

Part Six:

THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

(Chapters 29-30)

Chapter 30: The Aspects and Import of Prajñā

II. THE ASPECTS AND IMPORT OF PRAJÑĀ

A. THE EXALTED NATURE OF THE MAHĀPRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ

1. QUESTION: WHY IS PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ ALONE CONSIDERED “GREAT”?

Question: Why is the *prajñāpāramitā* (the perfection of wisdom) alone called the “Mahā” *prajñāpāramitā* (the great perfection of wisdom) in a manner not matching [the names of] the other five *pāramitās*?

2. RESPONSE: IT GIVES BIRTH TO THE GREAT ONES AND THE GREAT RESULT

Response: (Chinese text note: In our language, “mahā” means “great.” “Prajñā” means “wisdom.” “Pāramitā” means “reaching to the other shore.”)⁵ Because it is able to reach to the other shore of the great sea of wisdom and because it reaches to its very boundaries and utterly exhausts its most ultimate limits, it qualifies as “perfect” in its “reaching to the other shore.” In all the worlds, the Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time are the greatest. Next in order come the Bodhisattvas, the Pratyekabuddhas and the Śrāvaka-disciples. These four classes of great persons are all born from *prajñāpāramitā*. It is for this reason that it qualifies as “great.”

Additionally, it is able to bestow on beings a great resultant reward which is incalculable, inexhaustible, and eternally unchanging, namely “nirvāṇa.” The other five *pāramitās* cannot do this. “Giving” and the others, in the absence of the *prajñāpāramitā*, are only able to bring resultant rewards on the worldly plane. It is for this reason that they cannot, [in and of themselves], qualify as “great.”

B. ON THE VARIOUS LEVELS OF GENUINE WISDOM

1. QUESTION: WHAT IS MEANT HERE BY “WISDOM”?

Question: What is meant by “wisdom”?

2. RESPONSE: IT SUBSUMES ALL OTHER FORMS OF WISDOM...

Response: *Prajñāpāramitā* subsumes all forms of wisdom. How is this so? While pursuing the Buddha Path, the bodhisattva should study all dharmas and realize all forms of wisdom, namely the wisdom of Śrāvaka-disciples, Pratyekabuddhas, and the Buddhas.

a. THE WISDOM OF THE ŚRĀVAKA DISCIPLES

This wisdom [of the Śrāvaka disciples] is of three kinds: that of those “still subject to training” (*śaikṣa*), that of those “beyond training”

(*aśaikṣa*), and that of those “neither subject to further training nor beyond further training” (*naiva-śaikṣa-nāśaikṣa*).

As for the wisdom of those “neither subject to further training nor beyond further training,” it refers to such categories as the ground of “dry wisdom” (*śukla-vidarśana-bhūmi*), the contemplation on the unlovely (*aśubha-bhāvanā*), *ānāpāna-[smṛti]* (mindfulness of the breath), the four stations of mindfulness (*smṛti-upāsthanā*) in connection to the desire realm, the dharma of heat (*uṣmagata*), the dharma of summits (*mūrdhan*), the dharma of patience (*kṣānti*), the foremost worldly dharmas (*laukika-agra-dharma*), and other such dharmas.

As for the wisdom of those “still subject to training,” it refers to such categories as the patience associated with the dharma knowledge of suffering (*duḥkhe-dharma-jñāna-kṣānti*), and so forth on to the wisdom of the *vajropama-samādhi* of one verging on arhatship at the point of the ninth [act of counteractive abandonment (*prahāṇa-pratipakṣa*)] on the “uninterrupted path” (*ānantarya-mārga*).

As for the wisdom of those “beyond training,” this refers to the arhat’s wisdom arising with the ninth [act of “counteractive conservation” (*adhāra-pratipakṣa*)] on the “path of liberation” (*vimukti-mārga*). From this point on, everything qualifies as the wisdom of those “beyond training.” For instance: the knowledge of destruction (*kṣaya-jñāna*), the knowledge of non-production (*anutpāda-jñāna*), and so forth. This is what constitutes the wisdom of those beyond training. In the course of seeking the way of pratyekabuddhahood, the levels of wisdom are the same as these.

b. THE WISDOM OF THE PRATYEKABUDDHAS

1) PRATYEKABUDDHAS VERSUS ŚRĀVAKAS: WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

Question: If the path of a pratyekabuddha is just the same [as that of an arhat], on what basis could one distinguish between śrāvaka-disciples and pratyekabuddhas?

2) PRATYEKABUDDHAS AWAKEN WITH NO PRESENT-LIFE INSTRUCTION

Response: Although their paths are of a single type, still, their uses of wisdom have their differences. In a case where buddhas have not come forth [into the world] or else the Dharma of any given buddha has already become extinct, this person, on account of causal factors associated with previous lifetimes, brings forth wisdom on his own and does not do so based on hearing it [directly, in this life], from anyone else. On his own, he employs wisdom to gain realization of the Path.

3) STORY: THE KING ENLIGHTENED BY IMPERMANENCE

This is illustrated by an instance in which the king of a country had gone out into his gardens to wander about and enjoy himself. As he observed in the early morning the blossoming of the grove's trees and the flourishing abundance of fruit, he was struck by how extremely lovely and pleasurable they were. After the King had eaten, he then lay down to take a nap. Meanwhile, the wives and female entertainers of the King all went about picking flowers and, in the process, damaged the trees by breaking off branches.

After the King awoke, he observed the destruction in the grove and became spontaneously enlightened to the fact that all worlds are impermanent and bound to destruction in just this same way. After he had contemplated this, the mind of the non-outflow path (*anāsrava-mārga*) arose in him, he cut off the fetters, gained the way of the pratyekabuddha, perfected the six superknowledges, and flew off into an unoccupied and quiet area of the forest.

On account of causal circumstances such as these which arise as karmic reward for previous-life meritorious deeds, vows, and practices, one may need in this life only to observe a minor cause or condition and then be able as a result to perfect the path of the pratyekabuddha. It is factors such as these which constitute the difference [between the paths of a pratyekabuddha and an arhat].

a) TWO PRATYEKABUDDHAS: SOLITARILY OR CONDITIONS-ENLIGHTENED

Again, there are two kinds of pratyekabuddhas. One of them is referred to as "solitarily enlightened." A second type is referred to as "awakened by causes and conditions." To be "awakened by causes and conditions" is as related above. As for being "solitarily enlightened," this refers to a person who completes the Path in the present life, achieving a spontaneous enlightenment not involving hearing teachings from anyone else. This is what is meant by the "solitarily enlightened" pratyekabuddha.

b) THE TWO SUBTYPES OF SOLITARILY-ENLIGHTENED PRATYEKABUDDHA

i) SOLITARY SUBTYPE ONE: THE "LESSER" PRATYEKABUDDHA

The "solitarily enlightened" pratyekabuddha is of two types. The first is one who originally was on the path still subject to training (*śaikṣa*) and who was then reborn among people. There was no buddha in the world at this time and that buddha's Dharma had already become extinct. This *srota-āpanna* ("stream-enterer") had already fulfilled seven subsequent rebirths, should not have taken an eighth rebirth, but then spontaneously became enlightened. This

person is not properly referred to as either a buddha or as an arhat, but is instead referred to as a “lesser” pratyekabuddha. In fact, he is no different from an arhat. In some cases, they may not be comparable to the great arhats such as Śāriputra.

ii) SOLITARY SUBTYPE TWO: THE “GREAT” PRATYEKABUDDHA

A “great” pratyekabuddha creates merit and increases his wisdom across the course of a hundred kalpas and gains a number of the thirty-two marks. He may possess thirty-one marks or perhaps thirty, twenty-nine, or even on down to just one of the marks. Compared to the nine types of arhats, the acuteness of his wisdom is superior. He is able to fathom the general and specific characteristics of profound dharmas. He cultivates the absorptions for extended periods of time. He constantly takes pleasure in dwelling alone. One who has characteristics such as these is referred to as a “great” pratyekabuddha. It is characteristics such as these which constitute the differences [between arhats and pratyekabuddhas].

C. THE WISDOM OF THE BUDDHAS

One who seeks the Path of the Buddha, from the time of first bringing forth the resolve to [to realize complete enlightenment], makes a vow, “I vow that I will become a Buddha and cross the beings over to liberation, that I will succeed in realizing all of the Buddha dharmas, that I will practice the six *pāramitās*, that I will smash the hordes of demon armies as well as all of the afflictions, that I will gain the knowledge of all modes, that I will realize the Buddha Path, and that I shall ultimately gain entry into the nirvāṇa without residue.”

