms a sage is like one who raises his head and spits at heaven. Instead of reaching heaven, the spittle falls back on him. It is the same with someone who throws dust against the wind. Instead of going somewhere else, the dust returns to defile his own body. The sage cannot be harmed. Misdeeds will inevitably destroy the doer."**

Sutra commentary:

This section admonishes evil doers to refrain from harming sages and worthy ones.

**The Buddha said, "An evil person who harms a sage is like one who raises his head and spits at heaven.**

An "evil person" is a person who commits the ten evil deeds. Evil people are particularly jealous of sages and worthy ones (admired by many). Therefore, they often try to "harm" those virtuous individuals.

One could say that he does not have enough wisdom to hurt a sage. He has no wisdom anyway in the first place: why would you wish to harm a sage?

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Sometimes he didn't know that it's a sage. They don't advertise it or wear a sign!

The Buddha demonstrates the futility of such attempts through two analogies: worthy ones are like heaven or the wind.

**It's like one who raises his head and spits at heaven: instead of reaching heaven, the spittle falls back on him.** Worthy ones are like the sky, they cannot be reached with your defilements. Instead the spittle could fall back on him.

The Vietnamese has a saying: that's like spitting blood with your mouth "Ngâm máu phun người", you first defile your mouth with blood before you can even defile your victim.

**It is the same with someone who throws dust against the wind. Instead of going somewhere else, the dust returns to defile his own body.** This second analogy reminds me of kids' actions. I think many of us did at an early age try to throw light things against the wind, just to find out that the wind blew it right back at us.

One can also further extrapolate and say that harboring bad intentions towards others first defiles oneself.

**The sage cannot be harmed.** You could try, but you're wasting your time.

Let me put it this way for those of you who may be too smart for their own good. There is no evil

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force that is strong enough to overcome the forces of goodness.

Ultimately, goodness prevails!

You can be assured that **misdeeds will inevitably destroy the doer**. There is recoil in all offenses: the more vicious the attempt, the more damaging the recoil. If sages and worthy ones can be destroyed, they are not real sages or worthy ones!

Common wisdom has it: one must bear the consequences of one's actions **自作自受**, trying to harm worthy ones will ultimately bring one's own demise.

To Westerners, this may seem to be nonsense. If you know that they have evil designs and are intent upon inflicting harm to you and your loved ones are you going to stand by and do nothing?

Proponents of the preemptive strike theory would probably feel justified to take the initiative and take their opponents out of commission. They therefore would have sided with Bush 43's occupation of Iraq.

The Buddhists adopt a different approach. It is OK to defend oneself but it is not OK to attack.

This section is about sages not getting hurt when attacked. How so?

It's because they have higher gongfu and wisdom than their evil attackers. They therefore can recover quite easily from their injuries and damages. Furthermore, by not taking the initiative and create offenses, they avoid the inevitable recoils.

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What about ordinary people like us? What if our gongfu and wisdom are not good enough?

We should firm up our faith in goodness. To strike first is to create offenses. Have no doubt that we will have pay for the corresponding consequences.

On the other hand, have faith that we are on the side of the principles and wisdom.

I have met many old Vietnamese nuns. They are quite special. They are uneducated and not that bright. Yet their faith is so deep!

One of them is in her seventies. She left the home life when she was still in Vietnam in the 1960s. Back then the temple where she stayed was in the boonies and quite deprived of basic amenities like running water, electricity and toilets.

Furthermore, it had tons of snakes, very poisonous snakes which were known to kill people, including left home people in her temple.

Can you imagine yourself having to go to the outside in the middle of the night?

She also was in charge of offering incense. She told me that one night her instinct told her that the big container where she had to reach inside to fetch the incense stick had snakes inside. But she had to offer incense to the Buddhas.

I said: you did get a sick and poke inside first right?

She said: No. It never crossed my mind.

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Instead, she closed her eyes and silently prayed to GuanYin Bodhisattva. She said: “I am frightened of snakes. GuanYin, please do not let them hurt me because I want to continue to live here and offer incenses.” Then she reached inside the urn and pulled out the incense sticks.

As she pulled out her arm, she saw two sizeable snakes twisting their body around her arm. At that point, amazingly, she calmly used her free hand to uncoil each snake and threw them outside. The poisonous snakes did not even try to bite her!

Needless to say, her faith in GuanYin grew stronger and stronger over the years due to similar responses.

If you are good and intend no harm to others, then you surely can have faith that when need be, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will help and protect you.

By the way, do you know how sages learn to become unharmed by evil people? I believe that they got there by:

1. Having faith in this fact
2. Until sagehood, they refrain from reacting to attacks from evil individuals, thus planting the seeds from the eventual retribution.

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**Section 9:**

**BY RETURNING TO THE SOURCE, YOU FIND  
THE WAY**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "Deep learning and a love of the Way make the Way difficult to attain. When you guard your resolve and revere the Way, the Way is truly great!"**

Sutra commentary:

This section is about the Buddhist wisdom of “hearing, contemplation and cultivation”. In addition to erudition and learning, the Way needs to be cultivated

**The Buddha said, "Deep learning and a love of the Way make the Way difficult to attain.** “Deep learning 博聞” means to be erudite like Ven. Ananda, foremost in erudition. It involves both depth and 博; whereas 聞 refers to learning. In the old days when there were no books or electronic devices, the primary means of teaching is oral.

“And a love of the Way” means to really admire and worship the Way, **make the Way difficult to attain.** One can have great love and admiration for the BuddhaDharma, but unfortunately attaches to marks

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and looks for it in the wrong places (sekk for answers outside of the mind). In that case, it's very difficult to encounter the Dharma or if one encounters it, one cannot savor its depth and wonders. It's like chewing and not be able to swallow!

The Buddha herewith is giving a reminder: the Way must be certified to or realized 證 (as opposed to the common belief that it is to be “learned or understood or researched”). That is the ultimate prize!

**When you guard your resolve and revere the Way, the Way is truly great!**

“Guard your resolve”: many of us made the “resolve” to become attain Bodhi. This is a rather long journey, like it or not. As you plod along, it's not unusual to become discouraged or impatient. That is what we call tests in Buddhism. If you don't cultivate, everything appears to be fine. However, as soon as you resolve to cultivate, the tests come in a flurry. That is the Buddha reminded us to preserve your faith and resolve: thought after thought, do not renounce Bodhi.

The secret of success is in the word “revere 奉”. I teach my disciples about reverence: they are taught to bow to left home people. Isn't that one of the first lessons we teach to our children? To show reverence reveals good breeding. At a deeper level, a reverent mind minimizes the self. From a teacher's perspective, I ignore arrogant people because their cup is too full already!

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How does one revere the Way?

1. Show reverence: learn the Buddhist protocol and ceremonies.
2. Make offerings: plant blessings with Mahayana. It should not be that Mahayana must make offerings to you to draw you to the temples!
3. Take care of, or nurture: help propagate Mahayana. Great Master Xuan Hua brought Mahayana to the West forty years ago. It's still in its infancy. We need to work hard to help solidify its foundation.
4. Follow the teachings: put the teachings into practice. The best way to help propagate Buddhism is to vigorously cultivate it.
5. Have faith in Mahayana: the higher you ascend, the deeper your faith needs to be.

“The Way is truly great!” It is inconceivably wonderful! It is truly beyond words. It's just like that tasty treat; no amount of words can accurately describe its flavor. Similarly, one must cultivate the Way in order to experience its wonders.

If you have enough blessings to revere the Way, you can then obtain a response. The Way is truly great!

We specialize in the Mahayana Pure Land where we cultivate in order to obtain rebirth this very lifetime. Otherwise, if we still revolve in the reincarnation wheel, who knows when we can encounter Mahayana Pure Land Buddhism again!

Some of our followers came to us because they

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have deep faith in Mahayana and prayed to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for help in obtaining rebirth. Some asked to be taught how to practice reciting the Buddha's name. They all came to our small temple with the same common denominator: deep reverence for the Triple Jewel.

It is as my teacher, the late Great Master Xuan Hua said: "those who believe will be saved".

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**Section 10:**

**JOYFUL GIVING BRINGS BLESSINGS**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "When you see someone who is practicing giving, aid him joyfully, and you will obtain vast and great blessings." A Sramana asked, "Is there an end to those blessings?" The Buddha said, "Consider the flame of a single torch. Though hundreds and thousands of people come to light their own torches from it so that they can cook their food and ward off darkness, the first torch remains the same. Blessings, too, are like this."**

Sutra commentary:

We should “rejoice in others’ merit and virtues”: help others do good.

Giving has three:

1. Wealth: provide living beings with means to sustain themselves (their life), to cure their poverty.

2. Dharma: provide living beings with means to sustain their wisdom life.

3. Fearlessness: provide relief to alleviate their fears and worries.

**The Buddha said, "When you see someone who**

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**is practicing giving, aid him joyfully.** The act of giving makes you more liked but it's important to develop the joy in helping others. Happiness is shared, share joyfully and joyfully share.

**And you will obtain vast and great blessings.** To practice giving generates a lot of blessings. To aid others in practicing giving, brings joy to all involved, generates even more blessings.

**A Sramana asked, "Is there an end to those blessings?"** Aren't they stealing blessings from me? If they assist me in practicing giving, don't I have to share my blessings with them?

In the past, there were two people who offered a flower to the Buddha. One person personally made the offer. The other, gave the flower to someone else who offered it to the Buddha. Maitreya Bodhisattva was asked and replied: to give oneself, you'll become a PratyekaBuddha; to help others give: a Buddha.

**The Buddha said, "Consider the flame of a single torch.** The Buddha uses an analogy to make the point. It's like having a torch and allowing others to get fire from it. **Though hundreds and thousands of people come to light their own torches from it.**

**So that they can cook their food and ward off darkness.**

"Cooked food": symbolizes enlightenment. You can't be enlightened without giving!

"Darkness": represents obstructions to your prac-

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tice. There are three:

1. Karmic obstructions
2. Retribution obstructions
3. Afflictions obstructions.

**The first torch remains the same:** the light of the first torch remains just as bright. Not only you have your own blessings, you also generate the blessings of helping others obtain fire and light for their own use. Clearly, the blessings can be limitless if the torch keeps on getting passed: **blessings, too, are like this.**

The Buddha has a disciple named Katyayana 迦旃延. One day, on the way back from his alms bowl round, he encountered a woman wailing by the river bank: she appeared to be very miserable. She was about to throw herself into the river. Katyayana immediately grabbed her and said:

“Old lady, aren’t you feeling well? What troubles and difficulties are you experiencing? Please tell me”.

She glanced at the bhikshu and replied:

“What for? You can’t help me anyway!”

“Of course I can. My teacher, the Buddha always encouraged us to be kind and compassionate and try our all to help others. Please tell me the problem is and I’ll resolve it for you”, said Katyayana.

She thought it over for a moment and said:

“I’m suffering too much from poverty. When I

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was a child, I was sold off. For the past several decades, I've been treated with cruelty. I had to endure scolding and beating: there were no cruel punishments that I did not have to endure. If being alive is this miserable, I might as well kill myself so as to put an end to it." This said, she started to cry again inconsolably.

Katyayana gently told her:

"It's OK! Don't feel so bad. You should know that the reason you're destitute is because you did not cultivate blessings. Now you can still plant blessings, practice giving and will get out of poverty".

She was not convinced:

"You are a left home person and yet are trying to pull my leg. You yourself don't even know what poverty is like. How can you possibly understand my suffering? I've been a slave since I was a child. You want me to practice giving. What do I have to give with? All I have is this broken water vessel in my hand! In fact, it even belongs to my master. What can I use to give with?"

"If you hope for happiness and if you want to have blessings and money, then you must buy wealth. You want to sell off your poverty." Said Katyayana firmly.

"Sell what? Buy what?" said the old woman with her eyes wide open.

"You buy wealth so that you become rich. You

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sell off your poverty so that you end suffering”.

“Practice giving: even this broken water vessel in my hand belongs to my master. What do I give with?”

“You certainly can. Take the vessel to the river and fill it up with water. Then bring it back here and pour the water into my bowl. That’s how you buy wealth and I buy off your poverty.”

The old woman did as instructed. She was immediately born onto the Heaven of the thirty-three 忉利天.

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Section 11:

**THE INCREASE IN MERIT GAINED BY BESTOWING FOOD**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "Giving food to a hundred bad people is not as good as giving food to a single good person. Giving food to a thousand good people is not as good as giving food to one person who holds the Five Precepts. Giving food to ten thousand people who hold the Five Precepts is not as good as giving food to a single Srotaapanna. Giving food to a million Srotaapannas is not as good as giving food to a single Sakridagamin. Giving food to ten million Sakridagamins is not as good as giving food to a single Anagamin. Giving food to a hundred million Anagamins is not as good as giving food to a single Arhat. Giving food to one billion Arhats is not as good as giving food to a single Pratyekabuddha. Giving food to ten billion Pratyekabuddhas is not as good as giving food to a Buddha of the three periods of time. Giving food to a hundred billion Buddhas of the three periods of time is not as good as giving food to a single person who is without thoughts, without dwelling, without cultivation, and without accomplishment."**

Sutra commentary:

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This section discusses the comparative field of blessings or “multiplier effect”.

Fields of blessings are of three kinds:

1. Compassionate field of blessings 悲田: out of compassion one gives to those who are suffering or in difficulty. These people are the compassionate field of blessings.

2. Kindness field of blessings 恩田: we give to those to whom we owe kindness such as our parents, teachers, benefactors etc.

3. Reverence field of blessings 敬田: we offer up to those we respect, such as offering to the Triple Jewel.

This section refers to the multiplier effect for the reverence field of blessings.

**The Buddha said, "Giving food to a hundred bad people is not as good as giving food to a single good person.** Giving food represents the act of giving. Giving to a bad person helps propagate evil doing. Conversely, giving to a good person, helps bring good to others. Henceforth, the Buddha gave the stated 100:1 multiplier. Please note that although there is merit and virtues in the act of giving, there is a multiplier effect from the karma that the recipient creates herself. Yes, giving is meritorious, even when you give to a bad person.

**Giving food to a thousand good people is not as good as giving food to one person who holds the**

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**Five Precepts.** The Five precepts are:

1. No killing,
2. No stealing,
3. No sexual misconduct,
4. No lying and
5. No taking of intoxicants.

People who receive the Five Precepts have already taken refuge with the Triple Jewel. This double layer protection increases the associated multiplier.

Please notice that being good (practicing the ten good deeds) is inferior (by a factor of ten) to observing the Five Precepts. In fact, it is said that if one can purely uphold the Five Precepts, one can become a sage.

**Giving food to ten thousand people who hold the Five Precepts is not as good as giving food to a single Srotaapanna.** They are called sages in Hinayana because of their superior wisdom. They are the first stage Arhats who got there by cutting off the 88 view delusions. It's most difficult to do: that's why there is a "ten thousand" multiplier.

They are also called "entering the flow" of sagehood: meaning they can naturally progress toward sagehood with a lot less efforts than we can. How come? Unlike us, they know where there is a sagehood river that they can use. That's why it's not a bad idea to follow their lead: they certainly know where they're heading.

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First stage Arhats have to come back to the human realm seven times before they attain Fourth stage Arhatship.

**Giving food to a million Srotaapannas is not as good as giving food to a single Sakridagamin.** A “Sakridagamin” is a second stage Arhat. He/she has cut off the first six grades of thought delusions of the Desire Realm.

View delusions refer to the fact that we give rise to desire and love when faced with a state.

Thought delusions refer to our giving rise to discriminations because we’re confused about the principles.

In addition to having cut off view delusions, second stage Arhats also have cut off some thought delusions, justifying the “million” multiplier.

Second stage Arhats are also called “once returner”: they have to come back to the human realm once so that they can certify to the fourth fruition of Arhatship.

**Giving food to ten million Sakridagamins is not as good as giving food to a single Anagamin.** The “Anagamin” has put an end to all thought delusions of the Desire Realm. That is the state of the third stage Arhat, who is also called “non-returner”. At the end of his/her life, the Anagamin ascends to the heavens where he/she will certify to the fourth fruition.