One then practices in accord with his original vows. From this time on, during the interim, all of the wisdom which one accumulates—that which knows entirely all of the general characteristics and specific characteristics [of all dharmas]—this is what is meant by the wisdom of the Buddha Path.

One is exhaustively able to know everything within the sphere of these three levels of wisdom and is able to reach all the way to its very boundaries. Hence it is said that one reaches to the very limits of wisdom.

C. NON-BUDDHIST WISDOM IS ARTIFICIAL AND FALLACY-RIDDEN

1. OBJECTION: WHY RECOMMEND ONLY THREE-VEHICLES WISDOM?

Question: If it were to be as stated here, then one ought to explore all of the classes of wisdom, whether they be worldly wisdom or world-transcending wisdom. Why then do you only speak of reaching to

the very boundaries of the wisdom of the Three Vehicles while failing to mention the other classes of wisdom?

2. RESPONSE: ONLY THE THREE VEHICLES REFLECT GENUINE WISDOM

Response: That of the Three Vehicles is genuine wisdom. Any others are all empty and false. Although the bodhisattva is aware of them, he does not focus on practicing them.

1) ANALOGY: MT. MALAYA AS THE SOURCE OF SANDALWOOD.

It is just as with Mount Malaya. No place else produces sandalwood trees. If it is the case that other sources possess fine discourses, it is because, in all such cases, they were originally obtained from within the Dharma of the Buddha. They themselves, however, do not accord with the Dharma of the Buddha. When one first hears them, they may seem to be good, but if one listens longer, they turn out not to be so fine.

2) ANALOGY: COW MILK VERSUS DONKEY MILK

This is analogous to the difference between cow milk and donkey milk. Although they are the same in color, if one churns cow milk, it turns into butter, whereas if one churns donkey milk, it becomes like urine.

3. THE SIMILARITIES ARE FALSE AND HENCE DECEPTIVE

Although the Dharma of the Buddha as well as that of non-Buddhist paths may seem to be the same as regards not killing, not stealing, having kindness and pity for beings, focusing the mind, transcending desire, and contemplating emptiness, still, in the case of the discourse of non-Buddhist paths, although they may initially seem as if they are marvelous, if one follows them out to the end point to which they lead, they are then found to be false and deceptive.

4. FALLACIES UNDERGIRDING NON-BUDDHIST CONCEPTS OF WISDOM

a. REFUTATION OF NON-BUDDHIST "SELF" AND KARMA EFFICACY

All of the non-Buddhist paths are attached to the view of a self. If it was actually the case that a self existed, then it ought to fall into one or the other of two categories. Either it is characterized by destructibility or else it is characterized by indestructibility. If it is characterized by destructibility, then it ought to be something like a cow hide. If it is characterized by indestructibility, then it ought to be comparable to empty space. In the case of both of these positions, they are both such as would involve no offense entailed in killing and would involve no merit in refraining from killing.

If it were like empty space, then neither rain nor dew would be able to moisten it and neither wind nor heat would be able to dry

it out. If this were the case, then it would fall into the category of something which is permanent. If it were permanent, then suffering would be unable to torment it and happiness would be unable to please it. If it thus was something which did not experience suffering or happiness, then it ought not to be concerned with avoiding evil and striving to perform deeds which generate merit.

If it was comparable to a cow hide, then it would be such as might be destroyed by wind and rain. If it was destructible, then it would fall into the category of something which is impermanent. If it were impermanent, then there could be neither [future punishments resulting from] offenses nor [future blessings resulting from] engaging in meritorious karmic deeds.

If in fact the discourse of the non-Buddhist traditions corresponds to these characterizations, then what would be the point in having the teaching that refraining from killing is karmically meritorious and that engaging in killing constitutes a karmic offense?

b. OBJECTION: BUT NON-BUDDHIST ABSORPTIONS SURELY QUALIFY?

Question: Although the [teachings on] moral restrictions and karmic merit of these non-Buddhists may involve such fallacies, what about [the quality of] their dhyāna absorptions and wisdom?

c. RESPONSE: EVEN THERE, ATTACHMENTS DISQUALIFY THEM

Response: Because non-Buddhist paths pursue the cultivation of dhyāna meditation with a mind which holds to the existence of a self, because they are excessive in affection, views, and arrogance, and because they fail to relinquish all dharmas, they do not possess any genuine wisdom.

d. OBJECTION: SURELY THEIR "EMPTINESS" TRANSCENDS DHARMAS?

Question: You admit that non-Buddhist paths contemplate emptiness. If one contemplates emptiness, then one relinquishes all dharmas. How then can you say that, because they do not relinquish all dharmas, they therefore possess no actual wisdom?

e. RESPONSE: THEY ARE ATTACHED EVEN TO EMPTINESS

Response: Although non-Buddhist paths do contemplate emptiness, still, they seize upon that characteristic of being empty. Although they may be aware that dharmas are empty, still, they

are unaware that the self itself is empty. [They are dismissed herein as not having relinquished all dharmas and as possessing no actual wisdom precisely] because their “wisdom” is wedded to a cherishing attachment to the contemplation of emptiness.

f. OBJECTION: THEIR “NO-THOUGHT ABSORPTION” MUST QUALIFY?

Question: Non-Buddhist paths do possess the no-thought absorption (*asaṃjñā-samāpatti*) in which the mind dharmas as well as the dharmas associated with the mind are all extinguished. Because they are entirely extinguished, there is no fault therein involving a class of wisdom typified by cherishing attachment and seizing on particular characteristics.

g. RESPONSE: IT IS MERELY AN ARTIFICIALLY-PRODUCED DHARMA

Response: The power of the no-thought absorption resides in forcing the mind to enter extinction. It is not the case that it is based on the power of actual wisdom. Additionally, they are of the opinion that this actually constitutes nirvāṇa while remaining unaware that it is merely a compositely created dharma. On account of this, they fall into inverted views. Although thought is temporarily extinguished herein, nonetheless, when one encounters the appropriate causes and conditions, it will arise yet again. This situation is analogous to that of a person who has fallen into a dreamless sleep in which the thoughts of the mind are not manifesting activity. Still, when such a person reawakens, they do manifest their existence yet again.

h. OBJECTION: PEAK OF EXISTENCE, *BHAVĀGRA*, MUST BE WISDOM-BASED?

Question: Even if the faults of the no-thought absorption are as you describe here, still there is the additional absorption of “neither perception nor non-perception” (*naiva-saṃjñā-nāsaṃjñā-samāpatti*). There is no erroneous thought therein, nor does one extinguish thought in the manner of the artificially-created no-thought absorption. In this latter circumstance, it is by resort to the power of wisdom that one comes to be free of thought.

i. RESPONSE: SUBTLE THOUGHT STILL REMAINS EVEN THERE

Response: Even in this situation, thought is still present. It is simply because it is subtle that one remains unaware of it. If it was the case that it really was free of thought, why then would the disciples of the Buddha go beyond it in seeking to realize actual wisdom?

In the Dharma of the Buddha, this consciousness associated with the absorption of neither perception nor non-perception [is seen to] abide in dependence upon the other four aggregates. Because these

four aggregates are subsumed within the sphere of causes and conditions, they are therefore impermanent. Because they are impermanent, they are therefore associated with suffering. Because they are impermanent and hence associated with suffering, they are therefore empty. Because they are empty, they are therefore devoid of self. Because they are empty and devoid of self, they are therefore such as may appropriately be renounced.

1) ATTACHMENTS IN *BHAVĀGRA* PREVENT GENUINE *NIRVĀṆA*

It is because you and those like you maintain a cherishing attachment for this sort of wisdom that you do not succeed in reaching *nirvāṇa*.

2) ANALOGY: LIKE A DEAD-ENDED LOOPER CATERPILLAR

This [circumstance wherein one abides in the neither perception nor non-perception absorption] is analogous to that of the looper caterpillar which arches to position its hind legs [thus drawing them forward] and then, afterwards, extends its front legs on ahead. When it runs out of space, as there is no further place to which it can advance, it then returns back again.

Non-Buddhists resort to abiding in the first *dhyāna* in order to relinquish the desires associated with lower stations. This process goes on until they resort to abiding in the station of neither perception nor non-perception in order to relinquish the station of nothing whatsoever. On account of the fact that there is nothing above it to which they might resort, they remain unable to relinquish the station of neither perception nor non-perception. This is because they have no further place upon which to rely, because they are terrified at the prospect of losing the self, and because they fear falling into that circumstance wherein there is nothing whatsoever which can be gotten at.

j. NON-BUDDHIST CONCEPTIONS OF MORALITY ARE FAULTY

Additionally, in the scriptures of the non-Buddhists, there are statements permitting of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and the consumption of intoxicants.

[For instance], when employed for the purpose of making sacrifices to gods, [they claim that] resorting to incantations to kill carries no offense because it is done in service of practicing the Path. In the event that one encounters urgent difficulties and wishes to preserve one's own physical life and so kills a person of lesser station, they maintain that there is no offense in this so long as it is done for the sake of practicing their path.

Also, if there are urgent difficulties and it is for the sake of practicing their path, [they claim] one may steal anything but gold in order to save oneself from those circumstances. [This is based on the opinion that], later on, one will be able to get rid of this disastrous offense.

[They also claim that], aside from womenfolk associated with one's teachers, the wife of the King, the wife of one's spiritual master, and virgin girls, one may engage in sexual misconduct with any others when encountering pressing and urgent difficulties.

If it is for the sake of one's teachers, one's father or mother, one's own person, for the sake of a cow, or for the sake of a matchmaker, they allow that one may engage in false speech. In cold regions, it is permitted that one may drink liquor made from rock honey. In the course of making sacrifices to a god, it is considered permissible that one may taste one or two drops of liquor.

K. BUDDHIST MORALITY PERMITS NO SUCH ERRORS

In the Dharma of the Buddha, it is not this way. In regard to all beings, one maintains a mind of kindness and looks upon them equally, even to the point that one does not take the life of even an ant. How much the less might one kill a person? One does not take even a needle or a thread. How much the less might one take objects of greater value? One may not even lay a finger on a woman not under the protection of another and may not so much as touch even a courtesan. How much the less might one be able to touch a man's wife or daughter?

Even in joking, one may not engage in false speech. How much the less may one deliberately tell a lie? One may never drink any liquor at any time. How much the less might one do so on account of residing in a cold region or on account of performing a sacrifice to a god?

5. SUMMARY DISMISSAL OF NON-BUDDHIST TRADITIONS

[The beliefs of] you and other non-Buddhists like you are so extremely different from the Buddha's Dharma as to be as far apart as heaven and earth. Your dharmas and that of other non-Buddhists like you is a place for the production of afflictions. In the case of the Dharma of the Buddha, it is a place for the doing away with afflictions. This constitutes a great difference.

D. DESCRIPTION OF THE DHARMA OF THE BUDDHA

The dharmas of the Buddha are countless and comparable in

vastness to a great sea. It was on account of according with the minds of beings that there are all sorts of different articulations of Dharma. Sometimes they speak of existence, sometimes they speak of nonexistence, sometimes they speak of permanence, sometimes they speak of impermanence, sometimes they speak of suffering, sometimes they speak of bliss, sometimes they speak of self, sometimes they speak of no self, sometimes they speak of diligently cultivating the three modes of karmic action and accumulating all manner of good dharmas, and sometimes they speak of all dharmas as characterized by being in the sphere of the wishless (*apranīhita*).

1. THE THREE GATEWAYS TO THE DHARMA

Upon hearing all of these different explanations, one without wisdom would be of the opinion that they are perverse and erroneous. One who is wise, however, enters three types of gateways to Dharma and, in contemplating all of the discourses of the Buddha, finds that they are genuine and are not contradictory. What are the three gateways? The first is the *Piṭaka* gateway. The second is the Abhidharma gateway. The third is the emptiness gateway.

Question: What is meant by the “*Piṭaka*” gateway? What is meant by the “Abhidharma” gateway? What is meant by the “emptiness” gateway?

a. THE PIṬAKA UPADEŚA GATEWAY

Response: The *Piṭaka* [-*upadeśa*] has three million, two hundred thousand words. It was created by [Mahā]kātyāyana when the Buddha was still in the World. After the Buddha crossed into cessation, the human lifespan gradually diminished and the strength of people’s memories become reduced to the point that they were no longer able to perform vast recitations. Those who had gained the Path condensed it into three hundred and eighty-four thousand words. If a person enters through the *Piṭaka* [-*upadeśa*] gateway, the dialectical discussions are endless. There are contained within it the gateway of according with characteristics, the counteractive gateway, and all sorts of other gateways as well.

1) THE PIṬAKA UPADEŚA’S “CHARACTERISTICS” GATEWAY

As for the gateway of according with characteristics, it is as illustrated by a verse spoken by the Buddha:

Do not do any evil.
Uphold the practice of every good.
Each should purify his own mind.

This is the teaching of all Buddhas.

At this point one should discuss all of the mental dharmas associated with the mind (*caitasika-dharma*). Now, when he only speaks of “each purifying his own mind,” one knows then that he has [implicitly] spoken of all mental dharmas associated with the mind. How is this so? It is because they share the same characteristics and the same conditions.

For instance, when the Buddha speaks of the four stations of mindfulness, there is in that no departure from the four right efforts, the four bases of psychic power, the five root-faculties and the five powers. How is this so? There are four kinds of vigor contained right within the four stations of mindfulness. These then are just the four right efforts. There are four kinds of absorption. These are the four bases of psychic power. There are five kinds of good dharmas. These are the five root-faculties and the five powers.

Although the Buddha did not discuss the other gateways [at that time] and so only spoke of the four stations of mindfulness, one should realize that he had already [implicitly] spoken of the other gateways. This is just as with the Buddha and the four truths wherein he would sometimes speak of one truth, sometimes speak of two, and sometimes speak of three. This is exemplified in the verse spoke by Bhikshu Aśvajit (Lit. “Horse Star”) for Śāriputra:

All dharmas arise from conditions.

These dharmas’ conditions then meet their end.

My master, the great king of the Āryas

Explains this meaning thus.

This verse only refers to three of the truths. One should realize that the truth of the Path is already implicitly contained among them. This is because it is not apart from them. This is analogous to that circumstance wherein, when only a single person commits an offense, the entire family nonetheless endures the punishment. Cases such as these indicate what is meant by the “according with characteristics” gateway.

2) THE PIṬAKA UPADEŚĀ’S “COUNTERACTIVE” GATEWAY

As for the counteractive gateway, this is exemplified by the Buddha’s only speaking of the four inverted views: the inverted view imputing permanence, the inverted view imputing blissfulness, the inverted view imputing a self, and the inverted view imputing purity. Although he did not speak herein of the four stations of

mindfulness, one should realize that it already possesses the meaning of the four stations of mindfulness.

This is comparable to when, with the mentioning of a particular medicine, one thereby immediately knows of the associated sickness and when one mentions a particular sickness, one immediately knows of its associated medicine. So, too, if one speaks of the four stations of mindfulness, then one knows that one has already implicitly spoken of the four inverted views.

If one brings up the four inverted views, then these are just characteristics of erroneous understanding. If one speaks of the four inverted views then one has already implicitly mentioned the fetters. How is this the case? If one speaks of something's roots, then one thereby also gains knowledge of its branches.

For example, the Buddha said that all worlds contain three poisons. In speaking of the three poisons, one should know that he has already implicitly mentioned three [countervailing] components of the eight-fold right path. If he speaks of the three poisons, one should know that he has already thereby implicitly mentioned the poisons involved in all of the afflictions.

The fifteen kinds of affection constitute the poison of desire. The fifteen kinds of hatefulness constitute the poison of hatred. The fifteen kinds of ignorance constitute the poison of delusion. All of the erroneous views, arrogance, and doubt are subsumed within ignorance. In this manner, all of the fetters are entirely subsumed within the three poisons. What then does one employ to destroy them? It is those three component aspects of the eight-fold right path, [the three trainings of moral virtue, concentration, and wisdom].

If someone speaks of the three [countervailing] component aspects of the eight-fold right path, then one should realize that he has already thereby implicitly mentioned all of the thirty-seven wings of enlightenment. All sorts of characteristic features such as these indicate what is meant by the "counteractive gateway."

Dharmas such as have been described above constitute what is referred to as the "*Piṭaka* [-*upadeśa*]" gateway.

b. THE "ABHIDHARMA" GATEWAY

What then is meant by the "Abhidharma" gateway? In some cases, the Buddha himself explained the meanings of dharmas. In some cases the Buddha himself explained the names of dharmas. Still, the disciples engaged in the creation of all sorts of compilations and exegeses explaining his meaning. For instance, the Buddha said:

If there were a bhikshu who was unable to correctly bear in mind conditioned dharmas who nonetheless wished to gain the foremost worldly dharma, this would be impossible. If one fails to gain the foremost worldly dharma and yet still wishes to enter into the midst of the “correct” stage (*samyakto va niyāma*), this would be impossible to accomplish. If one wished to gain the realization of a *srota-āpanna*, a *sakṛdāgāmin*, an *anāgāmin*, or an arhat, this, too, would be impossible.