It’s “ten million” times more meritorious to give

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to a third stage Arhat than a second stage Arhat.

**Giving food to a hundred million Anagamins is not as good as giving food to a single Arhat.** “Arhat” refers to the fourth fruition of Arhatship. They have incredible wisdom for they no longer have an ego. The “hundred million” multiplier henceforth reflect the incredible difficulty to progress from third to fourth stage Arhatship.

They have severed view and thought delusions in the Triple Realm and thus put an end of birth and death. They are also known as “those with no more to study”.

I’ll provide more important information on the four stages of Arhatship when I explain the Vajra sutra.

**Giving food to one billion Arhats is not as good as giving food to a single Pratyekabuddha.** The “PratyekaBuddhas” wisdom is higher than that of the Arhat. They practice the Twelve Conditioned Links 十二因緣:

1. Ignorance: namely the arising of sexual desire.
2. Action: namely the sexual act.
3. Consciousness: conception takes place. The eighth consciousness arrives.
4. Name and form: the fetus takes form.
5. Six entrances: organs begin to form.
6. Contact: with the external world through the sense organs.

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7. Feeling: from contact with the outside world, feelings arise.

8. Love: for the pleasurable.

9. Grasping: cannot let go.

10. Existence: staging state between bodies.

11. Birth: one is born

12. Death: one dies.

They prefer to retreat to the high mountains or secluded valleys to contemplate the above Dharmas.

When the Buddha is in the world, these cultivators are called “Enlightened to Conditions” 緣覺. When the Buddha is no longer in the world, they are called “Solitarily Enlightened to Conditions” 獨覺.

They have a “one billion” multiplier over the Arhat.

**Giving food to ten billion Pratyekabuddhas is not as good as giving food to a Buddha of the three periods of time.** This refers to the fruition of Buddhahood. For example, Shakyamuni Buddha had to undergo three asamkhyeya kalpas (uncountable number of kalpas) of practice before he became “a Buddha”. This is why to make an offer to a Buddha is “10 billion” times more meritorious than giving to a PratyekaBuddha.

**Giving food to a hundred billion Buddhas of the three periods of time is not as good as giving food to a single person who is without thoughts, without dwelling, without cultivation, and without**

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**accomplishment.** This refers to an enlightened being. He/she is:

“Without thoughts”: his sixth consciousness stopped functioning.

“Without dwelling”: “he can produce a mind that dwells nowhere 應無所住而生其心” as in the Vajra sutra. He needs to rely on nothing.

“Without cultivation”: he cultivates but yet he does not cultivate.

“Without accomplishment”: he sees that there is nothing that can be accomplished.

In other words, he’s pretty close to Buddhahood. But he’s no Buddha.

Then why is there a much higher multiplier (“hundred billion”) than giving to the Buddhas?

Aren’t there inherent contradictions here? Aren’t Buddhas’ merit and virtues supposed to be unsurpassed?

I don’t know because I am no Buddha or one of these types of cultivators. But allow me to offer two possible explanations:

1. Buddhas are known throughout the Dharma Realm. You can be sitting here in the Saha world and make an offering to Amitabha Buddha who is right now ten billion worlds away to the West. It’s that “easy”. However, how do you make an offering to this individual with all these “without’s”? They are incredibly difficult to locate. That’s why the higher

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multiplier. These beings do not advertise themselves. In fact, they don't even "cultivate", how can they possibly feel worthy of our offerings?

2. Another possible reason is that the Buddhas do not need our offerings. These enlightened do so that they can accomplish their cultivation.

If you insist on asking me how to help locate one of these individuals: I can understand your rationale. The return on investment is considerable higher than investing in offering to the Buddhas!

They are Mahayana practitioners and therefore will occasionally come to support Mahayana practitioners. They will come to participate in Mahayana Great Assemblies. Even if you rub elbows with them, you won't be able to recognize them. Regardless, if you make offering to Great Assemblies, you are indirectly making an offering to them when they show up. This is what I admire about the Chinese. Traditionally, they are very generous in their support of Great Assemblies: they offer incense, flower, food, drinks, money, and volunteer their time, abode etc. If they keep it up, they are bound to be able to make an offering to these enlightened beings!

A sanghan asks Dhyana Master Wéi Zhèng: "Ven. Master, where can I find the Way?"

The Master replies: "The Way is right front of you".

"If it's in front of my eyes, then how come I don't see it?"

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“While there is a self, it can’t be seen”.

“With a self, one can’t see the Way, may I ask, does the venerable Master see it?”

“If there is a self and others, neither can see it”.

“If there is no self and others, can it be seen?”

The reply was “If there is no self nor others then why bother seeking to see the Way?”

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Section 12:

**A LIST OF DIFFICULTIES AND AN EXHORTATION TO CULTIVATE**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "People encounter twenty different kinds of difficulties: It is difficult to give when one is poor. It is difficult to study the Way when one has wealth and status. It is difficult to abandon life and face the certainty of death. It is difficult to encounter the Buddhist sutras. It is difficult to be born at the time of a Buddha. It is difficult to be patient with lust and desire. It is difficult to see fine things and not seek them. It is difficult to be insulted and not become angry. It is difficult to have power and not abuse it. It is difficult to come in contact with things and have no thought of them. It is difficult to be vastly learned and well-read. It is difficult to get rid of pride. It is difficult not to slight those who have not yet studied. It is difficult to practice equanimity of mind. It is difficult not to gossip. It is difficult to meet a Good and Wise Adviser. It is difficult to see one's own nature and study the Way. It is difficult to teach and save people according to their potentials. It is difficult to see a state and not be moved by it. It is difficult to have a good understanding of skill-in-means."**

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Sutra commentary:

This section details a list of difficulties: **The Buddha said, "People encounter twenty different kinds of difficulties.**

1. **It is difficult to give when one is poor.** For most of us, it's kind of difficult to imagine this. But how can one spare anything to give when one lacks everything? "Poor" really refers to destitution: one is so utterly poor!

2. **It is difficult to study the Way when one has wealth and status.** How many are there in the audience who is a billionaire? It takes a certain type of character to cultivate.

Wealthy people like to indulge themselves. Cultivators do not.

People with status like to throw their weight around. I remember my president boss who told me that he "liked" being the boss because he could do as he pleased. In contrast, good cultivators prefer to yield to others.

3. **It is difficult to abandon life and face the certainty of death.** Death is scary, perhaps because of its finality ("certainty"). Even the people who tried suicide failed many times before they can succeed.

All living beings instinctively cling to life. When given a choice, it's never easy to "abandon life": the most precious thing we have.

4. **It is difficult to encounter the Buddhist su-**

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**tras.** This difficulty is clearly multi-layered. How many people have heard of Buddhism? Furthermore, how many who heard of Buddhism would not reject it? For those who are open-minded about Buddhism, how many Mahayana Buddhist Sutras can you find in the bookstore; or in the library; in a language that you can understand?

**5. It is difficult to be born at the time of a Buddha.** To be able to meet with the Buddha is to be able to receive his help. It takes a lot of blessings to be able to receive the Buddha's help. Maitreya won't be born for quite a while. Where will you be?

Buddhas only appear in the world when conditions mature. In other words, he has a specific group of living beings who need to be crossed over. That list is pretty exclusive.

**6. It is difficult to be patient with lust and desire.** The sexual attraction between men and women is one of the strongest forces in the Universe.

For those of us who have been on both sides of the fence, once you've experienced the sensual pleasures, it's most difficult to resist them ("be patient" with them).

Furthermore, the world we live in is the Desire Realm. We've purposely came here to satisfy our "desires"!

**7. It is difficult to see fine things and not seek them.** This refers to that subtle tendency of self-indulgence. We secretly aspire for "fine things": the

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best things that money can buy, the most expensive things that we can afford.

In addition, it also alludes to that “keeping up with the Jones” attitude. Seeing others indulge themselves tends to make us “seek” more things.

In California, you could substitute “fine things” with cars. The majority of us venerate cars.

**8. It is difficult to be insulted and not become angry.** You probably don’t have this problem. When “insulted”, you don’t get “angry”, you simply get even instead, right?

To be insulted means that our all-important ego is under attack. I don’t know about you, I admit that it’s rather unpleasant! How dare they?

There is a famous story.

A monk came to a wealthy man for alms. The rich man invited the monk into his house. The layman put down an enormous priceless pink pearl on the table and went away to fetch for food to offer to the monk.

A goose walked by, saw the big pink pearl and thought that it was a piece of meat. It came over and swallowed it.

The wealthy man came back with food and discovered that his prized gem was missing. Naturally, he accused the beggar monk for having taken it, saying: “there are only the two of us here. What kind of monk are you? How could you steal my gem from me?”

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The monk only said: “I did not steal it”

“Who did then?” asked the lay man.

The monk stayed silent because he knew that if he told the man that the goose swallowed the pearl, the goose would lose its life.

This only made the rich man even more furious. He called his servants, ordered them to tie up the monk and started beating him.

The monk took the beating and never uttered a word even when he bleeding heavily from the severe beating.

The goose saw flesh and blood and therefore greedily headed over for a meal. The rich man killed it in one blow in his fit of rage.

It was only then the monk told the wealthy man to locate the pearl in the stomach of the goose.

Can we have enough Way virtue to endure insult and suffering without getting angry?

**9. It is difficult to have power and not abuse it.** A well-known American official Dr. Kissinger, didn't he say that power is the most potent aphrodisiac? Power over the weaker sex is very addictive, right ladies?

Perhaps, you feel that I'm being unfair. That's only because he have no real power yet over others. Trust me, when you do, you will definitely “abuse” it! Why? Until we eliminate our ego, we invariably will choose to serve our ego at the expense of others.

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10. **It is difficult to come in contact with things and have no thought of them.** “To be in contact with things” refers to encountering the dusts. Our six sense organs: ears, eyes, nose, tongue, body and mind come into contact with the externals (sound, form, smell, taste objects, touch objects and things) and our mind gets going and we can’t stop it.

For example, you’ve certainly have had song refrains that suddenly pop into their minds and that you can’t shake off? How about day-dreaming? What about your first love? What about that first time you touched?

Clearly, the list can be quite long.

11. **It is difficult to be vastly learned and well-read.** “Vastly learned and well-read” comes from the Chinese 廣學博究. “Vastly learned” gives breadth. “Well-read” could be also literally translated as “deeply researched”, providing depth. It’s probably what we call as a “Renaissance man” nowadays.

The difficulty lies in the approach used in acquiring knowledge. Ordinary people cram things into their brains through repetition and volume. The better approach would be to develop “wisdom” which operates independently of the conscious mind.

Even in these days of the smart phones and Internet, which minimize the need to memorize, it’s still pretty hard to be able to synthesize the information.

12. **It is difficult to get rid of pride.** Let’s face it: our world is built by very big egos. They set out to

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conquer the world. Many died trying to dominate it. “Pride” is what motivates us to build our world! To be “rid of” it would be tantamount to take meaning away from our existence.

At a smaller scale, pride reflects an attachment to the ego. Who does not want to be better, to be admired, to be praised, to be liked, to be loved? Try to take that away!

**13. It is difficult not to slight those who have not yet studied.** They are so uncouth!

I once interviewed a man whom we later hired as Chief-engineer. He’s a decent man, well-educated, married to a lady who is a professor at a university on the East coast. He was at an engineering firm in the Boston area for the previous twenty years. Since I was interested in hiring him, he called up his boss, the owner of the engineering firm in Boston. He said: “[engineer’s name] is very competent but he’s “un-suave”. Not only do you have study/acquire knowledge, you must also acquire manners and style.

**14. It is difficult to practice equanimity of mind.** “Equanimity of mind” the lack of discrimination, the ability to look at everything as level and equal.

Who has control over your discriminating mind? In fact, our education system excels at sharpening our discriminating mind. Society rewards those who can discriminate well very generously.

Discrimination arises from the inability to see

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through things and drop them. It takes wisdom to undertake “practicing” equanimity.

15. **It is difficult not to gossip.** Have you noticed how it is always more interesting to hear of other’s faults?

At our temple, we have sutra lecture on Saturdays and Sundays between 12:30pm and 2:30pm. That’s right after lunch time! Quite often, I noticed that some people tend to doze off, especially after eating those delicious dishes that our faithful like to bring the temple on the weekend.

I notice that if I tell more people stories during the first part of the lectures, it tends to help people stay awake more easily. Yes, it is indeed difficult not to stray into gossiping!

16. **It is difficult to meet a Good and Wise Adviser.**

A Good Knowing Adviser is a competent teacher. It is very difficult to encounter a wise teacher. It is even much more difficult for him to feel that you are worthy to be taught!

In the Avatamsaka Sutra, Good Wealth Bodhisattva travels vast distances to seek out Good Knowing Adviser’s in order to be taught how to get enlightened.

Buddhist scriptures recount the story of old Bhikshu who heard a group of young monks speak of the Arhat fruition and inquired about it. They made fun of the old monk, demanding him to prepare good meals

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to offer them before they'd teach. He obliged. After eating their fill, they told him to cross his legs and meditate. They then started to play soccer. They used the ball to hit the old monk's head saying that this is first stage Arhatship. Old man was very grateful and continued to sit and contemplated the first fruition. He attained it not too long afterward. The similar thing happened; the young monks hit the old monk's head with the ball and successively transmitted that Dharma to the old monk for 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and fourth stage Arhat. The old man reached 4<sup>th</sup> stage Arhat!

**17. It is difficult to see one's own nature and study the Way.** *"To see one's own nature"* is to become enlightened. For example, Chan is one of such Dharma Doors. They have a saying: see your own nature and become a Buddha. This is not an easy feat.

Once you've seen your nature, once you've awakened to your Buddha nature, you still have to "study the Way" further to attain "later acquired wisdom". This second phase of cultivation is fraught with difficulties!

**18. It is difficult to teach and save people according to their potentials.** The original Chinese text reads: "隨化度人難". I would translate it as "it is difficult to accord with, transform and cross over people".

"To accord with" means to go with the flow and yet not compromise oneself.

"To transform": to make something appear from

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thin air. Have you ever tried to transform a naughty and impish kid into a good and obedient one?

“To cross over”: to help end birth and death. This requires that you already know how to end your own birth and death before you can teach others how to do it. That’s double jeopardy!

The great and wise Shariputra had two disciples, a cemetery caretaker and an iron smith. He taught them but they made no progress at all.

He came and asked The Buddha for advice.

The World-Honored-One asked him what he taught them.

Ven. Shariputra said: “I taught the ex-cemetery caretaker to contemplate the breath and the iron smith the nine impure contemplations (refer to section 24)”.

Shakyamuni Buddha said: “They have the wrong Dharma Doors. Switch Dharma Doors between the two of them”.

Shariputra did as ordered. His two disciples shortly attained Arhatship.

Great Knowing Advisers have a knack of knowing what to teach us so as to help us make progress.

**19. It is difficult to see a state and not be moved by it.** “A state” is whatever your sense organs register. Our mind is most alert. As soon as it registers anything, it starts processing it immediately: it “moves”.

Another equivalent Buddhist term is “turned”. A

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state can turn the mind's attention away from the matter at hand, hence the phrase "turned by a state".

In particular, advanced cultivators often experience wonderful states when they meditate. Let me give you an advance warning. Watch out for that thought of arrogance arising so spontaneously. If you seize upon it, you will get derailed.

**20. It is difficult to have a good understanding of skill-in-means.** Another term for "skill-in-means" is expedients. This is a most frequently misunderstood concept in Buddhism. A good many are confused and commit offenses and justify them as expedients.

For instance, Buddha "lied" to a child who was about to fall to bottom of the well. He held out an empty hand and called to that child who was getting to dangerously close to the top of a deep well and said: "Little one, I have some candy for you". You can lie too if you have the Buddha's wisdom. Until then don't use expedients.

What do you think "a good understanding" refers to? Transcendental wisdom.

By the way, higher level (and thus very wise) Bodhisattvas need to spend a lot of time developing understanding of skill-in-means. If you have no true wisdom yet, please do not use it as an excuse for creating offenses!