If there were a bhikshu who, possessed of right mindfulness with respect to conditioned dharmas, gained the foremost worldly dharma, this is possible. If one had gained the foremost worldly dharma and then succeeded in entering into the “correct stage,” if one had entered into the correct stage and then succeeded in gaining the realization of a *srota-āpanna*, a *sakṛdāgāmin*, an *anāgāmin*, and an arhat, this is definitely possible.

As for what the Buddha directly explained herein, he did not mention the characteristics and meaning of the foremost worldly dharma. He did not describe the realms to which it belongs, what its causes are, what its conditions are, and which karmic effects occur as a result. The discriminating explanation of the characteristics and meanings of all of the sorts of dharmas practiced by the Śrāvakas—those dharmas consisting of the foremost worldly dharma and so forth on through to the nirvāṇa without residue—explanations such as these comprise what falls within the sphere of the “Abhidharma” gateway.

C. THE “EMPTINESS” GATEWAY

As for the “emptiness” gateway, it refers to the emptiness of beings (*pudgala-sūnyatā*) and the emptiness of dharmas (*dharmasūnyatā*).

1) THE EMPTINESS OF BEINGS

[In the case of the first], take for example this passage from the *Sutra on the Encounter with King Bimbisāra* (*Bimbisāra-rāja-pratyud-gamana-sūtra*):

The Buddha told the great king: When form is produced, it is only emptiness which is being produced. When form is destroyed, it is only emptiness which is being destroyed. When karmic formative factors (*saṃskāra*) are produced, it is only emptiness which is being produced. When they are destroyed, it is only emptiness which is being destroyed.

There is herein no self (*ātman*), no person (*pudgala*), and no

spiritual soul (*puruṣa*). There is no person who goes from this life on into the later life aside from a conjunction of causes and effects, a being consisting only of names and such. The foolish common person pursues reality by chasing after names.

It was in sutras such as these that the Buddha explained the emptiness of beings.

2) ŚRĀVAKA-LEVEL EMPTINESS OF DHARMAS

As for the emptiness of dharmas, take for example the *Great Emptiness Sutra* (*Mahā-śūnyatā-sūtra*) wherein the Buddha stated:

Within the twelve causes and conditions, from ignorance on through to old age and death, if there is a person who says that there is an old age or a death, or if he says that there is someone who grows old or someone who dies—in every such instance—these are erroneous views. The same is true [for such statements] with regard to birth, becoming, grasping, craving, feeling, contact, the six sense entrances, name-and-form, consciousness, karmic formative factors (*saṃskāra*) and ignorance.

If there is a person who says that the body is just the spiritual soul or if there is someone who says that the body is different from the spiritual soul—although these two are different, they are identical in that they are both erroneous views.

The Buddha said, “To say that the body is just the spiritual soul... [Anyone positing] erroneous views such as these is not my disciple. To say that the body is different from the spirit is also an erroneous view. [Anyone proposing this] is not my disciple.” In this part of the Sutra, the Buddha was speaking of the emptiness of dharmas.

When he said, “...if there is a person who says that there is someone who grows old or who dies...,” one should know that this fallacy was brought up in relation to the emptiness of beings.

Where he said, “If there is a person who claims that there is an old age or a death...,” one should know that this fallacy was brought up in relation to the emptiness of dharmas. This is also the case with the other references up to and including the above reference to “ignorance.”

Additionally, the Buddha discussed the sixty-two wrong views in the *Brahmā's Net Sutra* (*Brahma-jāla-sūtra*), saying:

If there is a person who claims that the spiritual soul is permanent and that the world is permanent, these are erroneous views. If one claims that the spiritual soul is impermanent and

that the world is impermanent, these, too, are erroneous views. To claim that the spiritual soul and the world are both permanent and impermanent or to claim that the spiritual soul and the world are neither permanent nor impermanent—In each of these cases, these are erroneous views.

Therefore one should know that all dharmas are empty. This is what is actually the case.

a) OBJECTION: ON SOUL-PERMANENCE, WORLD IMPERMANENCE

Question: If one claims that the spiritual soul is permanent, this ought to be an erroneous view. Why? Because a [self-existent] nature of any such “spiritual soul” is nonexistent.

If one claims that the world is permanent, this, too, ought to be a false view. Why? The world is actually entirely impermanent. It is on account of inverted views that one speaks of the world as permanent.

If one says that the spiritual soul is impermanent, this, too, ought to be an erroneous view. Why? One should not say that the spiritual soul is impermanent simply because it is devoid of a [self-existent] nature.

If one says that the world is impermanent, it should not be that this is an erroneous view. Why? It is the nature of all conditioned dharmas that they are in fact impermanent.

b) RESPONSE: WORLD IMPERMANENCE REALLY IS FALSE

Response: If it is actually the case that all dharmas are impermanent, why did the Buddha say, “To say that the world is impermanent is an erroneous view.”? Therefore one can know that it is not actually the case that it is impermanent.

c) OBJECTION: HOW CAN YOU CLAIM IMPERMANENCE IS FALSE?

Question: In place after place, the Buddha instructed one to contemplate conditioned dharmas as impermanent, suffering, empty, and devoid of self, thus causing people to gain the Path. How then can you state that, when one posits the reality of “impermanence,” that constitutes an erroneous view?

d) RESPONSE: SUCH TEACHINGS MERELY ACCORD WITH CIRCUMSTANCES

Response: In place after place, the Buddha spoke of impermanence and in place after place, he spoke of [certain factors] “not being destroyed.”

e) STORY: BUDDHA’S TEACHING OF KING MAHĀNĀMAN

Take for instance when the Shākyan King, Mahānāman, came to

where the Buddha dwelt:

[King Mahānāman] addressed the Buddha, saying, “The population of Kapilavastu is huge. Sometimes when I encounter a speeding chariot, a runaway horse, a crazed elephant or battling people, I lose the thought focused on mindfulness of the Buddha. At these times, I think to myself, ‘If I died now, where would I be reborn?’”

The Buddha told Mahānāman, “You should not be frightened. Do not fear. At such a time, you would not be reborn in one of the wretched destinies. You would certainly proceed to a good place. This is analogous to a tree which has always leaned well to the east. If there is someone who cuts it down, it will certainly fall toward the east.

“The situation is identical in the case of a person who is good. In an instance where the body is destroyed and one then dies, because throughout the long night [of time], the mental consciousness of the wholesome mind has imbued the mind with faith, moral virtue, learning, giving, and wisdom, one will certainly gain the benefit of it and thus achieve rebirth in the heavens.”

f) HENCE DHARMAS AREN'T INHERENTLY IMPERMANENT

If it was the case that all dharmas are impermanent by virtue of being produced and destroyed in every thought moment, why did the Buddha say that, because all of the meritorious qualities permeate the mind, one will certainly gain a superior rebirth? On account of this, one should realize that [dharmas] are not impermanent by nature.

g) OBJECTION: WHY THEN DID THE BUDDHA TEACH “IMPERMANENCE”?

Question: If impermanence is not actually the case, why did the Buddha speak of impermanence?

h) RESPONSE: “IMPERMANENCE” IS ONLY A PROVISIONAL TEACHING

Response: The Buddha accorded with what was appropriate for particular beings and so spoke that dharma for their sakes. It was in order to refute the inverted view imputing permanence that he spoke of impermanence.

[In the opposite case], because people were unaware of or did not believe in later existences, he spoke of the mind going on into a later existence and being reborn in the heavens, explaining that the karmic causes and conditions of offenses and merit are not lost

even in a million kalpas.

These are instances of the counteractive *siddhānta* (doctrinal perspective). They do not reflect [the ultimate truth of] the supreme meaning *siddhānta*. The true character of dharmas does not involve either the concept of permanence or the concept of impermanence.

Then, too, the Buddha spoke in place after place of the emptiness of dharmas. In the emptiness of dharmas, even impermanence itself is nonexistent. It is for these reasons that it is stated here that to claim that the world is impermanent is an erroneous view. Hence one refers here to the emptiness of dharmas.

i) DHARMAS' EMPTINESS STORY: BUDDHA'S DEBATE WITH VIVĀDABALA

Furthermore, there is the case of the *brahmacārin* from Vaiśāli known as Vivādabala (lit. "Power of Debate"). The Licchavis had given him many precious things to obtain his services in debating the Buddha. Having accepted his fee for service, he proceeded that night to contemplate and select five hundred challenging debate topics. Then, early the next morning, he went with the Licchavis to the place where the Buddha dwelt:

[Vivādabala] asked the Buddha, "Is there one ultimate path or are there many ultimate paths?"

The Buddha replied, "There is one ultimate path, not many."

The Brahmacārin said, "The Buddha claims that there is one path, yet all of the non-Buddhist masters each have an ultimate path. These constitute 'many,' not just 'one.'"

The Buddha said, "Although each has his own and there are many of them, in every case, they are not the actual path. Why? It is because all of them are attached to erroneous views that they do not qualify as the ultimate path."

The Buddha then asked the Brahmacārin, "Has the *brahmacārin* Mṛgāsiras (lit. "Deer Head") realized the Path or not?"

He replied, "That individual is the one foremost among all who have realized the Path."

It just so happened that the elder *brahmacārin* Mṛgāsiras was just then standing as a bhikshu behind the Buddha, fanning the Buddha. The Buddha then asked the Brahmacārin, "Do you recognize this bhikshu here, or not?"

The Brahmacārin then recognized him and, struck with shame, lowered his head.

The Buddha next uttered this verse found in the *Categories of Meaning (Arthavarga)*:

Everyone is of the opinion that he [possesses] the ultimate,
 And so each to his own is cherishingly attached.
 Each sees himself as right and attributes faults to others.
 In every case, these do not qualify as “ultimate.”

These people enter into the debate assembly.
 As they make distinctions among meanings and principles,
 Each points out the rights and wrongs of the other.
 Victor and vanquished then embrace either distress or delight.

The victor falls into the pit of arrogance.
 The loser then falls into a hell of distress.
 Therefore, in an instance involving one who is wise,
 He does not go along with either of these two dharmas.

[The Buddha then continued with more verses directed specifically at Vivādabala]:

Vivādabala, you ought to know that,
 Among my disciples and within my Dharma,
 There is nothing held to be [ultimately] “false” or “real.”
 What then is it that you are now seeking to accomplish?

If you are wishing to destroy my discourse on doctrine,
 It is ultimately impossible to succeed in such an endeavor.
 For it is difficult to vanquish the knowledge of all modes,
 This would be tantamount to destroying your own doctrine.

In place after place within the sutras of the Śrāvakas are discussions such as these which explain the emptiness of all dharmas.

3) THE MAHĀYĀNA EMPTINESS OF DHARMAS

As for the Mahāyāna gateway to emptiness, all dharmas, by their very nature, are eternally and intrinsically empty. It is not merely on account of some contemplation arising from wisdom-based skillful means that they are found to be empty. As the Buddha explained to Subhūti:

Form is inherently empty of form. [The same is true for] feeling, perception, karmic formative factors, and consciousness which, just so, is inherently empty of consciousness. The twelve sense bases, the eighteen sense realms, the twelve causes and conditions, the thirty-seven wings of enlightenment, the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, the eighteen exclusive dharmas, the great kindness, the great compassion, *sarvajñāna* (omniscience), and so forth until we come to *anuttarasamyaksambodhi* (perfect enlightenment)—they are all entirely inherently empty.

a) OBJECTION: HOW IS “EMPTINESS” NOT AN ERRONEOUS VIEW?

Question: If [one claims that] all dharmas, by their very nature, are eternally and intrinsically empty and that, in true emptiness, nothing whatsoever exists, how does this not amount to falling into an erroneous view? By “erroneous view,” we refer here to [the belief that] there is neither offense nor merit and that there is no present life or later life. [Those erroneous views] are no different from this [concept you propose].

b) RESPONSE: THIS CHARACTERIZATION IS WRONG, AS FOLLOWS...

Response: A person who [claims that] there is no offense nor merit does not claim that there is no present lifetime. He only claims that there are no later lifetimes [and that people are] the same as such things as grasses and trees which are naturally born and which naturally die. [He claims that] a certain person is born [and then] a certain person is killed and that it all ceases within the present, beyond which there is no additional later lifetime into which one is subsequently reborn. But they do not know to contemplate everything to do with the person both inwardly and outwardly [and realize that], in every case, it is empty of any inherently existent characteristics. It is this which constitutes the difference.

Additionally, people holding erroneous views are inclined for the most part toward engaging in manifold evils and ceasing all wholesome endeavors. People contemplating emptiness do not wish even to engage in the activity involved in wholesome dharmas. How much the less would they wish to engage in evil deeds?

c) OBJECTION: ISN'T EMPTINESS JUST CAUSALITY REFUTATION?

Question: There are two type of erroneous views. There are those which attempt to refute “cause” and also to refute “effect” and then there are those which attempt to refute effect but which do not attempt to refute cause. Those corresponding to your description attempt to refute effect but not cause.

As for those which attempt to refute effect and also to refute cause, if one claims that there are no causes, no conditions, no offenses, and no merit, then this constitutes an attempt to refute cause. If one claims that there are no retributions associated with karmic offenses and meritorious karmic deeds in present and later lives, then this constitutes at attempt to refute effects.

Now, the person who contemplates emptiness claims that, in every case, they are empty. If this is the case, then karmic offenses and meritorious karmic deeds as well as causes and effects—all of

them are entirely nonexistent.

This being the case, what differences exist among such claims?

d) RESPONSE: MAHĀYANA EMPTINESS DOESN'T IMPLY ACAUSALITY

Response: Those who hold to erroneous views resort to annihilationism to arrive at the emptiness of all dharmas. A proponent of the Mahāyana realizes the true emptiness of all dharmas but still does not engage in any such refutations or attempts to demolish [causality tenets].

e) OBJECTION: EMPTINESS EMBRACES THE THREE ERRONEOUS VIEWS

Question: These erroneous views are of three types: The first is typified by one who attempts to refute the retribution for karmic offenses and meritorious karmic deeds but does not attempt to refute such offenses and meritorious deeds. He attempts to refute effect-associated retribution from causes and conditions but does not attempt to refute causes and conditions. He attempts to refute the existence of later lifetimes but does not attempt to refute the existence of the present lifetime.

The second is typified by one who attempts to refute both the retribution associated with offenses and merit as well as offenses and merit themselves, who attempts to refute the existence of effect-associated retribution from causes and conditions as well as the causes and conditions themselves, and who attempts to refute the existence of later lifetimes as well as the present lifetime. Still, he does not attempt to refute all dharmas.

The third is typified by one who attempts to refute all dharmas, claiming that, in every case, they may be shown to be entirely nonexistent. The person who contemplates emptiness also speaks of true emptiness and claims that there is nothing whatsoever which exists. What difference is there then between this and the third type of erroneous view?

f) RESPONSE: AGAIN, EMPTINESS DOESN'T INVOLVE ACAUSALITY

Response: The one who holds to erroneous views brings about emptiness through the refutation of all dharmas. The person who contemplates emptiness realizes that dharmas are themselves truly empty and does not engage in refutations or attempt to demolish [the causality tenets to which you refer].

Moreover, the person who holds to erroneous views claims that all dharmas are entirely empty and that there is nothing whatsoever which exists. [As a consequence of that approach], he seizes

upon dharmas' characteristic of being empty and engages in frivolous debates. The person who contemplates emptiness realizes that all dharmas are themselves empty, but in doing so, does not seize upon that characteristic or engage in such frivolous debates.

g) ATTACHMENT TO EMPTINESS STILL INVOLVES AFFLICTIONS

Furthermore, although those who seize upon erroneous views claim that everything is empty, still, where one might be prone to desire, they still give rise to desire. Where one might be prone to hatefulness, they still become hateful. Where one might be prone to arrogance, they still become arrogant. And where one might be prone to delusion, they still become deluded. They each deceive themselves.

h) BUDDHISTS REALIZING EMPTINESS TRANSCEND AFFLICTIONS.

In the case of the disciples of the Buddha realizing emptiness in accordance with reality, their minds do not move. In every circumstance wherein one might be prone to the arising of the fetters, they no longer arise. They become like empty space which even a smoky fire remains unable to stain and which even a great rain is unable to drench. In the case of whoever contemplates emptiness in this way, all of the various sorts of afflictions are no longer able to attach to their minds.

i) ERRONEOUS VIEWS INVOLVE SUBMERSION IN DESIRE

Additionally, even though people seizing on erroneous views may claim there is nothing whatsoever which exists, they still haven't freed themselves from the causes and conditions of desire. [Correct understanding of] true emptiness refers to a circumstance wherein one has already emerged from any causes and conditions associated with desire.⁶ These [distinctions as set forth above] constitute the difference [between inverted views and the correct understanding of emptiness].

j) REALIZATION OF TRUE EMPTINESS INVOLVES TRANSCENDENCE

Not even the pure dharmas of the four immeasurable minds are able to match the wisdom realizing true emptiness. This is because the objects upon which they focus are unreal. How much the less could those erroneous views be able to match it?

k) THREE ANALOGIES: DISTINCTIONS IN LIFE QUALITY AND DESTINY

Also, these views [discussed above] all qualify as erroneous views. Views based on realization of true emptiness, however, qualify as

right views. Those who course in erroneous views are base and evil people in the present lifetime and then become bound to fall into the hells in later lifetimes.