Section 13:

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WAY AND PAST LIVES**

Sutra text:

**A Sramana asked the Buddha, "By what causes and conditions can I know my past lives and understand the ultimate Way?" The Buddha said, "By purifying your mind and preserving your resolve, you can understand the ultimate Way. Just as when you polish a mirror, the dust vanishes and brightness remains. If you cut off desire and do not seek, you then can know past lives."**

Sutra commentary:

The previous section talks about difficulties in cultivation. Now, this section explains about how the spiritual penetration of knowledge of past lives is directly connected to the understanding of the Way.

**A Sramana asked the Buddha, "By what causes and conditions can I know my past lives and understand the ultimate Way?"**

A left home person asks the Buddha...

“Cause”: direct factor, like the seed planted that can produce flowers.

“Condition”: aiding factor; usually many are re-

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quired: for example, conditions like the sun, fertilizer, soil, etc... have to be present before it can flower.

To “know of past lives”: to know of the various incarnations of the previous lives. This refers to the obtaining of the spiritual penetration of the knowledge of past lives, one of the six spiritual penetrations (1. Heavenly Eye 2. Heavenly Ear 3. Knowledge of past lives 4. Spiritual Foot 5. Knowledge of others’ thoughts 6. Exhaustion of outflows).

To “understand the ultimate Way 會其至道”: “understand” refers to the awakening to or the realization of; “ultimate” refers to the final destination of the cultivation of the Way, the unsurpassed Buddha fruition. In other words, one realizes the Buddha Way.

**The Buddha said, "By purifying your mind and preserving your resolve, you can understand the ultimate Way.** Here, the Buddha reversese the order of his answers. He asnwers the second part first. In order to realize the Way, one must:

1. “Purify our mind”: means to keep precepts. Precepts consist of two factors: a. Commit no evil (stop all evil) b. Offer up all good (cultivate all good conduct; in particular to benefit others).

2. “Preserve our resolve”: means not to give up cultivation. Resolve refers to resolve for Bodhi. No matter what happens, no matter how difficult it appears to be, we must not give up.

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In other words, if we uphold precepts and plug along, we will definitely attain the Way.

**Just as when you polish a mirror, the dust vanishes and brightness remains.** The “mirror” is an analogy for our self-nature; the “dust” symbolizes our afflictions. When we “polish” our mirror in order to remove the defilements, only “brightness remains”: we can recover our inherent wisdom.

If we can keep on dusting off our self-nature non-stop, we will certainly regain ultimate purity and attain the Way.

Furthermore, **If you cut off desire and do not seek, you then can know past lives.** As to the knowledge of last lives spiritual penetration, we can obtain it by:

1. Cutting off desire: do away with desires, especially sexual desire.
2. Not seeking: do not run outside and seek for externals.

The Buddha’s subtle message here is that cultivators should have clear priorities.

It’s not uncommon for cultivators to aspire to obtain spiritual powers. Instead, they should be aspiring to develop wisdom as their primary objective.

As cultivators cultivate wisdom by keeping precepts and perfecting the patience paramita (by not giving up), naturally they will be able to cut off desires and have no seeking. They can thus obtain the

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penetration of the knowledge past lives. Spirtual powers are natural outgrowths of cultivation. They should not be the primary objective of cultivation.

Why?

One should first attempt to develop wisdom so as to be able not to abuse spiritual penetrations. Unfolding wisdom will bring about spiritual penetrations. In contrast, obtaining spirtual penetrations will not lead to obtaining the Way.

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**Section 14:**

**ASKING ABOUT GOODNESS AND GREAT-  
NESS**

Sutra text:

**A Sramana asked the Buddha, "What is goodness? What is the foremost greatness?" The Buddha said, "To practice the Way and uphold the truth is goodness. To unite your resolve with the Way is greatness."**

Sutra commentary:

True goodness is to cultivate. True greatness is to certify to Bodhi.

**A Sramana asked the Buddha, "What is goodness? What is the foremost greatness?"** What are the standards that we should adhere to for goodness and greatness?

Greatness has the connotations of enormous, numerous and superior. In the worldly sense, we have the four greats: earth, wind, fire and metal.

**The Buddha said, "To practice the Way and uphold the truth is goodness.** To purify oneself and help others is goodness. It's about the three non-outflow studies of precepts, samadhi and wisdom. It's about cleansing oneself of defilements, clearing

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one's head so as to make the right choices. That entails understanding the principles and upholding them: that's the truth.

“To practice the Way”: is to cultivate goodness. It's the Way of goodness.

“To uphold the truth”: is to understand the principles (i.e. the truths about the Dharma Realm) and to live accordingly (observe the truth with our lives and body). There is no better goodness.

**To unite your resolve with the Way is greatness:** Unite your resolve and aspirations with the Way. That's the engine behind certifying to sagehood: the beginning of greatness.

One starts with resolving for Bodhi: we want to cultivate to attain enlightenment. As soon as that happens, we will encounter countless tests of our resolve.

For example, there was a young Vietnamese lady who decided to leave the home life to cultivate the Way. She had no interest in the opposite sex and had no aspiration for riches. However, as soon as she decided to leave the home life, her Caucasian colleague with whom she had been good friend for her entire five-year career at the firm, all of a sudden took a romantic interest into her. He began to declare his love for her and said that he could not live without her. His earnestness greatly weakened her resolve.

If we can preserve our resolve and overcome the many tests, we can then “unite with the Way”: we

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become one with the Way. That is ultimate greatness.

To achieve ultimate greatness, you must conquer the ultimate enemy: yourself. Throughout the history of mankind, whatever anyone was able to come up with, he or she will be eventually surpassed in time. For example, no world record ever lasts forever. And yet, the people of the world continue to dedicate their life in the pursuit of these futile goals. In contrast, those who learn to conquer themselves become great men. The ultimate great man is the position of a Buddha. If you are really into greatness, settle for nothing less!

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Section 15:

**ASKING ABOUT STRENGTH AND BRILLIANCE**

Sutra text:

**A Sramana asked the Buddha, "What is the greatest strength? What is the utmost brilliance?" The Buddha said, "Patience under insult is the greatest strength, because people who are patient do not harbor evil, and they gradually grow more peaceful and strong. Patient people, since they are not evil, will surely gain the respect of others. When the mind's defilements are gone completely, so that it is pure and untainted, that is the utmost brilliance. When there is nothing, from before the formation of the heavens and the earth until now, in any of the ten directions that you do not see, know, or hear; when you have attained All Wisdom, which may be called brilliance."**

Sutra commentary:

**A Sramana asked the Buddha, "What is the greatest strength? What is the utmost brilliance?"** A left home person asks the Buddha about patience and brilliance.

“Strength”: can help us prevail over others. There are six kinds of strength:

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1. child's tears' strength
2. women's hatred strength,
3. Brahman's patience strength
4. King's arrogance strength
5. Arhat's vigor strength
6. Buddha's compassion and kindness strength.

“Great strength” (literally “very strong” in the original Chinese text), means that one can move others but others cannot move one.

**The Buddha said, "Patience under insult is the greatest strength.**

“Patience”: one can bear unfavorable circumstances and yet our mind does not get angry or move.

There are three kinds of patience:

1. Patience against the enemy's harm **耐 怨 害 忍**. We may be scolded, beaten, criticized, slandered, harmed etc. But can patiently endure it. This is also known as being patience **生 忍**: patience against living beings.

2. Patience to peacefully endure suffering **安 受 苦 忍**. For example, one can patiently endure heat, cold, hunger, sickness etc. It's also called Dharma patience **法 忍**.

3. Dharma Patience of Principles examination **諦 察 法 忍**. We examine the principles and thoroughly understand them. We penetrate the doctrines and

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therefore put everything down and see through everything. It's also called The first principle patience **第一義忍**: we can patiently endure anything because we understand the principles.

**Because people who are patient do not harbor evil, and they gradually grow more peaceful and strong.**

Patient people do not get upset and do not blame others for their difficulties and their suffering. Therefore they “do not harbor evil”: no matter how badly they are treated, not matter how unjustified the treatment, they harbor no resentment or anger. They will not do anything evil (commit the ten evils) to retaliate.

If you have such control over your temper, you will “gradually grow more peaceful and strong”. If you harbor no evil intentions toward others, you will gradually become more at ease with them and vice versa. You will incrementally become more at peace with your self and with the world around you.

Peace comes from the total lack of contention.

Furthermore, you can gradually become “stronger” too. Your increase in strength is from two reasons:

1. Lack of patience underscores weaknesses of character. The more patient you become, the more of these weaknesses you have overcome. The ancients liken it to smelting gold. Patience is that high heat that increasingly refines the gold.

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2. To get angry is to spend a lot of energy. Patient people do not waste their energy on evil things and therefore they have more strength.

I define strength as the ability to take a beating. Stronger people can take more of a beating. Weak people cannot take a beating and survive.

The more beating you endure, the stronger you become: you become more and more immune to those attacks.

**Patient people, since they are not evil, will surely gain the respect of others.** Patience is a virtue. Patient people are virtuous people and therefore “will surely gain the respect of others”. For example, the ghosts and spirits are not impressed by strength or power. They however respect and are deferent toward virtuous individuals. Take the lead from Jesus: turn the other cheek. You surely will be admired (because you are strong) and respected (because you are virtuous).

True strength manifests as patience. Patience helps erase defilements and obtain unobstructed wisdom.

**When the mind's defilements are gone completely, so that it is pure and untainted, that is the utmost brilliance.**

*“When the mind's defilements are gone completely”*: there is no more greed, hatred and stupidity. When the mind is absent of those three poisons, it is then free of defilements.

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“It is pure and untainted”, the actual Chinese text is literally “pure without flaw (like jade) and undefiled 淨無瑕穢”. It attains its purest form and completely free of impurities.

**That is the utmost brilliance:** at that moment, its utter “brilliance” manifests. “Brilliance” refers to the light of wisdom. Yes, your mind emits light, the light of wisdom. Once your mind is free of delusions and ignorance, its natural brilliance is revealed.

What is this state of absence of defilements of the mind?

The mind ultimately becomes empty: **there is nothing, from before the formation of the heavens and the earth until now** even before our world was ever formed or we were ever born onto it (time axis), **in any of the ten directions that you do not see, know, or hear**, this emptiness extends through (space axis), even in all the space dimensions where our sensors cannot reach.

**When you have attained All Wisdom, which may be called brilliance.** “All Wisdom” is the wisdom of the sages. They’ve realized True Emptiness. That wisdom is utmost brilliant.

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Section 16:

**CASTING ASIDE LOVE AND ATTAINING THE  
WAY**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "People who cherish love and desire do not see the Way. Just as when you stir clear water with your hand, those who stand beside it cannot see their reflections, so, too, people who are entangled in love and desire have turbidity in their minds, and therefore they cannot see the Way. You Sramanas should cast aside love and desire. When the stains of love and desire disappear, you will be able to see the Way."**

Sutra commentary:

The previous section talks about strength and brilliance, the two necessary factors for success. What else do we need? Here, the Buddha reveals that our mind originally is like settled water. We can't see our nature because our mind water is agitated by love and desire. We need to unburden ourselves so as to get to our destination quicker.

**The Buddha said, "People who cherish love and desire do not see the Way.** A little bit tough on our ears: to find out that the one thing that the Western culture values, love, is the very thing that muddles

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our mind. Desires make us chase after external things and therefore take us off center. This includes the love of God, Allah and for that matter, Buddha!

“Cherish” means to harbor, value or nurture. Ordinary people accept “love and desire” as part of the human experience. They find meaning in fulfilling their desires and cherish love.

Such people will not be able to “see the Way”. They cannot see the need to end their suffering.

It’s as if **you stir clear water with your hand, those who stand beside it cannot see their reflections**: your mind is agitated and loses its clarity. This is under your control: it’s you who chooses to let yourself become agitated and therefore cannot see your own reflection, your own true self!

**So too, people who are entangled in love and desire have turbidity in their minds, and therefore they cannot see the Way.** Love is an entanglement. Only when one succeeds in emptying oneself of love and desire, can one still the mind and purify the body.

In particular, **You Sramanas should cast aside love and desire**, that’s what you signed up for: to cast aside love and desire, to forsake human sexual love and give up desire for worldly things. **When the stains of love and desire disappear, you will be able to see the Way**: you can realize to the sagely fruits.

Abandon love and desire arising from delusions: certify to True Emptiness. Get rid of attachment to emptiness love and desire, certify to Wonderful Exis-

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tence. Stay clear from attachment to either True Emptiness or Wonderful Existence (attachment to effects and retributions) and certify to the Middle Way.

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Section 17:

**WHEN LIGHT ARRIVES, DARKNESS DEPARTS**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "Those who see the Way are like someone holding a torch who enters a dark room, dispelling the darkness so that only light remains. When you study the Way and see the truth, ignorance vanishes and light remains forever."**

Sutra commentary:

Darkness or ignorance has no nature of its own. If you simply replace darkness with light, it ceases to exist.

There is no need to feel that cultivation is so difficult. It could be as simple as that: bring in light and it chases away darkness.

**The Buddha said, "Those who see the Way are like someone holding a torch who enters a dark room, dispelling the darkness so that only light remains.** To see the Way, to become enlightened is similar to lighting it up so that everything is clear; your mind is no longer confused. No region of your mind is left unlit i.e. you no longer feel the need to cover up your mistakes and offenses!

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The beauty of this section lies in one word that is not translated: light “immediately” dispels darkness. That’s the sudden teaching! For example, you plug along and sustain it. In time, you’ll get there. The room may have been in the dark for thousands of years, of lifetimes, as soon as you bring in a torch, everything is in the clear!

Another implication here is that we should be all-embracing: even the worst can turn around very quickly. The Chinese have a saying: “the sea of suffering is boundless, turn your head around and that is the shore of liberation”. Evil people are temporarily misguided. If they can realign themselves, they too can attain liberation.

**When you study the Way and see the truth, ignorance vanishes and light remains forever.** Ignorance is banished forever. There is an implied caveat here for those who have a little bit of gongfu already: when you practice, guard against arrogance. As long as you still have a trace of arrogance, you still haven’t seen through your delusions. Someone might say: “I’m not arrogant! I just do and say whatever it takes to get this Master to teach me his secrets so that I become enlightened!”

“To see the truth” is to realize the truth of emptiness. You see that your self-nature is truly empty. At that time, all “ignorance” is vanished: you’ve vanquished delusions. “And” only “light remains forever”. Your true brilliant wisdom is revealed. You will never be covered up by ignorance again.

Section 18:

**THOUGHTS AND SO FORTH ARE BASICALLY  
EMPTY**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "My Dharma is the mindfulness that is both mindfulness and non-mindfulness. It is the practice that is both practice and non-practice. It is words that are words and non-words, and cultivation that is cultivation and non-cultivation. Those who understand are near to it; those who are confused are far away, indeed. It is not accessible by the path of words and language. It is not hindered by physical objects. If you are off by a hairsbreadth, you will lose it in an instant."**

Sutra commentary:

Practicing the Buddhadharma involves transcending duality in thoughts, action and words.

The translator did a superb job in this section. I am very grateful for their most excellent work!

**The Buddha said, "My Dharma is the mindfulness that is both mindfulness and non-mindfulness 念無念念.** Be mindful but be not attached to being mindful. Yes, it takes a lot to be able to be mindful. You are taught to be mindful of what you eat, what you say, when you walk, etc... And it's

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not easy to do. By the time you have gongfu and can sustain it, you tend to be attached to your achievement, to that knowledge. That's why in Mahayana, we plant seeds to help undo that kind of attachment right from the outset.

The original Chinese text 念無念念 also has a parallel meaning. At a higher level, one can reach that point where one thinks, 念 (first character) of non-thought, 無念 thoughts, 念 (third character). The conscious mind stops working entirely (therefore the product of the mental process can no longer be called to be a thought).

**It is the practice that is both practice and non-practice 行無行行.** This kind of rhetoric that kept me confused for years! How can it be practice and non-practice at the same time? You will find this type of duality throughout the Vajra sutra.