One who courses in wisdom founded on true emptiness gains a good reputation in the present life and then succeeds in later lives in realizing buddhahood. The difference here is like that between water and fire. The differences are so great that trying to compare them would be like comparing lethal poison to sweet-dew ambrosia (*amṛta*) or like trying to compare stinking feces to that food of the gods known as *sudhā*.

l) TRUE EMPTINESS INVOLVES EVEN EMPTINESS-OF-EMPTINESS

Moreover, when coursing in the realization of true emptiness, one has access to the “emptiness of emptiness” samādhi. In the case of that type of “emptiness” based only on erroneous views, although there is an emptiness [to which one refers], still, there is no actual coursing in the emptiness-of-emptiness samādhi.

m) EMPTINESS REALIZATION ENTAILS GIVING, VIRTUE, DHYĀNA

Furthermore, a person who contemplates true emptiness has first gone through an incalculable amount of giving, upholding of precepts, and dhyāna absorption. His mind is gentle and pliant and his afflictive fetters are but scant. Afterwards, he gains the realization of true emptiness. In the case of one who courses in erroneous views, there have been none of these endeavors. He simply wishes to seize upon emptiness by resort to erroneous thoughts linked to speculations and discriminations.

n) STORY: THE COUNTRY BUMPKIN INFATUATED WITH SALT

This is comparable to the man of rural origins who had never before seen salt. He happened to observe a man of noble status flavoring various meat and vegetable dishes with salt before eating them. He asked, “Why do you do that?”

The other man replied, “It is because this salt is able to make everything taste delectable.”

This man then thought, “If this salt is able to cause everything to taste delectable, then its own flavor must be even more delicious.” He then scooped up only the salt, filled his mouth with it, and swallowed it down. The intensity of the saltiness injured his mouth after which he exclaimed, “Why did you claim that salt is able to make for delectability?”

The man of noble background said, “You fool! With something

like this, you must carefully calculate how much to mix in to achieve delectability. How could you even contemplate just eating salt by itself?"

d. SUMMARY STATEMENT ON THE EMPTINESS GATEWAY TO DHARMA

One who is deficient in wisdom hears of the emptiness gateway to liberation but fails to also cultivate all manner of meritorious qualities. He wishes only to realize emptiness. This is a case of maintaining erroneous views and thereby cutting off one's own roots of goodness.

Concepts such as these illustrate what is meant by "the gateway of emptiness."

2. SUMMARY STATEMENT ON THE THREE GATEWAYS TO DHARMA

If one enters into these three gateways [of the *Piṭaka-upadeśa*, of the Abhidharma, and of emptiness], then he will realize that the principles contained in the Dharma of the Buddha are not mutually contradictory. The origin of one's ability to realize this concept is just the power of *prajñāpāramitā*. As a result, one has no hangups or obstructions with respect to any dharma.

If one does not succeed in realizing the dharma of *prajñāpāramitā*, then, on entering the Abhidharma gateway, one falls into [a view seizing on] existence. Upon entering into the emptiness gateway, one falls into [a view seizing on] nonexistence. And when one enters into the *Piṭaka* [-*upadeśa*] gateway, one falls into [a view seizing on] both existence and nonexistence.

Additionally, in his practice of *prajñāpāramitā*, although the bodhisattva *mahāsattva* knows the identical characteristics among all dharmas, he is also able to know all of the differing characteristics of all dharmas. Although he knows all of the differing characteristics of all dharmas, he is also able to know the identical characteristics among all dharmas. It is this class of bodhisattva wisdom which qualifies as "*prajñāpāramitā*."

E. THE BODHISATTVA'S USE OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* IN CONTEMPLATIONS

1. QUESTION: HOW DOES THE BODHISATTVA KNOW ASPECTS OF DHARMAS?

Question: How is it that the bodhisattva, *mahāsattva* knows all of the different characteristics of all dharmas? How is it that he knows the identical characteristics among dharmas?

2. RESPONSE: HE MAY CONTEMPLATE THEM AS "EXISTENT"

Response: The bodhisattva contemplates [any given] characteristic of dharmas, [for instance], the so-called "existence" characteristic.

On account of this “existence,” in the midst of all dharmas, thoughts which correspond to “existence” arise. It is in a manner such as this that everything [may be said to] “exist.”

3. QUESTION: HOW IS “EXISTENCE” IMPUTED TO NON-EXISTENTS?

Question: How is it that among “nonexistent” dharmas, thoughts imputing “existence” might arise?

4. RESPONSE: “NONEXISTENCE” IS JUST A REFLECTION OF “EXISTENCE”

Response: If one speaks of “nonexistence,” this very matter is itself just [a reflection of] the dharma of “existence.”

Additionally, the bodhisattva may contemplate an identical characteristic among all dharmas, the so-called characteristic of “nonexistence.” This is just as with the case of cows wherein the characteristic of “being a sheep” is nonexistent and is also just as with the case of sheep wherein the characteristic of “being a cow” is also nonexistent. In a just the same manner, among all dharmas, each and every one of them is devoid of the characteristics of that which is “other.”

Just as mentioned previously, it is on account of “existence” that thoughts corresponding to “existence” may arise. In the case of these dharmas, however, we speak of that which is different from what may be said to “exist.” Because it is different, then it ought to be the case that it is “nonexistent.”

[Given the aforementioned], if it were actually the case that the dharma of existence [could be] represented by the cow, [for example], then it ought [by force of logic] to also be the case that the sheep, too, is just a cow. Why? Because, in the case of both of them, the dharma of “existence” is no different. If it were different, then it would be the case, [again, by force of logic], that it would be “nonexistent.” In this same manner, everything [which is “other”] would, [logically-speaking], be entirely “nonexistent.”

5. THE BODHISATTVA MAY CONTEMPLATE DHARMAS AS “SINGULAR,” ETC.

Then again, the bodhisattva may contemplate all dharmas in terms of their singularity. Based on this dharma of singularity, even in the midst of all dharmas, thoughts reflecting the concept of “singularity” may arise in him. Each and every dharma can be said to possess the mark of singularity. It is through the coming together of multiple instances of such “singularity” that one then refers to “two” or then refers to “three.” It is [solely] the “one” which is [accorded the status of being] “real,” whereas the “two” and the “three” are

[simply] false [composites of singularity].

6. HE MAY CONTEMPLATE DHARMAS AS “CAUSED”

Then again, the bodhisattva contemplates dharmas as existing through having that by which they are caused. As in the case of the human body, they are impermanent. Why is this? This is because they are characterized by the processes of production and extinction. All dharmas are just like this. This is because their existence occurs through having that by which they are caused.

7. HE MAY CONTEMPLATE DHARMAS AS “CAUSELESS”

Yet again, [however, it may be said that] it is on account of having no cause that any dharma [can be supposed to] “exist.” Taking for example the human body, its impermanence occurs by virtue of its being produced and then destroyed. It is on account of its being produced and destroyed that one knows that it is impermanent. This cause itself ought additionally to have its own cause. If this were the case, then this would be a case of infinite regression. If this [tracing back of causation is in fact] endless, then this [becomes tantamount to] being devoid of any cause.

If this cause has no additional [prior] cause [to which it can be traced], then the cause of this circumstance of “impermanence” is really a case of being devoid of cause. [When contemplated] in this manner, [one finds that] everything is devoid of any cause.

8. HE MAY CONTEMPLATE DHARMAS AS “HAVING ASPECTS”

Additionally, the bodhisattva contemplates all dharmas as possessing particular characteristics. There are no existent dharmas which are entirely devoid of characteristics. For instance, earth is characterized by solidity and heaviness. Water is characterized by coolness and moistness. Fire is characterized by heat and illumination. Wind is characterized by lightness and movement. Empty space is characterized by the ability to envelop things and take them in. Discrimination, awareness, and knowing constitute the characteristics of consciousness.

Having a “this” and a “that” constitutes the characteristic of spatiality. Having a “long ago” and a “more recent” constitutes the characteristic of time. Possession of a turbid and evil mind together with the tormenting of beings constitute the characteristics of karmic offenses. Possessing a pure and good mind which pities beings constitute the characteristics of meritorious karma. Being attached to dharmas constitutes the characteristic feature of bondage. Not being attached to any dharma whatsoever constitutes the

characteristic feature of liberation. Direct and unimpeded knowing of all dharmas constitutes the characteristic feature of buddhahood.

In like fashion, each and every phenomenon possesses its own particular characteristic features.