At this point, one practices a non-practice practice. Same logic as the “thought 念” phrase. At this point, one practices but it's as if one is not practicing at all.

**It is words that are words and non-words 言無言言.** This kind of state cannot be described with words. You can only say 言 non-words 無言 words 言 .

You shouldn't be attached to words or language either. Once you understand, you have to be not attached to that understanding.

Language and words are expedients to communicate with those of us who are still confused.

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Those who are enlightened must borrow worldly words and language to try to communicate what cannot be described by language and words.

**And cultivation that is cultivation and non-cultivation 修無修修**. Especially, avoid being attached to the concept of cultivation. Don't look down on others who don't have your gongfu or do not maintain your level of cultivation.

At this level, one cultivates and yet it's as if one does not cultivate at all! For us mortals, we still complain about the discomfort in our legs. We feel that cultivation is just so hard. For these enlightened beings, they no longer see it as cultivation. For them, to live is to cultivate. For us, to cultivate is no way of living!

**Those who understand are near to it 會者近爾**. Those of us who “understand” those aforementioned incomprehensible phrases, are very special individuals. They are very close to accomplishing the Way.

**Those who are confused are far away, indeed 迷者遠乎**. Individuals who are still deluded really have a long way to go!

**It is not accessible by the path of words and language 言語道斷**. When you see the Way, it can't be put into “words”. There is no “language” that can express it. “Path” refers to the approach chosen to come near it. In particular, it refers to the fact that the worldly path of relying on words or language to

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access the Way lead to nowhere, literally “terminates 斷”.

You can't even formulate a thought. This is the state frequently described as where: language falls short and the workings of the mind cease.

**It is not hindered by physical objects 非物所拘.** When you are no longer attached to physical objects, how can they hinder you? It's not even metaphysical. There is nothing at all there!

**If you are off by a hairsbreadth, you will lose it in an instant 差之毫釐，失之須臾.** When you get started on this trek, every single bit of deviation is greatly magnified and brings you very far off target in the end.

In fact, if you insist on utilizing the worldly approach to investigate the Way, you are instantly out of orbit. For example, if you are motivated by dreams of grandeur for your cultivation of Mahayana, you'll certainly miss the boat. People who are motivated by greed for fame or profit in their cultivation are like the deluded ones who make it to the great ocean, determined to bring back the great ocean with a cup.

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**Section 19:**

**CONTEMPLATING BOTH THE FALSE AND  
THE TRUE**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "Contemplate heaven and earth, and be mindful of their impermanence. Contemplate the world, and be mindful of its impermanence. Contemplate the efficacious, enlightened nature: it is the Bodhi nature. With this awareness, one quickly attains the Way."**

Sutra commentary:

Here we learn that everything is made from the mind alone. Do away with the false and keep only the true. Don't be attached to external things because they are impermanent.

**The Buddha said, "Contemplate heaven and earth, and be mindful of their impermanence.**

"Heaven" covers over us and "earth" supports us. Man exists in between. We live under the Heaven's edict and subsist thanks to the Earth's graces. But they are "impermanent": they go through their own life cycles.

The heavens are simply a higher plane of existence as compared to the human realm, but they too

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go through the cycles of formation, growth, change and destruction. The heavens of all three realms go through birth and death as well.

Our earth also goes through cycles of formation and destruction.

“Contemplate” means to use our contemplative wisdom to examine it. “Be mindful” means never forget for a single moment. Use our contemplative wisdom to illuminate it to see it’s truly impermanent.

The human existence is sandwiched between two impermanent structures that support it.

**Contemplate the world, and be mindful of its impermanence.** The “world” where we live is therefore also “impermanent”.

Seasons change, oceans become strawberry fields, valleys give birth to mountains, glaciers disappear, and tornadoes come and go. Nations are formed and eventually become extinct. Cultures evolve into oblivion.

Let’s not forget that the world of dinosaurs is no longer.

Whatever you can see with marks is impermanent. It continually changes and eventually disappears.

“Impermanent” has two connotations:

1. Changing and decaying **變壞**: it changes constantly and invariably degrades.

2. Ending and disappearing **斷滅**: it comes to an end and vanishes from existence.

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**Contemplate the efficacious, enlightened nature: it is the Bodhi nature.** “Efficacious, enlightened nature” is from the Chinese “靈覺”. “Efficacious 靈” refers to our spirits, our non-physical substance or our spiritual nature. It is actually endowed with latent enlightenment 覺. It is the same as “Bodhi”: the same substance as the Buddha’s enlightened nature.

That’s what your original nature is, bright and ever-lasting; the one that we forgot exists.

“Bodhi” is free from birth and death. In particular, it is not subject to production or birth; and therefore is not subject to destruction or death.

**With this awareness, one quickly attains the Way.** “Awareness” is translated from the Chinese “知識”: literally knowledge and consciousness. You internally know it and externally recognize it everywhere.

Keep this in mind, work at it and you’ll get there before you know it. You are on the right tracks.

Recognize that your conscious mind is impermanent. It is also called the false mind: continually produces false thoughts. It produces the myriad things. Put an end to the mad mind; put a stop to that conscious mind; and the myriad things cease to exist. Our bright true nature can then be revealed.

This is what the PratyekaBuddhas excel at doing. They retire into the isolated mountains or secluded forests to cultivate. They observe the changing sea-

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sons: how the leaves change color in the fall, fall to the ground and then grow out again in the spring. They eventually awaken to the impermanence of the world: everything goes through the cycle of birth and death. They thus become enlightened.

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**Section 20:**

**REALIZE THAT THE SELF IS TRULY EMPTY**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "You should be mindful of the four great elements within the body. Though each has a name, none of them is the self. Since they are not the self, they are like an illusion."**

Sutra commentary:

Use the contemplation of the four great elements that make up our body as false to enter the realization that our body is false, an illusion.

**The Buddha said, "You should be mindful of the four great elements within the body.** Great elements: can be found everywhere in the Dharma Realm, in every possible way in great quantities.

We are made up of the four elements: earth (solid parts like muscle, bones, hair ...), water (blood, secretions, etc.), fire (warmth) and air (breath, movement, etc.)

**Though each has a name, none of them is the self.** The "self" is usually identified with the body which is made up of the four great elements. Although each element has its own "name", none is the self.

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The self is simply a mental construct, it cannot be physically found anywhere amongst the four great elements.

In the Shurangama sutra, Matangi's daughter fell madly in love with Ven. Ananda. She pursued him all the way back to the Buddha and told the World-Honored-One that she could live without Ananda. The Buddha asked her what is that she loved about Ven. Ananda. She said she loves his eyes, lips, nose etc. The Buddha said that he needed Ananda's mind while she wanted Ananda's body. He thus offered to cut each part off to give to her. She refused saying that it's not the same to have only Ananda's organs.

Does that sound familiar? How many of you have hugged the pillow on which your wife slept? Did you inhale her body odor that still lingered on it too? While you did it, did you also picture her in your mind?

We just imagined that it was her, did we not?

**Since they are not the self, they are like an illusion.** The Buddhist logic! Don't be so attached to your body! You can go to great lengths to feed it, clothe it, massage it and still when it feels like it, it breaks down and won't cooperate with you. Be nice to your body, do not neglect it but don't be so attached to an illusion. Beauty is short-lived, goodness is forever. Even sexual desire is rather short-lived or capricious.

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Section 21:

**FAME DESTROYS LIFE'S ROOTS**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "There are people who follow emotion and desire and seek to be famous. By the time their reputation is established, they are already dead. Those who are greedy for worldly fame and do not study the Way simply waste their effort and wear themselves out. By way of analogy, although burning incense gives off fragrance, when it has burned down, the remaining embers bring the danger of a fire that can burn one up."**

Sutra commentary:

OK, so you are no longer attached to your physical body. But is it OK to be attached to your mental body? Fame seekers gain no real benefits but ultimately are harmed by it.

**The Buddha said, "There are people who follow emotion and desire and seek to be famous.** There are many of us who are moved by our "emotion and desire and seek fame". "Fame" is one of the five desires.

"Fame" was translated from the Chinese "聲名": literally hearing of the name. We want our name, be it good or bad, to be heard, hopefully very far and

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wide.

There is a saying: “the leopard leaves its skin and man leaves his name 豹死留皮，人死留名”. The leopard’s skin is very pretty and highly prized by many.

Confucius also said: “The superior man leaves the world but his name is not praised 君子疾沒世而名不稱焉”. They live a long and virtuous life and yet their ultimate fear is that after they leave the world, people no longer praise or look up to them!

High achievers in our modern times seem to have two lives. The first one is that which they use to amass a fortune or power. After attaining their goals, they tend to put more emphasis on their second life: their fame or reputation.

“Seek”: refers to the fact that their actions are motivated by emotions and desires.

**By the time their reputation is established, they are already dead.** It takes a lot of blood and sweat and personal sacrifice to attain fame. Even in these days of wireless communication and the internet, it still takes a lot of time for our name to be spread: that just is the nature of the transmission delays. By the time your name gets established, quite often, you’re “already dead”.

The painters of old devoted their life to their art, hoping to be recognized for their talent. Except for very few, most of them die in dire poverty and great suffering way before their works are recognized. This

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is an example of being way ahead of one's time.

**Those who are greedy for worldly fame and do not study the Way simply waste their effort and wear themselves out.** There are some who are quite “greedy for worldly fame”. They want their name is be well known for a long time in the world “世常名”. They devote their blood and sweat to fulfill their ambition. They deliberately choose to not “study the Way”; partly because they have no time or energy left for it, partly because cultivating the Way is in conflict with their greedy desire for fame.

These folks “simply waste their effort”. They are after something that cannot last for that long. They are after something that is ephemeral and illusory. In their quest, they “wear themselves out”: they wear their body out. Last week, I met with a relative of mine whom I have not seen for almost a decade. She's now a successful executive who breathes fire and is quite well off financially. She told me that three years ago, she had a stroke and realized that no amount of money or recognition is worth dying or becoming an invalid for.

Fame, recognition is not necessarily bad. But there is a difference between getting recognition versus seeking recognition. The common man seeks recognition, the superior one does not.

The Buddha then uses the incense analogy.

**By way of analogy, although burning incense gives off fragrance, when it has burned down, the**

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**remaining embers bring the danger of a fire that can burn one up.** Incense gives off a pleasant fragrance is analogous to the sweetness that fame can bring. To enjoy the fragrance, you must burn it up!

After obtaining fame, one becomes attached to that euphoria and can't let go. That attachment can bring about unhappiness and even harm. In the "Sunset Boulevard" movie, the old actress is so attached to her past glory that she ceases to live. She ended up killing her younger lover (who rejected her for a younger woman) in a moment of madness and desperation.

Why do ordinary people seek after something that's potentially harmful to them?

In particular, left-home people ought to be careful about fame. They should be careful that their actions are not motivated by fame seeking motives. That's why one of Great Master Xuan Hua's six principles is not to seek.

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Section 22:

**WEALTH AND SEX CAUSE SUFFERING**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "People are unable to renounce wealth and sex. They are just like a child who cannot resist honey on the blade of a knife. Even though the amount is not even enough for a single meal's serving, he will lick it and risk cutting his tongue in the process."**

Sutra commentary:

People are particularly attached to wealth and sex. They are like children who crave for honey and do not hesitate to lick it off a sharp blade. Similarly, wealth and sex may have a little of good flavor, their dangers are nevertheless quite significant.

**The Buddha said, "People are unable to renounce wealth and sex.** A pair of desires that represents self-indulgence: the more the better. Having wealth gives us a sense of security. It is also an affirmation of our power over others! As to sex, it is certainly one if not the most addictive things in life. The Buddha points out to us that ordinary people "are unable to renounce wealth and sex".

**They are just like a child who cannot resist honey on the blade of a knife. Even though the**

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**amount is not even enough for a single meal's serving, he will lick it and risk cutting his tongue in the process.** How childish it is! We follow these urges knowing full well that we could get hurt, that the reward is probably not worth the risk.

When we are confused by our desire for wealth and sex, we become “just like a child”. The rational becomes infantile. Is it fair to be called a child? Once a child wants something, can he or she listen to reason?

For just a little of flavor of “honey on a knife blade”, we are gladly willing to take a chance, knowing we can get really hurt.

It is said that beauty does not confuse, it is man who confuses himself. Are we in control or are our urges in control? We lose control because we are “unable to renounce”.

Can we be specific here?

Let's talk about those sexual urges. They make heat rise inside, our mind become clouded and make us stop at nothing until fulfilled. These types of urges caused the downfall of the great many leaders and heroes throughout the history of mankind.

What about wealth?

It tends to give that god complex: we can do anything our heart desires as long as we can get away with it! It is pure ugliness! What about those who attained wealth or financial gains by cheating and steal-

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ing from others? Regardless of what you'd like to believe, these folks are very unhappy: they have to live with their guilt and be harassed by the ghosts of those they harmed both now and in the future. Don't walk down this path!

It is also important not to neglect the word "resist". Empires fall and heroes become villains, often because we are unable to resist temptation. It's just like children who cannot resist the temptation of licking honey on the blade of a knife!

Please, please, do not dismiss this as obvious!

If you ask the Catholic, many of them would confess to you that the struggle with the saint on their left shoulder and Satan on their right shoulder usually ends up with following Satan most of the time!

We Buddhists are no better, I must admit! We all have struggle with our own (inner) demons. Quite often, giving to them can be so sweet and pleasant!

What to do?

The only recourse is to stop behaving like a child. Instead, be an adult and refer to your precepts. Stick to the precepts and you'll live another day to continue the quest! I wish the best of luck to all of us!

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Section 23:

**A FAMILY IS WORSE THAN A PRISON**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "People are bound to their wives, children and homes to such an extent that these are worse than a prison. Eventually one is released from prison, but people never think of leaving their wives and children. Don't they fear the control that emotion, love, and sex have over them? Although they are in a tiger's jaws, their hearts are blissfully oblivious. Because they throw themselves into a swamp and drown, they are known as ordinary people. Pass through the gateway! Get out of the defilement and become an Arhat!"**

Sutra commentary:

Another wakeup call: the family and household are even worse than a prison.

**The Buddha said, "People are bound to their wives, children and homes to such an extent that these are worse than a prison.** Men are very attached to their “wives and children”. It is as if they are “bound” to them. We choose to stick to a literal translation of the Chinese text in order to preserve the Buddha’s intention of pointing out the order of priori-

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ties in a man's attachment.

“Homes” means house, palaces (for gods), and places of abode. It's where we can rest, dwell, store our wealth and feel secure. It also represents our attachment to our ancestors and relatives. For some, it's the attachment to their ancestral land and tombs.

The above-mentioned is applicable to the Desire Realm.

The Form Realm takes the Dhyana bliss for family and the four Dhyana heavens for home. The Formless realm takes samadhi for family and the four stations of emptiness for home. Even the Arhats take the bliss of liberation for family and the Nirvana with residues for home.

Such attachment is “worse than a prison”.

**Eventually one is released from prison, but people never think of leaving their wives and children.** At least, we are aware that a “prison” is not a good place to be and try to stay away. Furthermore, our stay in the prison is term-limited. In contrast, we are not even aware that we are bound by our “wives and children”. A man once told me, his favorite place in his house is the master's bathroom where he retreats so that he can have a moment of peace away from his wife and children. Like most men, he would “never think of leaving” them.

**Don't they fear the control that emotion, love, and sex have over them?** “Emotion, love and sex” seem to be part of happiness to the ordinary people.

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It seems to start with a little harmless sexual attraction which could lead to sexual gratification and/or deep love. We can get to the point where life without it becomes miserable. We can't help but think about it day and night.

Wise people know better. They "fear" emotion, love and sex and quickly run away from them.

**Although they are in a tiger's jaws, their hearts are blissfully oblivious.** Maybe the danger increases the bliss for ordinary people who are not aware of the dangers. In contrast, they gladly surrender themselves to the sweetness of emotions, love and sex.

**Because they throw themselves into a swamp and drown, they are known as ordinary people.** They deliberately "throw themselves" into the sinking mud and get drowned. Ordinary people know full well that it's a lot of trouble and it is unclean. And yet, they choose to throw themselves into it. Such is the behavior of "ordinary people".

A better alternative would be to **pass through the gateway! Get out of the defilement and become an Arhat!** Cross through the Dharma Door of Emptiness. To pass through the door symbolizes penetrating the meaning of the principles.

Let go of your attachments to the family life. Don't be stuck at the gateway of emotion and love.

It's our choice: allow ourselves to be bound or to pass through. That choice dictates the direction of the journey: towards wisdom, light and liberation or to-

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ward confusion, shadows and constraints. It's kind of funny that the ordinary person looks at us, left home people as subjecting ourselves to so many constraints and hardships. In fact, it's the more rapid path towards self-liberation ("get out of the defilement") and bliss ("become an Arhat").

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**Section 24:**

**SEXUAL DESIRE OBTRUCTS THE WAY**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, “Of all longings and desires, there is none as strong as sex. Sexual desire has no equal. Fortunately, it is one of a kind. If there were something else like it, no one in the entire world would be able to cultivate the Way.”**

Sutra commentary:

This section contains one of the most famous quotes. Of all forms of desire sexual desire is the strongest force that binds us up. If there were another like it, we’d never be able to succeed in cultivation. All cultivators: beware!

**The Buddha said, “Of all longings and desires, there is none as strong as sex. “Longings” refers to more compelling kinds of “desires”.**

Longings can be for:

1. Opposite sex 女色, especially their form and marks.
2. Wealth and gems 財寶. We covet money, assets, gems and play things.
3. Fame and recognition 聲名.

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4. Food and drink 飲食.

5. Sleep and rest 睡眠.

6. Homes 家宅.

7. Fields and gardens 田園. Fields represent production facilities bringing in income and revenue. Gardens are places where we go play.

8. Clothes 衣服. They are a private and personal form of self-indulgence.

9. Retinues 眷屬. They are our relatives (whom we are attached to) and dependents (who are very attached to us).

10. Position and titles 官爵. Position reflects our rank or importance in society while title reflects the honor that society bestows upon us.

Sexual attraction is the most compelling force of our human existence.

Sexual desire can be divided into the desire for:

1. Colorful form 顏色. Perhaps that's why women take care of their hair and nails. They spend fortunes on clothing and grooming.

2. Form and countenance 形容. They use make-up and hit the gym.

3. Awesome comportment 威儀. The Vietnamese has a saying: "lack of social graces can destroy beauty". Perhaps that's why the European royalty send their offspring to finishing school.

4. Words and languages 語言. The Japanese

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seem to like their women to speak in high pitched tones.

5. Fine and smooth 細滑. The skin is soft to look at and smooth to the touch.

6. Human marks 人相. Each culture and society has its own beauty standards. Some African tribes used to like their women with long faces and long necks.

**Sexual desire has no equal.** Its binding and blinding power is unmatched.

Some might argue that other types of addiction are more potent. For example, chemical addiction might be considered to trump sexual addiction.

Not so!

Chemical dependency is recognized as dangerous and we've come up with countermeasures and cures. In contrast, sexual pleasure is not.

Furthermore, chemical addiction only affects one life time, sexual addiction affects many lives (and makes us revolve in the reincarnation wheel)!

Fortunately, **if there were something else like it, no one in the entire world would be able to cultivate the Way.** It can confuse us like nothing else. Did you know that just before the Buddha realized the Way, i.e. he's a very high level Bodhisattva; he had to face the sexual desire test? The Demon King sent three of his most gorgeous daughters to seduce the Buddha. This will be covered in section 26.

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The Shurangama Sutra says: “if you can’t renounce sexual desire, you can’t transcend the dust **婬心不除，塵不可出**”.

Clearly, this won’t happen overnight but is possible!

The Buddha taught nine kinds of contemplation **九種觀想** to overcome sexual desire:

1. Green coagulation **青瘀**. After death, the body begins to change color to green because the blood coagulates.
2. Decomposition **爛**. It starts decomposing.
3. Swelling **脹**.
4. Pus and Blood oozing out **膿血**.
5. Bugs and maggots **蟲蛆**. These insects are eating away at the corpse.
6. Decay **壞**. The skin breaks up.
7. Destroyed **散**. Only bones, hair and tendons are left.
8. Burned **燒**. Reduced to ash when burned.
9. White bones **白骨**. All that remains is a pile of bones.

Those who practice these contemplations of impurity discover a gradual decrease in desire and in time can eliminate it altogether.

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Section 25:

**THE FIRE OF DESIRE BURNS**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "A person with love and desire is like one who carries a torch while walking against the wind: he is certain to burn his hand."**

Sutra commentary:

In this section, we learn why we want to stay away from love and desire.

The Shurangama Sutra quotes the Buddhas of the ten directions calling sexual desire, the "desire fire".

**The Buddha said, "A person with love and desire is like one who carries a torch while walking against the wind.** The admonition here is to guard against indulging in love and desire. On the surface, it seems appealing and beneficial. But it's very dangerous to be in its company.

If you do, you are **he is certain to burn his hand.** It's better to go with the wind by reciting the Buddha's name and seeking for rebirth.

This is why the Buddha created the sangha to enable us to distance ourselves from love and sexual desires. The buffer zone is necessary for our protection. Until we are no longer blinded by sexual desires, it's

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better to keep our distance.

There was an immortal who cultivated in the mountains for decades. As a result, he developed tremendous spiritual powers and often used them.

The king heard of him and therefore bowed to him as teacher and would often invite him to the royal palace for offerings and instructions.

One day, the king had some state business that took him away from the royal palace and instructed his princess daughter to substitute for him as host to his teacher.

At the usually agreed upon time, the hermit rode on the clouds to arrive at the palace. The dutiful princess immediately bowed down. As the Indian custom of bowing has it, her knees, elbows and forehead touched the ground and she opened the palms of her hands to invite the hermit to step into them: this signifies the acceptance of the respect.

As the hermit's feet touched the beautiful princess' soft and warm hands, he also caught a whiff of her body fragrance. His mind stirred and desire rose in him.

Instantaneously, he lost all of his spiritual penetrations. Afterwards, he had to walk all the way back to the mountains. He moved away and never dared go near the royal palace again.

Until you have developed true wisdom, it is a lot safer to keep your distance from the temptation.

Section 26:

**HEAVENLY DEMONS TEMPTING THE  
BUDDHA**

Sutra text:

**The heaven spirit offered beautiful maidens to the Buddha, hoping to destroy his resolve. The Buddha said, "What have you skin-bags full of filth come here for? Go away; I've got no use for you."**

**Then the heaven spirit became very respectful and asked about the meaning of the Way. The Buddha explained it for him, and he immediately attained the fruition of Srotaapanna.**

Sutra commentary:

The final test for the Buddha was the sexual desire test.

**The heaven spirit offered beautiful maidens to the Buddha, hoping to destroy his resolve.** “The heaven spirit” is the demon king Mara 波旬. Just before Shakyamuni Buddha attained Wonderful Enlightenment, the demon king sent his army to the attack. The Buddha quickly defeated them. He then sent his three daughters, the “jade women” as beautiful and refined and perfect as jade. He hopes to stir up sexual desire in the Buddha’s mind by offering his

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lovely daughters to the Buddha.

The demon king dwells at the sixth heaven of the Desire Realm. It's the highest heaven in the Desire Realm.

**The Buddha said, "What have you skin-bags full of filth come here for?"** The human body is often referred to as a "skin-bag 革囊" in Buddhism. Outside it may look attractive especially when you dress and make it up. However, the inside is rather ugly to look at and is filled with stuff that no one wants to see. "Skin-bag" is a reminder that our body is rather defiled. It's also like placing beautiful flowers into a much adorned flower vase. It appears quite attractive but the water inside is quite smelly and filled with plenty of insects and viruses.

The original Chinese term for skin "革" also means to be discarded.

**Go away; I've got no use for you.** You may look attractive on the outside but inside your mind is full of impure thoughts. What do others find so attractive about you? The Buddha used his spiritual power to fast forward time to when these gorgeous women are in their old age and lose their sex appeal.

That worked fine for the Buddha. What about us, what can we do against temptation?

The key is in the word "use". It denotes the fact that we value it and cherish it. We simply are confused by its exterior and fail to look at its true substance.

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If we know how to use the proper contemplation then we will no longer be confused by the exterior and our mind will not move.

**Then the heaven spirit became very respectful and asked about the meaning of the Way.** That impressed the Demon King. Ah hah, he probably thought to himself, he's not as attached to sex as I am. He must know something that I don't. Let's inquire.

**The Buddha explained it for him, and he immediately attained the fruition of Srotaapanna.** It pays to encounter the Buddha; it surely saves a lot of time when you have a good teacher to guide you. This section documents the fact that although the demon king is most evil, he can still be crossed over. The Buddha took the opportunity to teach him and helped him attain first stage Arhatship.

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Section 27:

**ONE ATTAINS THE WAY AFTER LETTING GO  
OF ATTACHMENTS**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "A person who follows the Way is like a floating piece of wood that courses along with the current. If it does not touch either shore; if people do not pluck it out; if ghosts and spirits do not obstruct it; if it is not trapped in whirlpools; and if it does not rot, I guarantee that the piece of wood will reach the sea. If students of the Way are not deluded by emotion and desire, and if they are not disturbed by the many deviant views, but are vigorous in their cultivation of the unconditioned, I guarantee that they will certainly attain the Way."**

Sutra commentary:

This section begins with an analogy and then is followed by the description of the Dharma for those who study the Way.

**The Buddha said, "A person who follows the Way is like a floating piece of wood that courses along with the current.** Cultivation is to learn to go with the flow, make the best out of the circumstances.

**If it does not touch either shore** of emotion and desire, it can flow unhindered. Cultivation involves

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avoiding getting caught by the two shores of emotion and desire. One shore is the shore of views and thoughts, representing attachment to birth and death. The other shore is that of emotion and desire arising from ignorance, representing attachment to Nirvana.

**If people do not pluck it out**, this represents not getting caught in the nets of deviant views. They fail to understand the law of cause and effects and therefore spin out of orbit.

To be plucked out means to be used for worldly pursuits.

**If ghosts and spirits do not obstruct it**: if it is not hindered by the ghosts and spirits. Ghosts come from the yin world to cause trouble. Spirits come from the yang world to compete against us; they have great spiritual penetrations. Spirits accrue blessings and virtues in a prior lifetime, ghosts in contrast, do not.

“Obstruct” also carries the connotation of being covered up: by views and thought delusions.

**If it is not trapped in whirlpools**, making it spin around, representing laziness: they fail to be vigorous, or if they are vigorous, they lack the proper guidance and thus spins around and don’t make progress.

Whirlpool gives the illusion of making progress but actually we are simply circling in place. That’s the nature of revolving in the wheel of birth and death: one life we’re born in the heavens, the next, in the animal realm: we have no control what so ever!

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**And if it does not rot**, if this piece of wood can withstand the water and moisture: it won't rot. This refers to having adequate blessings for the long journey.

Rotten wood is an analogy for people who break precepts, lack faith in the BuddhaDharma or slander the Triple Jewel. They are like rotten wood which cannot be carved.

For the advanced cultivators, this symbolizes the ability to penetrate the Unconditioned Dharma.

**I guarantee that the piece of wood will reach the sea**: It will reach its goal of liberation. "The sea" symbolizes the Buddha nature that we all try to return to. The sea represents the sea of our nature; we merge into True Suchness, our original home. We have been wandering aimlessly, now we've returned home.

In other words, **if students of the Way are not deluded by emotion and desire, and if they are not disturbed by the many deviant views, but are vigorous in their cultivation of the unconditioned, I guarantee that they will certainly attain the Way**. The Buddhas thus compassionately pointed the pitfalls that will get us in trouble. Stay clear of them and you'll reach Bodhi.

The Buddha said that we should:

1. Guard against emotion and desire. They confuse us.
2. Not harbor deviant views. They will cause ha-

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voc in our cultivation.

3. Vigorously cultivate the Way. In particular, focus on planting non-outflow blessings with the Unconditioned Dharma.

Under those conditions, He guarantees that we “will certainly attain the Way”: we will attain the fruitions.

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Section 28:

**DON'T INDULGE THE WILD MIND**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "Be careful not to believe your own mind; your mind is not to be believed. Be careful not to get involved with sex; involvement with sex leads to disaster. After you have attained Arhatship, you can believe your own mind."**

Sutra commentary:

Here the (conscious) mind is described as like a wild horse that is very difficult to tame. In fact, it cannot be trusted. Furthermore, stay clear of sex because it brings disaster. By the way, only after you've become an Arhat can you trust your mind.

**The Buddha said, "Be careful not to believe your own mind.** For example, it is so persuasive that it can come up with a hundred of reasons that you've found the love of your life. But, if your advances are rejected, it is also very capable of quickly putting the object of your desire down mercilessly. Does this sound familiar?

Few can be as persuasive as our own mind.

The Buddha was afraid that we don't get it, so he repeated: **your mind is not to be believed.** Can he

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any clearer? Do not trust your own arguments!

The clever conscious mind is what makes us revolve in the wheel of reincarnation.

Another clear and present danger is sex, the source of the myriad evils. **Be careful not to get involved with sex; involvement with sex leads to disaster.** Do not go anywhere near sex: we will only get into trouble. The Chinese text is actually more intense. It says that our going near sex will surely produce “disasters”.

A man was on his death bed. His loving wife cried and asked him. “How am I going to live without your love? What about our son, who will take care of him?” The man felt very bad as he died and is reborn as a bug in his wife’s nose. The wife cried in great pain. At the time, an Arhat came by to help. The husband bug came out of his ex-wife’s nose; the wife saw it and wanted to stamp it. The Arhat stopped her and told her that it’s her husband’s reincarnation. She asked: my husband believes in Buddhism and observes the precepts, how could he have fallen into the three evil paths? The Arhat explained, he should have been reborn into the heavens, had he not been confused by his love for his family. He spoke Dharma for the bug. At the end of the bug’s life, it was reborn in the heavens.

Sex robs us of our vital energy. Case in point: excessive sex leads to premature aging. There is a price to pay for sexual pleasure whether you want to admit

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or not.

Does that mean that you must live like a monk or nun? No, because monk and nuns are not necessarily safe from sex. The point here is to be aware of the pitfalls and make the right choice.

**After you have attained Arhatship, you can believe your own mind.** The Fourth stage Arhat has cut off a lot of delusions already (he's ended all the view and thought delusions of the Triple Realm) and therefore his wisdom can be trusted. He can really see through things and put them down. In particular, he has put an end to the self and is therefore free of its unpredictability and caprices.

Regarding cultivation, Mencius said: "To study the Way has no other reason but to seek to liberate one's mind 學問之道無他，求其放心而已". Basically, he advocates that we cultivate in order to be able to liberate our mind. "To liberate" is similar to the cattle herder, he can liberate the cattle: allow them to go graze where they see fit. Regardless, even without supervision, the cattle still returns to the stables. Similarly, once we've obtained fourth stage Arhatship, our mind can be liberated and we are still in control.

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Section 29:

**PROPER CONTEMPLATION COUNTERACTS  
SEXUAL DESIRE**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "Be careful not to look at women, and do not talk with them. If you must speak with them, be properly mindful and think, 'am a Sramana living in a turbid world. I should be like the lotus flower, which is not stained by the mud.' Think of elderly women as your mothers, of those who are older than you as your elder sisters, of those who are younger as your younger sisters, and of very young girls as your daughters. Bring forth thoughts to rescue them, and put an end to evil thoughts."**

Sutra commentary:

For those of us who feel that the sex thing is just too hard to cope with, the Buddha offers some counter-measures against the sexual buildup. Having the proper contemplation, the proper perspective will help avoid disasters.

**The Buddha said, "Be careful not to look at women, and do not talk with them. I remember when I was a novice at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas; men do not talk to women in private. We**

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actually avoid contact with the opposite sex when possible.

If you don't look at them, then you won't want to talk with them.