9. HE MAY CONTEMPLATE DHARMAS AS "DEVOID OF ASPECTS"

Then again, the bodhisattva contemplates all dharmas as being in every case devoid of characteristics. All of these characteristics are produced from the coming together of causes and conditions. Because they are devoid of any inherently existent nature, they are therefore nonexistent. Take for instance the case of [the element] "earth." It is referred to as "earth" on account of the conjunction of the four dharmas of forms, smells, tastes, and touchables. It is not solely on the basis of form that it is referred to as "earth." Nor is it solely on the basis of smells, solely on the basis of tastes, or solely on the basis of touchables that it is therefore referred to as "earth."

How is this the case? If it was solely forms which constituted earth, then wherever the other three [component aspects] were present, it should not be that it would then qualify as "earth." In such a case, earth would then be devoid of the aspects of smell, taste, and tangibility. The circumstantial permutations would hold in just the same fashion for the other aspects consisting of smells, tastes, and touchables.

Again, how is it that these four dharmas could constitute a single dharma? How is it that a single dharma could be comprised of four dharmas? On account of this [inherent contradiction], one cannot take four [dharmas] as constituting earth nor can one have [the element] "earth" apart from these four aspects.

10. OBJECTION: BUT THESE FOUR DHARMAS DON'T CONSTITUTE "EARTH"

Question: I do not take these four aspects as constituting "earth." It is simply that it is on account of these four dharmas that the dharma of earth is produced. This "earth" then dwells among these four dharmas.

11. RESPONSE: THIS IS A FALLACY, REFUTED AS FOLLOWS...

Response: If it was actually true that earth was produced from four dharmas, then earth itself would be different from these four dharmas in just the same way that when a father and mother give birth to a son, the son is then different from the father and the mother.

If it was the case that earth was different from these four

dharmas, then in just the same manner as the eye perceives forms, as the nose is aware of smells, as the tongue is aware of tastes, and as the body is aware of touchables, there should then exist an additional and different sense faculty together with a different associated consciousness which perform the function of being aware [of this distinctly different objective entity known as “earth”].

If there is in fact no such additional and different sense faculty with its associated consciousness which perform the function of being aware [of the sense-object known as “earth”], then there could be no earth [under the theoretical circumstance you posit].

12. OBJECTION: IF FALLACIOUS, THEN THE ABHIDHARMA OFFERS CLARITY

Question: If the above-proposed statement about the characteristics of earth indeed possesses such faults, then the actual circumstance should accord with the Abhidharma’s discussion of the characteristics of earth wherein it states that “earth” refers to a type of form created from the four great [elements], that it is solely the element earth which is characterized by solidity, and that “earth” constitutes a visible form.

13. RESPONSE: THIS, TOO, HAS FAULTS, AS FOLLOWS...

Response: As for the claim that earth is only form, we have already discussed that fallacy. Additionally, as for this claim that earth is characterized by solidity, if it were the case that it need only be the eye which perceives form, it should be like the moon reflected in water, like an image in a mirror, or like the shadows of shrubs and trees. In such a circumstance, there would be no quality of solidity [of which one might speak] for it is through the sense faculty of physical touch that solidity is perceived.

Moreover, if one posits that the form seen by the eye is earth’s characteristic of solidity, [this fails to acknowledge that] this earth-element form which is seen by the eye is also characterized by the moistness of water and the heat of fire. But these are the elements of water and fire [and hence are not “earth”].

If this was actually the case, then one should also be able to [visually] distinguish the wind element in wind, but one is not actually able thereby to distinguish it. If it were as you claim, then, which is the wind element in the wind and which is the wind in the wind element? If there is only a single thing which is involved, then it should not be the case that it acts through the agency of two distinct elements. If one were to respond that they are not actually different,

then it should not be the case that earth and the element of earth are different, either.

14. OBJECTION: EACH OF THE ELEMENTS CONTAINS THE OTHERS

Question: As for these four elements, each and every one of them does not exist separately from the others. Within earth, there exist the rest of the four elements. Water, fire and wind each possess the rest of the four elements. It is just that, in the case of “earth,” it is because the earth element is dominant in it that it is referred to as “earth.” The circumstance is the same with water, fire, and wind.

15. RESPONSE: THAT IS A FALLACY, AS FOLLOWS...

Response: That is not so. Why? If it was actually the case that the four great elements all exist within fire, it should be then that they are all hot, this because there is no fire which is not hot. If there were such a circumstance wherein any of the other three elements existed within fire and they were not hot, then one could not refer to it as fire. If they were in fact hot, then they would relinquish their own particular natures and would then all be referred to as fire.

If one were to claim that it is because they are so subtle that one is unable to perceive them, then that would be no different from their being entirely nonexistent therein. If it were the case that there was something coarse which could be gotten at, then one could know that there is actually something existing therein which is subtle. If there is nothing which is coarse therein, then there is nothing which is subtle therein, either.

On account of all sorts of cause and conditions such as these, the characteristics of earth cannot be gotten at. If it is the case that one cannot get at the characteristics of earth, then the characteristics of all other dharmas cannot be gotten at, either. Therefore all dharmas have this single characteristic [of inapprehensibility of signs].

16. OBJECTION: NONEXISTENCE OF ASPECTS IS ITSELF AN ASPECT

Question: One should not claim that they are devoid of characteristics. Why? If all dharmas are devoid of characteristics, this is in itself a characteristic. If there were no “nonexistence of characteristics,” then one could not refute the characteristics of all dharmas. How is this so? Because there would be no “nonexistence of characteristics.” If this “nonexistence” characteristic does exist, then one ought not to say that all dharmas are devoid of characteristics.

17. RESPONSE: THAT IS ONLY A MEANS FOR REFUTING ASPECTS

Response: One employs the nonexistence of characteristics to refute the characteristics of dharmas. If there existed a “nonexistence of

characteristics” characteristic, then one would fall into [a position affirming the existence of] the characteristics of dharmas. If one did not thereby enter into [a position affirming the existence of] the characteristics of dharmas, then it should not be the case that one questions the nonexistence of characteristics.

As it is employed as a universal refutation of the characteristics of dharmas it demolishes its own characteristics as well. This is analogous to a burning log already present in a fire which, after igniting all fuel added to it, incinerates itself as well. Thus it is that the ārya courses in signlessness. This is because the signlessness samādhi serves to demolish even the characteristic of nonexistence.

18. ADDITIONAL PRAJÑĀ-BASED BODHISATTVA CONTEMPLATIONS

Also, the bodhisattva contemplates all dharmas as neither conjoined nor dispersed, as being without form, without shape, non-dual, as indemonstrable, as ineffable, and as having but a single characteristic, namely signlessness.

Discussions such as these speak in terms of a singular mark of dharmas. How is it that one contemplates all of the different sorts of marks possessed by dharmas?

a. TWO-FOLD CATEGORIZATIONS

All dharmas may be subsumed within two-fold categorizations of dharmas, in particular: name and form; form and formless; visible and invisible, involving [sense-faculty–sense-object] opposition (*pratigha*) and not involving such opposition (*sapratigha*); possessing outflow-impurities and being free of outflow-impurities, conditioned and unconditioned, and so forth.⁷ There are two hundred different two-fold dharma categorizations as discussed in the “Thousand Difficult Questions” chapter.

Additionally, there are the two-fold dharmas of patience and pliant harmoniousness. There are also: the two-fold dharmas of personal reverence and the making of offerings; the two types of giving, the giving of wealth and the giving of Dharma; the two powers, the power of wise analysis and the power of cultivation of the Path; the two completions, completeness in precepts and completeness in correct views; the two characteristics, the characteristic of straightforwardness and the characteristic of pliancy; the two dharmas of meditative concentration and wisdom; the two dharmas of knowing (*vidyā*) and liberation (*vimukti*); the two dharmas, worldly dharmas and dharmas of the supreme meaning; and the

two dharmas of mindfulness and discerning wisdom.