If you have to talk with, then don't look at them: this is something that Westerners seem to have a problem with. Left home people rarely look directly into each other's eyes when they speak. They sort of prefer to look sideways in your direction.

I remember talking to one of my female disciple and looked at her left shoulder. So she moved to her left so as to be in my line of sight. I then looked to her right shoulder, making her shift toward her right!

**If you must speak with them**, because sometimes one has to come into contact with them, **be properly mindful and think**, the Buddha recommends that we do two things: our mind should be proper (we should have a proper attitude) and maintain proper thoughts (do not false-think!)

**I 'am a Sramana living in a turbid world. I should be like the lotus flower, which is not stained by the mud.'** Remind yourself who you are. You chose to leave the world and become a left home person. You chose to leave defilements of the "turbid world". "Turbid" is analogous to putting mud into a glass of clear water and stirring it up.

The superior person does not get stained by the environment he lives in.

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When getting in touch with people, be careful not to get soiled “stained by the mud”.

**Think of elderly women as your mothers;** respect them as you would your own mother. **Think of those who are older than you as your elder sisters, of those who are younger as your younger sisters.** Think of them as your sisters. Conversely, women should think of their brothers.

And think **of very young girls as your daughters.** Treat them as your own daughters. Be careful and avoid physical contact when possible.

Left home people are not supposed to get too close to young girls and boys. We are not even supposed to touch animals (like dogs or cats)!

**Bring forth thoughts to rescue them,** to help them to end suffering and attain bliss. Instead of indulging in false-thinking (self-benefit), make the resolve to help them (benefit others).

And **put an end to evil thoughts.** If bad thoughts have arisen because of habit energies, immediately put an end to it. Stop the slide to prevent further damage.

What are “evil thoughts”? They simply are thoughts that are of a sexual nature.

The objective is to maintain the proper mindset and not indulge in false-thinking.

All false-thinking that arises will naturally extinguish by itself if we are careful not to add fuel to the

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fire. The addition of fuel to the fire only makes it burn longer and gives it more chances of burning out of control.

We all know this. We all also fail this kind of test because we fail to maintain the proper frame of mind. That is why the Buddha explained this section.

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**Section 30:**

**STAY AWAY FROM THE FIRE OF DESIRE**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "People who cultivate the Way are like dry grass: it is essential to keep it away from an oncoming fire. People who cultivate the Way look upon desire as something they must stay far away from."**

Sutra commentary:

Stay away from the fire of desire lest you want to get burned.

**The Buddha said, "People who cultivate the Way are like dry grass: it is essential to keep it away from an oncoming fire.** Dry grass symbolizes the six desires corresponding to the six sense organs.

The six defiling objects (dusts) are like raging fire. Where there is union, there is great potential for disaster.

When the six sense organs come into contact with the six dusts, the six desires and seven emotions arise.

Emotion is the boss of right and wrong (是非), discrimination and quarrel.

The seven emotions are:

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1. Joy (喜; heart)
2. Anger (怒; liver)
3. Anxiety (憂; lungs)
4. Pensiveness (思; spleen)
5. Grief (悲; lungs)
6. Fear (恐; kidneys)
7. Fright (驚; kidneys)

The six desires are:

1. Form desire (色欲)
2. Shape and feature desire (形貌欲)
3. Awesome comportment desire (威儀欲)
4. Speech, language and sound desire (言語音聲欲)
5. Desire for Fine and smooth things (細滑欲)
6. Desire of human marks (人相欲)

If one indulges in desires and emotions, then one is flirting with the fire danger.

**People who cultivate the Way look upon desire as something they must stay far away from.** Keep at a safe distance. Indulging in desires only hinders the Way.

To put it plainly: desires harm cultivation.

We cultivate in order to calm our mind. The mind of ordinary people is constantly agitated by the waves of desires, thereby reducing their clarity of mind.

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In the Tang dynasty in China, there was a Chan master, Dhyana master Dào Lín 道林. He lived on tree tops and thus is nicknamed as Eagle Nest Monk 鳥窠禪師. The country's prime minister came for a visit and said: "the venerable one's place of abode is a bit dangerous isn't it?" The Chan master replied: "Your eminence's danger is even greater?" The prime minister said: "Disciple is a safe height, how can I be at more risk?" The Chan master said: "Dry grass and fire are close to each other, constantly chasing after emotional desire; you don't think that it's dangerous?"

When we make it to First Dhyana, we no longer worry about food, sex and sleep and thus get Chan bliss. This is the first time that we have a taste of what it's like to escape the Desire Realm. Although First Dhyana is not considered by the Chan School as having samadhi power (because it's still rather fragile and quite unstable), it is a very important milestone for cultivation. That is why we set reaching First Dhyana as a major milestone for new cultivators. Once it is reached, cultivators are well on the way.

In general, until both the self and state are emptied out, it's safer to distance oneself from desires.

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**Section 31:**

**WHEN THE MIND IS STILL, DESIRE IS DISPELLED**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "There was once someone who was plagued by ceaseless sexual desire and wished to castrate himself. The Buddha said to him, 'To cut off your sexual organ would not be as good as to cut off your mind. Your mind is like a supervisor: if the supervisor stops, his employees will also quit. If the deviant mind is not stopped, what good does it do to cut off the organ?'"**

**The Buddha spoke a gatha for him:**

**Desire is born from your intentions.**

**Intentions are born from thoughts.**

**When both aspects of the mind are still,**

**There is neither form nor activity.**

**The Buddha said, "This verse was spoken by the Buddha Kashyapa."**

Sutra commentary:

To cut off desire, we should start with the mind. Desires are born from intentions. Intentions arise from thoughts. When you investigate how thoughts

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are produced and get to its very origin, you'll discover that place where your mind is still.

**The Buddha said, "There was once someone who was plagued by ceaseless sexual desire and wished to castrate himself.** One exasperated cultivator thought of resorting to the extreme measure of self-castration. The body seems to have a life of its own and would not cooperate and behave itself.

**The Buddha said to him, 'To cut off your sexual organ would not be as good as to cut off your mind.** It can be much less painful. You are better off dealing with the root cause. Worldly people tend to fail make the connection: it's the false-thinking mind which is the culprit, not the body!

**Your mind is like a supervisor: if the supervisor stops, his employees will also quit.** The "mind" is actually behind it all (it is the "supervisor"). If the mind/supervisor ceases indulging in sexual thoughts, our body would not be engaged.

As long as the supervisor tolerates it, the employees will continue to indulge.

**If the deviant mind is not stopped, what good does it do to cut off the organ?'"** If the problem is not addressed at the root source, aren't we simply putting on a Band-Aid?

Even without the use of the sexual organs, people still continue to false-think!

**The Buddha spoke a gatha for him:**

**Desire is born from your intentions.**

**Intentions are born from thoughts.**

**When both aspects of the mind are still,**

**There is neither form nor activity.**

“Gatha 偈” is a verse. The Chinese form can be in phrases of four, five, six or seven characters which may or may not rhyme; four of these phrases form a gatha.

“Desire is born from your intentions”.

“Intention 意” refers to our sixth consciousness or also known as the conscious mind. This mind was identified in an earlier section as “cannot be trusted”.

“Intentions are born from thoughts”.

“Thoughts 思想” give rise to “intention”. According to the Consciousness Only school, “thoughts” consist of two components decision 思 and examination 想. Examination is the recognition of the sensory data (dusts) brought in by the six sense organs. Decision is the mental process of deciding what it is. A little bit was lost in the translation.

“When both aspects of the mind are still” refers to the two examination and decision aspects of the mind/intention are no longer operational.

“There is neither form nor activity”.

When you can still your thoughts, you are no longer confused by form or sexual desire.

**The Buddha said, "This verse was spoken by**

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### **the Buddha Kashyapa."**

“Kashyapa” Buddha is the sixth of the seven Buddhas that has so far appeared in our Worthy eon. He is the predecessor of Shakyamuni Buddha. “Kashyapa” means “drinking light 飲光”: his light is so bright that it appears to drink up the light from the moon or sun.

The key here is to work with the mind. The Buddhist shastras say: “When the mind moves, the myriad dharmas are born; when the mind is extinguished, the myriad dharmas are extinguished”.

This actually happened. When the Buddha was at the Jeta Grove, there was a Bhikshu who sincerely wanted to cultivate the Way. He has a rather impetuous nature and has a lot sexual desire. Hearing that he needs to end sexual desire and yet he is constantly overwhelmed by his urges, he asked to borrow a knife to cut off his male organ. The Buddha spoke to him and explained Dharma to him. He attained Arhatship not too long afterward.

When a thought of desire arises, be aware and do not follow it, do not indulge. Every time that you indulge, you lay down more tracks to make it easier to tread the subsequent times. If you don’t, you are gradually quieting your mind. That’s the secret! Do not allow yourself to be confused!

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**Section 32:**

**EMPTYING OUT THE SELF QUELLS FEAR**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "People worry because of love and desire. That worry then leads to fear. If you transcend love, what worries will there be? What will be left to fear?"**

Sutra commentary:

This section comes from the Mahaparanirvana Sutra (Sagely conduct chapter). We worry and have fear because of love and desire. To end love and desire is to put an end to worry and fear.

**The Buddha said, "People worry because of love and desire. That worry then leads to fear.** When you chase after love and desire, you tend to worry. Worry has a way of quickly developing into fear before you know it because worry is a form of suffering and suffering brings on fear.

Have you ever bought a new car?

A new car brings on a lot of pleasure and pride. Isn't it fun to catch a glimpse of your neighbors' envious eyes as you drive past her? Doesn't it feel even greater when you pretend in her presence that it's nothing at all?

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Then, don't you also find yourself fretting getting nicked in the parking lot when you go shopping?

**If you transcend love**, if you are free from thoughts of love and desire, **what worries will there be? What will be left to fear?** Put down your attachments and you'll be free.

People have seven kinds of worries **七種憂慮**:

1. Body **身力**: have we pampered it enough? Can we sustain its strength?
2. Lifespan **壽命**: can we live a little bit longer?
3. Disease **疾病**: weakens us physically.
4. Mistakes **罪惡**: weaken us morally and mentally.
5. Disaster **殃禍**: wreaks destruction upon us.
6. Separation (from loved ones) **別離**: we want more of those nice feelings.
7. Death **死亡**: it's so final!

There are five kinds of fear **五種恐怖**:

1. To lose life **不活**. Most of us will not admit it but this ranks amongst the top of the lists.
2. Bad reputation **惡名**. We all have our insecurities. We all fear rejection.
3. Stage fright **大眾威德**.
4. Death **死亡**. We don't know of that many people who can come back from death. We therefore have fear because it is unknown and irreversible.

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5. Fall into the evil paths 墮惡道. I have many disciples who are quite brave. I have no problem admitting to them that this is one of my deepest fears. To fall into the three evil paths (animal realm, ghost realm and hell) would mean to have to endure suffering for eternity.

Confucius says:

“The wise is not deluded, the humane have no worries, and the brave have no fear 智者不惑，仁者不憂，勇者不懼”.

Wise people are not confused about the principles and manifestations. The humane and kind have nothing to worry about. Brave people really have no fear at all.

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**Section 33:**

**WISDOM AND CLARITY DEFEAT THE DEMON**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "People who cultivate the Way are like a soldier who goes into battle alone against ten thousand enemies. He dons his armor and goes out the gate. He may prove to be a coward; he may get halfway to the battlefield and retreat; he may be killed in combat; or he may return victorious.**

**"Sramanas who study the Way must make their minds resolute and be vigorous, courageous, and sharp. Not fearing what lies ahead, they should defeat the hordes of demons and obtain the fruition of the Way."**

Sutra commentary:

Here we learn of another reason why fearlessness is listed as one of the three forms of giving.

Cultivators should use the three non-outflow studies of precepts, samadhi and wisdom and advance with single-minded vigor.

**The Buddha said, "People who cultivate the Way are like a soldier who goes into battle alone**

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**against ten thousand enemies.** In cultivation, our odds are one against ten thousand. The ten thousand enemies are like the myriad delusions of views and thoughts. Cultivation ultimately boils down to learning to face your demons alone. You can't run away from them or hide your head under the sand. You're simply delaying the inevitable. You have to take the test to pass the grade. Luckily, most soldiers have gone through training and have backup.

**He dons his armor and goes out the gate.** "Donning armor" refers to the old times when one goes into battle, one needs to wear armor in order to protect one against harm.

It is equivalent to receiving and upholding the precepts. The better you are at it, the stronger your personal protection. This is against the common misperception that precepts are restrictive; in contrast, they protect you against harm.

Going out the gate alludes to venturing into unknown territories to conquer new areas. A newly settled land is not unlike your mind having more control of your life.

**He may prove to be a coward.** "Coward" is translated from "意怯弱", literally "mind fearful and weak". This arises from the lack of precepts power 戒力.

This individual definitely needs more support!

**He may get halfway to the battlefield and retreat.** That is because of a lack of faith. Faith can be

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built up from vigor. If you vigorously cultivate, you'll get numerous responses and thus building your faith. Like in our Chan class, we never needed to oversell the Chan benefits. In fact, we consistently undersold the benefits. The benefits and responses that were experienced are just the tip of the iceberg. Now you know why samadhi power is critical: it helps us not give up halfway; giving up before attaining the fruitions of the Way.

Not retreating reflects adequate samadhi power **定力**.

**He may be killed in combat;** alluding to the cultivator giving up the practice.

**Or he may return victorious.** “To return victorious” reflects having adequate wisdom power **慧力**, enabling the cultivator to attain the fruitions.

Nothing is for sure. Sometimes, the enemies are just too much for you. You simply get overwhelmed and fail in your quest (you don't die per se; you could simply lose faith and give up on cultivation). However, if you persevere, chances are that you'll succeed and return triumphantly. It can be a lot of fun, very blissful.

**Sramanas who study the Way must make their minds resolute and be vigorous, courageous, and strong.**

“Sramanas” are left home people. They are fighting for their wisdom life.

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“Make the mind resolute” means to make one’s mind firm and prepared to go for the long haul.

The Chinese word for “vigor” has two characters: qing jìn 精進. Qing 精 means pure, not mixed. Jìn 進 means not retreat. This could be explained as to be single-minded and resolutely advance.

“Courageous 勇” is the lack of fear or timidity. In the past, brilliant generals have been known to destroy boats that carry the troops across the oceans. Their soldiers have no choice but bravely fight to the death. To be courageous is to not even entertain a single thought of retreat.

“Strong 銳” also has a connotation of sharpness: can easily break through obstacles.

It takes resolve, you have to really want it and be willing to pay the price for it. That requires real wisdom; the wisdom to discern the right direction and commit to it. Once committed, one should strive forward vigorously, overcome personal fears, and valiantly go against the odds.

**Not fearing what lies ahead**, cultivation is a rather long journey, fraught with many dangers. Therefore, cultivators of the Way must never fear obstacles and difficulties.

A brilliant tycoon said: “Others see difficulties, I see opportunities!”

**They should defeat the hordes of demons and obtain the fruition of the Way.**

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“Demons” are of four kinds:

1. Heavenly: the beings dwell in the sixth Desire Heaven. They have tremendous spiritual powers and are very evil. They want to inflict harm and suffering upon us.

2. Death: these types of demons bring death to wherever they go.

3. Afflictions: they specialize in causing afflictions in us. There are anger demons, greed demons, insanity demons etc.

4. Skandha: they specialize in confusing advanced cultivators. Beware!

One of the three forms of giving is the giving of fearlessness. That builds up our fearlessness account that we can draw upon when we cultivate. If we don't fall prey to fear, we'll make it to Bodhi.

There are many “fruits of the Way” such as Arhatship, Bodhisattvahood, etc.

The Buddha defeated the hordes of demons before attaining the Way (becoming a Buddha). That's why he is called the Great Hero (大雄).

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**Section 34:**

**BY STAYING IN THE MIDDLE, ONE ATTAINS  
THE WAY**

Sutra text:

One evening a Sramana was reciting the Sutra of the Teaching Bequeathed by the Buddha Kashyapa. The sound of his voice was sad and dejected as he reflected remorsefully on his wish to retreat in cultivation. The Buddha asked him, "In the past when you were a householder, what did you do?"

He replied, "I was fond of playing the lute." The Buddha said, "What happened when the strings were slack?"

He replied, "They didn't sound." "What happened when they were too tight?" He replied, "The sounds were cut short." "What happened when they were tuned just right between slack and tight?" He replied, "The sounds carried." The Buddha said, "It is the same with a Sramana who studies the Way. If his mind is harmonious, he can attain the Way. If he is impetuous about the Way, his impetuosity will tire out his body; and if his body is tired, his mind will become afflicted. If his mind becomes afflicted, then he will retreat from his practice. If he retreats from his practice, his offenses will certainly increase. You

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**need only be pure, peaceful, and blissful, and you will not lose the Way."**

Sutra commentary:

People may misunderstand and be overzealous: to study the Way, one should regulate body and mind. We should not be too lax or too intense. Don't try to be too fast (overeager) or too slow (lazy).

Confucius said: "Advance too rapidly, Retreat just as hastily **其進銳者其退速**".

**One evening a Sramana was reciting the Sutra of the Teaching Bequeathed by the Buddha Kashyapa.** Many left-home people recite Sutras in the evening as part of their daily routine.

Back then, sramanas eat before noon. They listen to the Dharma in the afternoon. They recited and read the scriptures in the evening (**前半夜讀誦經典**). They rested in the middle of the night (**中夜養息**). And they practiced Chan in the early morning (**後夜修禪定**).

When Kashyapa Buddha appeared in the world, Shakyamuni Buddha was Protecting Brightness Bodhisattva **護明菩薩**. Although Kashyapa Buddha's BuddhaDharma was already extinct from our Saha world, Shakyamuni Buddha can still access it and bring it to our era.

Just like Kashyapa Buddha, before entering Stillness, Shakyamuni Buddha also left behind his "be-

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queathed teachings” as well.

**The sound of his voice was sad and dejected as he reflected remorsefully on his wish to retreat in cultivation.** The thought of retreat is very heavy on his mind. And his voice is very sad and tense from dejection. He feels that he can't continue to cultivate and would have to return to lay life.

**The Buddha** knew what was on his mind (from the spiritual penetration of the knowledge of others' mind) and **asked him.**

**"In the past when you were a householder, what did you do?" He replied, "I was fond of playing the lute."** He used to like playing the lute.

**The Buddha** said, **"What happened when the strings were slack?" He replied, "They didn't sound."** The notes are not musical.

**"What happened when they were too tight?" He replied, "The sounds were cut short."** The notes don't resonate as long as they are supposed to.

**"What happened when they were tuned just right between slack and tight?" He replied, "The sounds carried."** The notes sound right and carried all over. Each sound is supposed to be: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Si.

**The Buddha** said, **"It is the same with a Sra-mana who studies the Way. If his mind is harmonious, he can attain the Way.** If he can maintain his balance he can attain the Way.

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**If he is impetuous about the Way, his impetuosity will tire out his body; and if his body is tired, his mind will become afflicted.** If he overdoes it, his body gets tired and makes him afflicted.

I met a young monk who had to go see a doctor because he bowed to the Buddha one thousand times a day. That's overdoing it a little bit, especially when he has not been taught the proper technique for bowing.

**If his mind becomes afflicted, then he will retreat from his practice.** Cultivation is no longer paying off for him, he wants to quit.

One of the direct consequences of quitting is that you tend to be critical of cultivation. You failed because you don't know how to cultivate. And yet, you blame it on your teachers or colleagues.

**If he retreats from his practice, his offenses will certainly increase.** That's the inevitable consequence of retreating: your offenses will certainly increase.

Why?

Left home people observe more precepts than lay people. Sramanas therefore tend to create fewer offenses in their daily life.

**You need only be pure, peaceful, and blissful, and you will not lose the Way.** Keep your precepts ("pure"), practice meditation (calm down your mind and become "peaceful") and derive joy from your practice ("blissful") and you will make it.

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Not too fast, not too slow and you'll get there at the right time. The key word is to stay away from extremes: excess of efforts and lack of drive to obtain liberation.

Dharma Master Wonderful Admiration 妙欽 said:

“Leaving the home life for a year, the Buddha is in front of one's eyes 出家一年，佛在眼前; leaving the home life for two years, the Buddha is at mid sky 出家兩年，佛在半天; leaving the home life for three years, the Buddha has returned to the western sky 出家三年，佛歸西天”。

For recently ordained sramanas, they still are enthused as if the Buddha is cultivating with them. After a while (two years later), they realize how tough it can be and become more disillusioned. That's why it's as if the Buddha is further away in the sky. After three years, they become even more disillusioned: it's as if the Buddha has retired to the Western Bliss world (which is ten billion worlds away from our world).

Such is the experience of many left home people.

This Bhikshu reflected on the Buddha's personal instructions and continued his cultivation. He later attained Arhatship. This was reported in the Agama sutras.

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Section 35:

**WHEN ONE IS PURIFIED OF DEFILEMENTS,  
THE BRILLIANCE REMAINS**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "People smelt metal by burning the dross out of it in order to make high quality implements. It is the same with people who study the Way: first they must get rid of the defilements in their minds; then their practice becomes pure."**

Sutra commentary:

Brilliance and defilements are mutually exclusive.

**The Buddha said, "People smelt metal by burning the dross out of it in order to make high quality implements.** High quality tools require high quality metal. To obtain high quality metal, you must use high heat to burn up impurities.

Anyone sees any parallel between this and the pain when may come when you cross your legs? The special Chan training that we offer can produce very high quality raw materials very quickly.

**It is the same with people who study the Way: first they must get rid of the defilements in their minds.** The starting point of the three non-outflow

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studies is precepts! In this Dharma ending age, most people no longer pay much attention to precepts any more. As a result, they lack the proper foundation. It is no wonder their progress is rather slow.

Defilements of the mind impede your progress. If your mind is full of defilements, you are not a good Dharma vessel. Don't blame your teacher for not teaching you: whatever she tells you, it goes in one ear and out the other.

I had a Taoist friend come over to the house. He's half believer in Buddhism and half in Taoism: a rather common happening for Asians. We have lots of blooming flowers in the backyard, very pretty and colorful. When he heard that there was one flower that has a really strange color, that's the one that he zeroes in and did not even notice the multitude of beautiful flowers! Even though he met many virtuous monks and read many Buddhist sutras, he had many erroneous views, he consistently distorted the teachings! It just wouldn't sink in!

**Then their practice becomes pure.** First, you must do garbage dumping before you can fill up the Dharma vessel.

If you are still at a low level, it does not really matter. As you progress higher, it becomes more critical to dump the erroneous views and knowledge you've picked up along the way.

That is why I advocate quality over quantity. I am very conservative in my research and study habits. I

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prefer to stick to the patriarchs and sages' teachings instead of the popular and famous teachers.

Attaining the Way is achieved by purifying oneself.

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**Section 36:**

**THE SEQUENCE THAT LEADS TO SUCCESS**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "It is difficult for one to leave the evil destinies and become a human being. "Even if one does become a human being, it is still difficult to become a man rather than a woman. "Even if one does become a man, it is still difficult to have the six sense organs complete and perfect. "Even if the six sense organs are complete and perfect, it is still difficult for one to be born in a central country.**

**"Even if one is born in a central country, it is still difficult to be born at a time when there is a Buddha in the world. "Even if one is born at a time when there is a Buddha in the world, it is still difficult to encounter the Way.**

**"Even if one does encounter the Way, it is still difficult to bring forth faith.**

**"Even if one brings forth faith, it is still difficult to resolve one's mind on Bodhi.**

**"Even if one does resolve one's mind on Bodhi, it is still difficult to be beyond cultivation and attainment."**

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Sutra commentary:

This section lists out the nine incremental difficulties. Listen and realize how difficult it is to be able to cultivate the Way.

The first four are worldly retributions: our past creditors are catching up with us and demanding restitution. The last five are transcendental retributions.

**The Buddha said, "It is difficult for one to leave the evil destinies and become a human being.** The three “evil destinies” are: animal realm, hungry ghost realm and hells. Once fallen into the evil paths, one must undergo tremendous suffering for interminably long periods. Upon death, one usually is immediately reborn into the same realm for ten upon ten thousands of millions of times. Eventually, one can then make it back to the human realm.

The Chinese has an analogy for obtaining a human body. It's like “a blind turtle surfacing through a floating piece of wood 盲龜浮木”. Turtles can live for a very long time. Usually, they only surface every hundred years or so. Furthermore, this turtle happens to be totally blind. And yet, when it surfaces, it can poke its head through a whole in a piece of wood that happens to be floating in the ocean. This is infinitely harder than winning the super lotto.

**Even if one does become a human being, it is still difficult to become a man rather than a woman.** Granted it might be better to be a woman in this country but for the rest of the world, the overwhelm-

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ing majority of the women are dependent upon men.

The Mahaparanirvana Sutra lists ten undesirables for women:

1. At birth, their parents are not happy 父 母 不 喜.
2. Raising them is not that interesting 視 無 滋 味.
3. Cause a lot of worries 心 常 畏 人 (a man said: to have a gorgeous daughter means that he has to learn to shoot to keep to boys away)
4. Worry about marrying them off 父 母 憂 嫁.
5. They will leave you it (they'll grow up and leave you) 父 母 生 離.
6. Afraid of husband's joy or anger 畏 夫 喜 怒.
7. Difficult pregnancy and birth 懷 產 甚 難.
8. Strictly supervised by parents 少 為 父 母 管 束.
9. Controlled by husband 中 為 夫 婿 禁 制.
10. Older, fear offspring 老 為 兒 孫 所 訶.

Great men do:

1. Draw near Good Knowing Adviser
2. Investigate the Proper Dharma
3. Contemplate its meanings/principles
4. Cultivate accordingly

Regardless of gender: if one can recognize the Buddha nature then it's male even though the body is

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female.

**Even if one does become a man, it is still difficult to have the six sense organs complete and perfect.** Six sense organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. To have complete sense organs represents being fully endowed with all the human capacities, thus making it easier to cultivate the Way.

Those beings who just came out of the lower three evil paths and make it to the human realm, tend to have incomplete sense organs.

**Even if the six sense organs are complete and perfect, it is still difficult for one to be born in a central country.** “A central country” refers to a place where you have plenty of resources. For example, we take so many amenities for granted in the United States. When I was in Taiwan, whose average income approaches that of Western Europe, it was very difficult to find a library.

More specifically, a central country is one where one can find Buddhism.

**Even if one is born in a central country, it is still difficult to be born at a time when there is a Buddha in the world.** At that time, life was a lot better. In particular, places where the Buddha came usually thrived.

In particular, it’s much easier to obtain the Way if you cultivate when the Buddhas are in the world, especially if it’s under the Buddha’s guidance.

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In contrast, we're born before or after the Buddha's time: it's one of the eight difficulties.

**Even if one is born at a time when there is a Buddha in the world, it is still difficult to encounter the Way.** During the Buddha's time, he and his disciples spent a lot of time in the city of Sravasti where he received royal patronage. In that capital city, one third saw the Buddha; one third heard of him and one third never even heard of him.

**Even if one does encounter the Way, it is still difficult to bring forth faith.** Why is faith important? Without it you wouldn't listen to instructions. If you don't follow instructions, you won't find the treasure trove. It is funny how most people seem to think that we gauge our success by how many people we convert to Buddhism. That's a myth as far as Mahayana is concerned. If you think that we are trying to convert you, think again and guard against arrogance. Let me tell you, life is lot more pleasant when we can learn to embrace all Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. I've always maintained that Mahayana is not for everyone, there is no need to convert. People believe because it does them good. There is no need to sell.

Two kinds of people are very difficult to bring forth the faith:

1. With deviant views
2. Intelligent and eloquent.

**Even if one brings forth faith, it is still difficult**

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**to resolve one's mind on Bodhi.** “To resolve for Bodhi” is to want to become a Buddha.

Take the case of the Arhats, they think they've made it and thus treading the Bodhisattva path is just too much for them.

Four things that is difficult to believe:

1. True Suchness is the origin of all dharmas
2. The Buddha has limitless virtues
3. The Buddhadharma has great benefits
4. The Sangha can be trusted.

**Even if one does resolve one's mind on Bodhi, it is still difficult to be beyond cultivation and attainment.**

The “Bodhi” mind (Bringing forth the faith shastra; 起信論) has three components:

1. Direct mind
2. Deep mind
3. Compassionate mind.

The four great vows for Bodhi:

1. LBs are limitless; I vow to cross them over.
2. Afflictions are inexhaustible; I vow to cut them off.
3. Dharma Doors are immeasurable, I vow to learn them.
4. The Buddha Way is unsurpassed, I vow to realize it.

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“To be beyond cultivation and attainment” refers to understanding the true principles. This is enlightenment.

These individuals cultivate and yet do not see it as cultivation. In contrast, common mortals like us constantly cringe and grimace at the thought of cultivation.

Furthermore, the enlightened ones got there because they no longer see that there is anything to be attained. That includes the Buddha fruition. This is not just rhetoric, that’s how they think!

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Section 37:

**STAYING MINDFUL OF MORAL PRECEPTS  
BRINGS US CLOSE TO THE WAY**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "My disciples may be several thousand miles away from me, but if they remember my moral precepts, they will certainly attain the fruition of the Way. "If those who are by my side do not follow my moral precepts, they may see me constantly, but in the end they will not attain the Way."**

Sutra commentary:

This section explains that when the mind is close to the Buddha, that's what matters. It doesn't matter how far the body is. In particular, to be mindful of precepts is to really believe in Him.

**The Buddha said, "My disciples may be several thousand miles away from me, but if they remember my moral precepts, they will certainly attain the fruition of the Way.** This is the Buddhist secret, by strictly cultivating the precepts, one can attain sagehood. In particular, the person who can purely observe the Five Precepts will become a sage.

**If those who are by my side do not follow my moral precepts, they may see me constantly, but in**

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**the end they will not attain the Way.** Physical proximity to a Good Knowing Adviser (GKA) does not allow one for making excuses for not following the teachings.

When you strictly observe the precepts, your three karmas of body, mouth and mind are purified and great things happen.

There is a very famous anecdote in the Vinaya.

There were two monks who decided to go on a pilgrimage to visit Shakyamuni Buddha.

They had to cross over a desert. Along the way, they ran out of water. They stumbled into a human skull in which there were bugs living inside.

One monk decided to take a drink to survive. The other chose not to drink and died of thirst.

His surviving colleague made it to see Shakyamuni Buddha and recounted his experience to the Buddha.

He said that unfortunately, his Dharma brother did not make it because he stubbornly refused to drink that water that was full of bugs as decreed by the Buddhist Vinaya.

The Buddha immediately scolded the monk and informed him that he broke precepts. His Dharma brother did die of thirst in the desert. However because of his virtues, he was immediately born onto the Trayastrimsa Heaven. He then came to pay the Buddha a visit and already left.

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“Do not be lax. Cultivate vigorously. Guard your sense organs. Even though you are far from me, I’m constantly mindful of you: you are really next to me.”

Shurangama Sutra: “To guard your mind is precepts. Keeping precepts give rise to samadhi. From samadhi, wisdom unfolds.”

In Mahayana, we don’t really keep quotas for disciples for the above-mentioned reason. Those who call themselves Buddhists and even were transmitted the precepts are not real Buddhists (close to their GKA) if they keep on breaking precepts, whereas the people who are not even Buddhists and yet are able to maintain their mouth, body and mind karmas purely, are real Buddhists. What’s in a name?

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**Section 38:**  
**BIRTH LEADS TO DEATH**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha asked a Sramana, "How long is the human life span?" He replied, "A few days." The Buddha said, "You have not yet understood the Way." He asked another Sramana, "How long is the human life span?" The reply was, "The space of a meal." The Buddha said, "You have not yet understood the Way." He asked another Sramana, "How long is the human life span?" He replied, "The length of a single breath." The Buddha said, "Excellent. You have understood the Way."**

Sutra commentary:

Human life is impermanent. Death can be so imminent.

**The Buddha asked a Sramana, "How long is the human life span?" He replied, "A few days." The Buddha said, "You have not yet understood the Way."** "A few days" indicates that this "sramana" understands that human life is very short indeed. Unfortunately, the Buddha declared that he has not yet "understood the Way".

In Mahayana, the "life span" begins when the

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Alaya consciousness, also called the eighth consciousness arrives. When it leaves, that's what is considered to be death.

The Buddha had a cousin: a royal prince who was a real playboy. The Buddha sent one of his Bhikshus to the cousin to tell him that the Buddha ordered him to leave the home life because he only had a week left live. What would you do if you knew that you only have a week to go? This guy said, "OK, tell my cousin that I'm grateful for the advance warning, I'll do as ordered". What do you think he did? Being so clever, he decided to party for six days before joining the Buddhist order! Because he cultivated for one day, he was born onto the heavens instead of falling to the lower realms.

**He asked another Sramana, "How long is the human life span?" The reply was, "The space of a meal." The Buddha said, "You have not yet understood the Way."** "The space of a meal" is short indeed. It alludes to how the pleasures (such as eating) in life are so short lived.

Unfortunately, he has not yet understood the meaning of the Way either.

**He asked another Sramana, "How long is the human life span?" He replied, "The length of a single breath." The Buddha said, "Excellent. You have understood the Way."**

Ven. Xuan Hua told an excellent story that illustrates the wisdom behind being mindful of life's im-

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permanence.

There were three old men who got together.

The sixty year old man said: “I am so happy that we can get together. Who knows whether or not all three of us can do next year?”

The seventy year old retorted: “I can’t even plan that far. You know, at my age, every night when I go to bed, I’m not even sure that I can wake up the following day!”

The eighty year old man lamented: “You guys! For me, after I exhale, I’m not even sure I can still be alive to inhale the next breath!”

“The length of a single breath” is very short. What it alludes to is the fragility of life. Our life hangs on to each and every single breath. This sramana has “understood the Way” because he truly understands life’s impermanence and feels pressed for time.

Confucius said:

“Hearing of the Way in the morning, I don’t mind dying in the evening **朝聞道，夕死可矣**”. If he can hear of the true principles and then die, he feels that his life has been worth it. What is the meaning of your life?

The Chinese have a saying:

“Born in a stupor and dying as if in a dream **醉生夢死**”.

It beautifully describes the human condition: we

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don't know how we got here and eventually die as if  
the whole thing is but a dream!

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Section 39:

**THE BUDDHA'S INSTRUCTIONS ARE NOT  
BIASED**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "Students of the Buddha's Way should believe in and accord with everything that the Buddha teaches. When you eat honey, it is sweet on the surface and sweet in the center; it is the same with my sutras."**

Sutra commentary:

One should believe and follow all the Buddhist teachings and not discriminate between Mahayana and Hinayana, Chan versus Pure Land, Provisional teaching versus Actual teaching, etc.

**The Buddha said, "Students of the Buddha's Way should believe in and accord with everything that the Buddha teaches. Don't discriminate!**

The four teachings: provisional, actual, sudden and gradual.

The Store teaching: production extinction of true self emptiness (emptiness contemplation 空觀; Arhat and PratyekaBuddha); the Connective teaching: unborn of true self emptiness (emptiness contemplation 空觀; non-birth three Vehicles fruitions); the Sepa-

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rate teaching: limitless dharmas are all empty (mundane contemplation 假觀; three worthies and ground bodhisattvas); the Perfect teaching: Middle Way (The Primary Principle 第一諦; non-action fruitions of the Faith positions, Equal Enlightenment ...).

Key words: to “believe in 信” to not doubt. To “accord with 順” is to not contradict.

The Buddha brought his Dharma to the Saha world in order to help us. We can believe that! His teachings are for the purpose of lighting up the many dark corners of our mind.

Quite often, we cannot possibly understand everything that he teaches. That is what good teachers are supposed to do! They bring up things that are hard to swallow but will do us a lot of good. We should believe that! People with a lot of blessings can easily bring forth the faith. They listen to the Dharma and somehow it has a true ring to them.

If we really believe, then we should learn to accord with the teachings. If we can carry out the Buddha’s instructions, then we can see that he certainly did not fool us at all.

This is a real problem for the teachers who are trying to teach the truth. Unless they are truthful, their students eventually will figure it out!

As far as I know, no Arhat or PratyekaBuddha or Bodhisattva ever complained that the Buddha misled them in any way!

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**When you eat honey, it is sweet on the surface and sweet in the center; it is the same with my sutras.**

“On the surface” alludes to the provisional teaching (for Arhats and PratyekaBuddhas). At the initial level (Provisional Dharma), the BuddhaDharma is so sweet to the taste.

Remember that the Buddha’s first five disciples were accomplished cultivators of the external paths. When they began practicing the Two Vehicles, it was wonderful beyond description.

“In the center” refers to the actual teaching (for Bodhisattvas). When they graduated to the Bodhisattva Vehicle, they discovered that cultivation is even more wonderful.

They realize that the Two Vehicles are just like the transformation city. If they move on then they get so much more.

All the teachings were made for a purpose: the provisional teaching gradually leads to the actual teaching. Each teaching was suitable for the individual cases.

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**Section 40:**

**THE WAY IS PRACTICED IN THE MIND**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "A Sramana who practices the Way should not be like an ox turning a millstone. Such a one walks the Way with his body, but his mind is not on the Way. If the mind is concentrated on the Way, what further need is there to practice?"**

Sutra commentary:

Cultivation centers on the mind, not at external things.

**The Buddha said, "A Sramana who practices the Way should not be like an ox turning a millstone.** An "ox turning a millstone" does it grudgingly. Who's forcing you to cultivate?

Some Westerners misunderstand left home people. They feel that we are parasites of society. That is so far from the truth.

What are we producing that is of value?

I submit to you that religious people contribute goodness to society. We bring that energy of kindness and compassion to the world.

As you get older, you will see more spiritual need

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in your life. Religion can bring meaning to people's lives.

Please do not wait until your body is almost broken up from your struggles to make ends meet or to conquer the world before you try to understand why you came to this world.

**Such a one walks the Way with his body, but his mind is not on the Way.** His mind is somewhere else even though his body is close to the Way.

There are some left home people who only leave the home life with their body, not with their mind. They take on left home people appearance but entertain mostly worldly thoughts and devote a lot of their time to worldly pursuits.

Who are they?

They are those who are pursuing fame and profit.

**If the mind is concentrated on the Way, what further need is there to practice?** If you can reach the state of being constantly mindful of the Way, you've made it. You have no more false-thinking. You've accomplished the Way. There is no further need to practice it.

Hinduism used to stress ceremonies and religious protocols.

The Way is not all those external things like the ceremonies, etiquette, sutra books, temples, statues etc... Those are only external things that point to the mind..

Section 41:

**A STRAIGHT MIND GETS RID OF DESIRE**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "One who practices the Way is like an ox pulling a heavy load through deep mud. The ox is so extremely exhausted that it dares not glance to the left or right. Only when it gets out of the mud can it rest. The Sramana should regard emotion and desire as being worse than deep mud; and with an undeviating mind, he should be mindful of the Way. Then he can avoid suffering."**

Sutra commentary:

Cultivate a straight mind that is intent on keeping defilements away.

**The Buddha said, "One who practices the Way is like an ox pulling a heavy load through deep mud.** It's certainly not like going to the beach! Cultivation is like ploughing in mud. "An ox" is supposed to do what it's told. So do cultivators: they should do what their Good Knowing Adviser tells them.

"A heady load": alludes to the heavy burden we need to pull. Cultivators have three kinds of burden:

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1. Afflictions (before ending birth and death).
2. Living beings (vow to save all living beings).
3. The teachings (vow to understand the teachings).

“Deep mud” symbolizes the sea of birth and death that we ceaseless wander in.

**The ox is so extremely exhausted that it dares not glance to the left or right.**

“Extremely exhausted”: we need to give it our all.

“It dares not glance to the left or right”:

It has a sense of urgency and does not let itself become distracted.

Success cultivators are those who have a sense of urgency. Cultivation is really a matter of life and death for them. For example, Chan practitioners are taught to hang imaginary “death 死” characters in front of their eyes.

**Only when it gets out of the mud can it rest.** If you are aware of the danger you’re in, you wouldn’t go about it casually, would you? “To get out” means to end birth and death.

Here again, the Buddha starts off with an analogy to make the point.

**The Sramana should regard emotion and desire as being worse than deep mud; and with an undeviating mind, he should be mindful of the Way.** “Emotion and desire” are very dangerous. Do

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not indulge in them. They make you fall.

Cultivate with single-minded determination “un-deviating mind”. Be mindful of birth and death: we’re born, create karmas, die and are reborn to undergo the retributions of past karmas (“revolve in the wheel”). Do not get distracted by emotion and desire.

**Then he can avoid suffering**; you can then end suffering.

“Suffering” has two kinds:

1. Share section birth and death suffering: we are physically born and die.

2. Change section birth and death suffering: our mind ceaseless changes: one thought chases another.

Why did the Buddha introduce fear in the equation? Fear of the ultimate loss. Fear can motivate us to cultivate and obtain liberation.

There was an old man who was married to a beautiful and much younger wife. He fell head over heel for her and dutifully did what she asked of him.

One day the king of a neighboring country marched his huge army over to try to conquer the old man’s smaller country.

So the old man enlisted into the army to fight the invading army.

Before he left for battle, his wife gave him a large bucket of rice so that he can eat while away from home. She told him not to lose the rice bucket if he wanted to see her again. (I guess some women have

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different priorities than men.)

The old man dutifully put the bucket of rice on his head and rode off to the battlefield.

The invading army proved to be too much for the smaller country: its army was soundly defeated and dispersed throughout the battlefield.

The old man was separated from his army. As he was running for his life, he saw a camp. Thinking that it was his army's he rushed his horse toward it in full gallop with his rice bucket on top of his head.

The enemy army was totally taken by surprise. They tried to grab the bucket perched on top of the old man's head. This only made him fight even more valiantly.

His fellow soldiers who were dispersed in the neighboring hills saw him. They thought that he was on the attack. Impressed by his bravery, they too sounded the charge and also rushed the enemy's camp.

As a result, the enemy was in total disarray and had to run for their lives.

The old man could then safely come home to his wife with the rice bucket.

Moral of the story: it pays to be afraid of your wife.

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Section 42:

**UNDERSTAND THAT THE WORLD IS ILLU-  
SORY**

Sutra text:

**The Buddha said, "I look upon royalty and high positions as upon the dust that floats through a crack. I look upon treasures of gold and jade as upon broken tiles. I look upon fine silk clothing as upon cheap cotton. I look upon a great thousand-world as upon a small nut kernel. I look upon the waters of the Anavatapta Lake as upon oil used to anoint the feet. I look upon the door of expedient means as upon a cluster of jewels created by transformation. I look upon the Unsurpassed Vehicle as upon a dream of gold and riches. I look upon the Buddha Way as upon flowers before my eyes. I look upon Dhyana samadhi as upon the pillar of Mount Sumeru. I look upon Nirvana as upon being awake day and night. I look upon inversion and uprightness as upon six dancing dragons. I look upon impartiality as upon the one true ground. I look upon the flourishing of the teaching as upon a tree blooming during four seasons.**

Sutra commentary:

This final section is to help break living beings'

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attachment to dharmas.

**The Buddha said, "I look upon royalty and high positions as upon the dust that floats through a crack.** Looking at status and power like insignificant achievements. "Dust that floats through a crack": ordinary people prize royalty and titles; they are but insignificant dust that can be seen through the cracks.

Life is too short: we spend a lifetime to chase after fame and in the end, it can't help us the birth and death problem. We undergo death and are reborn again, again and again.

Position and power have no meaning to the Buddha.

**I look upon treasures of gold and jade as upon broken tiles.** Precious jewels and treasure are worthless (as "broken tiles") to Him as well. In the land of Ultimate Bliss, the ground is gold. It's as worthless as dirt here in the Saha world.

The truly rich are not impressed by gold and gems.

**I look upon fine silk clothing as upon cheap cotton.** Unlike many of us, he's not attached to fine clothing either. There is nothing like the feel of fine silk or fabric against your skin is there?

The Buddha is does not value that fine feeling that nice clothing can provide.

**I look upon a great thousand-world as upon a small nut kernel.** If you have spiritual powers, opened you Heavenly Eyes, you can see the various

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worlds. He's not impressed either.

He's not attached to big or small.

**I look upon the waters of the Anavatapta Lake as upon oil used to anoint the feet.** All that water (of very big lake in India) seems so little to him.

He's not attached to little or much.

Now for those who are more advanced.

**I look upon the door of expedient means as upon a cluster of jewels created by transformation.** The Three Vehicles (Arhat, Pratyekabuddha and Bodhisattva Vehicles) are merely created for temporary use (provisional teaching). There is no need to be attached to them: don't think they are superior to anything else.

Lay people value ways to get rich. Cultivators value Dharma Doors that help them quickly attain the fruitions.

The Buddha is not attached to Dharma Doors at all. All Dharma Doors are truly level and equal.

**I look upon the Unsurpassed Vehicle as upon a dream of gold and riches.** The actual teaching itself is also merely a dream of riches and gold. Break the attachment to the superiority of the actual teaching.

Living beings are already replete with the priceless Buddha nature. The Unsurpassed Vehicle is but a means to recover what we already have in the first place.

**I look upon the Buddha Way as upon flowers**

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**before my eyes.** Mahayana is merely like a vision of flowers. They won't last forever.

Mahayana itself is to help all living beings. By itself there is nothing worth taking about. Whatever is known as the Buddha Way is merely a vision of flowers. You should not be attached to it.

**I look upon Dhyana samadhi as upon the pillar of Mount Sumeru.** Mount Sumeru is the highest mountain in the Desire realm. It towers over everything and is immovable. Samadhi power is quite awesome and yet He looks at it as a thing that can be topped.

One should not be attached to samadhi power because like Mount Sumeru, it does not last forever.

**I look upon Nirvana as upon being awake day and night.** You are constantly aware and clear-headed. That's all Nirvana means to him.

It's probably to remind the Two Vehicle practitioners: do not be that attached to Nirvana!

**I look upon inversion and uprightness as upon six dancing dragons.** When they dance, one can no longer tell one from another.

Six dancing dragons represent the six organs. They can be as captivating as six dancing dragons. That's the nature of being upside-down or right-side-up.

He does not even discriminate between proper or deviant.

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**I look upon impartiality as upon the one true ground**, of truth, of True Suchness where there is no duality.

When we discover the truth and merge with it, we then can become “impartial”: we no longer discriminate.

The Buddha is no longer attached to marks.

**I look upon the flourishing of the teaching as upon a tree blooming during four seasons**, with its cycles and lows and highs. That’s the nature of the Buddhadharmā.

“Look”: using the Buddha’s eyes.

Whoever who are, wherever you are: don’t be attached. As a cultivator of the Way, it’s shocking to hear that someone can look at Nirvana as like being awake. But coming from someone who is already there, you’ve got to pay attention: He knows. Once you get there, there is nothing to be attached to. You can’t get there unless you let go of even the notion of making it, even the idea of liberating yourself!

Ultimately, free yourself of all attachments!

Story of the cloth bag carrying monk: he encounters the prime minister who asks about Mahayana. “What is the highest teaching?” The official asks.

The beggar monk immediately drops his cloth bag, his only possessions.

“Really, is there anything higher than that?” Pressed the prime minister.

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The monk picks up the bag and walks away until he disappears from sight.

There is nothing in the ultimate teaching. There is no mark (nor is there no no mark).

This section is a very good reference: very powerful dharmas that are being discussed here.

Emptiness contemplation (空觀):

7. Fame
8. Wealth
9. Food and clothing
10. World
11. Rivers and ocean

Mundane contemplation (假觀):

1. Expedients
2. Big Vehicle
3. Buddha Way
4. Samadhi
5. Nirvana

Middle contemplation (中觀):

1. Inversion/proper
2. Impartiality
3. Flourishing of the teaching.

- End -