There are also: the two truths, worldly truth and the truth of the supreme meaning; the two liberations, temporary liberation (*sāmayikī vimukti*) and indestructible liberation of mind (*akopya-ceto-vimukti*); the two kinds of nirvāṇa, nirvāṇa with residue and nirvāṇa without residue; the two types of ultimate fulfillment, ultimate fulfillment of endeavors and ultimate fulfillment of vows; the two types of seeing, seeing arrived at through knowledge and seeing arrived at through severance; two kinds of completeness, completeness in meaning and completeness in discourse; the two dharmas of having but few desires and knowing when enough is enough; the two dharmas of ease in nourishing and ease of fulfillment; the two dharmas of accordance with Dharma and implementation of Dharma; and the two types of knowledge, the knowledge of destruction and the knowledge of non-production. In a manner such as this, one may make distinctions with regard to an incalculable number of two-fold gateways to Dharma.

b. THREE-FOLD DHARMA CATEGORIZATIONS

Furthermore, he knows: the three paths consisting of the path of seeing, the path of meditation (lit. “path of cultivation”), and the path of those beyond training; the three natures consisting of the nature realized through severance, the nature realized through abandonment, and the nature realized through cessation; the three trainings consisting of training in the moral-virtue prohibitions, training in meditative concentration, and training in wisdom; the three types of bodhi consisting of the bodhi of the Buddhas, the bodhi of the Pratyekabuddhas, and the bodhi of the Śrāvaka-disciples (Chinese textual note: This refers to being beyond further training and being complete in wisdom.); the Three Vehicles consisting of the Buddha Vehicle, the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, and the Śrāvaka-disciple Vehicle; the Three Refuges consisting of refuge in the Buddha, refuge in the Dharma and refuge in the Sangha; and the three classes of [meditative] abodes consisting of those correlating to the [four-immeasurables] abodes of Brahmā, those correlating to the [dhyāna-heaven] abodes of the gods, and the [affliction-free] abodes of the Āryas; the three bases of authority consisting of authority rooted in oneself, authority based on others, and authority based in the Dharma.

He also knows: the three types of unguardedness on the part of buddhas consisting of unguardedness with respect to actions of the body, unguardedness with respect to actions of the mouth, and

unguardedness with respect to actions of the mind; the three bases for the production of merit consisting of giving, upholding of moral precepts, and cultivation of the wholesome mind; the three staves consisting of the staff of listening, the staff of abandoning desires, and the staff of wisdom; the three modes (lit. “wheels”) consisting of the mode of manifesting supernatural transformations, the mode of reading others’ minds, and the mode of teaching and transforming beings; and the three gates to liberation consisting of the emptiness gate to liberation, the signlessness gate to liberation, and the wishlessness gate to liberation. There are an incalculable number of three-fold gateways to Dharma such as these.

c. FOUR-FOLD DHARMA CATEGORIZATIONS

Additionally, he knows the four-fold dharmas: the four station of mindfulness; the four right efforts; the four foundations of psychic power; the four truths of the Āryas; the four lineage-bases of the Āryas; the four fruits of the śramaṇa; the four knowledges; the four faiths; the four paths; the four means of attraction; the four reliances; the four roots of goodness conducive to penetrating understanding; [an additional set of] four paths; the four “wheels” of gods and men; the four dharmas in which one develops solidity;⁸ the four fearlessnesses; and the four immeasurable minds. There are an incalculable number of four-fold gateways to Dharma such as these.

d. FIVE-FOLD DHARMA CATEGORIZATIONS

Also, he knows the five groups of those beyond training, the five transcendent natures, the five bases of liberation, the five root-faculties, the five powers, the five types of great giving, the five types of knowledges, the five types of anāgāmin, the five abodes of the pure-dwelling gods, the five types of counteractive paths, the five knowledge-based samādhis, the five-component samādhis of the Āryas, and the five methods of discourse according with Dharma. There are an incalculable number of five-fold gateways to Dharma such as these.

e. SIX-FOLD DHARMA CATEGORIZATIONS

Furthermore, he knows the six dharmas of relinquishment, the six dharmas of affectionate respect, the six superknowledges, the six kinds of arhats, the six stations on the path of seeing the truth, the six recollections, the six samadhis, the six absorptions, and the six *pāramitās*. There are an incalculable number of six-fold gateways to Dharma such as these.

f. SEVEN-FOLD DHARMA CATEGORIZATIONS

Additionally, he knows the seven limbs of enlightenment, the seven forms of wealth, the seven supports, the seven absorptions associated with thought, the seven sublime dharmas, the seven knowledges, the seven destinies of good people, the seven forms of purity, the seven forms of merit associated with wealth, the seven forms of merit not associated with wealth, and the seven absorption-assisting dharmas. There are an incalculable number of seven-fold gateways to Dharma such as these.

g. EIGHT-FOLD DHARMA CATEGORIZATIONS

Also, he knows the eight-fold path of the Āryas, the eight liberations, the eight bases of ascendancy, the eight realizations of great men, the eight forms of vigor, the eight types of great men, and the eight powers of the arhat. There are an incalculable number of eight-fold gateways to Dharma such as these.

h. NINE-FOLD DHARMA CATEGORIZATIONS

Furthermore, he knows the nine sequential absorptions, the nine “reduced-format” [links in the chain of causality from] name-and-form and so forth (Chinese textual note: “From name-and-form to birth and death makes nine.”), the nine knowledges free of outflow-impurities, this because, in gaining the knowledge associated with cessation, one eliminates the “equal” knowledge [from among the ten types knowledge], the nine stations free of outflow-impurities, six dhyāna-related stations together with three formless absorptions, and the nine stations on the path of meditation.⁹ There are an incalculable number of nine-fold gateways to Dharma such as these.

i. TEN-FOLD DHARMA CATEGORIZATIONS

Additionally, he knows the ten dharmas of those beyond study, the ten reflections, the ten knowledges, the ten universal bases, the ten goods, the ten grounds,¹⁰ and the ten powers of a buddha. There are an incalculable number of ten-fold gateways to Dharma such as these.

j. ADDITIONAL DHARMA CATEGORIZATIONS

He also knows the eleven dharmas which assist the path of an ārya, also knows the dharma of the twelve causes and conditions, also knows the thirteen transcendent dharmas, the fourteen transformative minds, the fifteen mental events on the path of seeing the truths, the sixteen-fold practice of *ānāpāna*, the seventeen practices of the Āryas, the eighteen dharmas exclusive to the Buddha, the

nineteen stations of abandonment, the one hundred and sixty-two path-events on the path of meditation which are able to demolish the insurgents of the afflictions, the one hundred and seventy-eight fruits of the śramaṇa, [comprised of] the eighty-nine conditioned fruits and the eighty-nine unconditioned fruits. There are an incalculable number of dharmas such as these which possess differing characteristics. [Whether they are] produced or destroyed, increased or decreased, conducing to gain or loss, or are pure or impure, he is able to utterly know them all.

19. ALL SUCH CONTEMPLATION OBJECTS ARE REDUCED TO EMPTINESS

After the bodhisattva, *mahāsattva* has come to know these dharmas, he is able to cause all dharmas to enter into the emptiness of inherent existence. And so it is he retains no attachment to any dharma.

F. THE BODHISATTVA'S EXTENSIVE ADOPTION OF TEACHING EXPEDIENTS

He goes beyond the stations of the Śrāvaka-disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas and enters into the bodhisattva position (*samyaktva niyāma*). After he has entered into the bodhisattva position, on account of great compassion and pity for beings, he employs the power of expedients to explain the distinctions implicit in the names of the various dharmas and thus brings beings across to liberation, causing them to succeed in gaining the Three Vehicles. In doing this, he is like a skillful craftsman who, on account of the power of herbal potions, is able to cause silver to change into gold and gold to change into silver.

1. OBJECTION: IF EMPTY, WHY MAKE DISTINCTIONS?

Question: If it is the case that the nature of all dharmas is true emptiness, why would he make distinctions among all of the various names of dharmas? Why would he not just speak of the true emptiness?

2. RESPONSE: ABIDING IN EMPTINESS, ONE REFRAINS FROM ATTACHMENT

Response: The bodhisattva, *mahāsattva* does not speak of emptiness as something which may be obtained or attached to. If it could be obtained or attached to, he should not then discuss all of the various sorts of different characteristics. As for the emptiness which cannot be obtained, one remains free of any hangups or obstructions with respect to it. If there were any hangups or obstructions, then it would be something which could be obtained and thus it would not be the emptiness which cannot be obtained.

In the case of the bodhisattva, *mahāsattva*, he has realized the

emptiness which cannot be obtained and yet is still able to make distinctions with respect to dharmas, is still able to feel compassion for beings, and is still able to take them across to liberation. This is the power of *prajñāpāramitā*. To state it in a way which grasps the essential point: It is [direct and correct perception of] the true character of dharmas which constitutes the essence of *prajñāpāramitā*.

G. ON THE EXCLUSIVE DEFINITION OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ*

1. OBJECTION: WHY SUCH EXCLUSIVITY IN DEFINING *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ*?

Question: All of the worldly and common classics as well as all of the ninety-six types of monastic scriptures claim that they embody [the correct understanding of] the true character of dharmas. Additionally, the three-fold canon of the Śrāvaka-disciples' Dharma also is held to embody [the direct and correct perception of] the true character of dharmas. Why then do they not also qualify as embodying *prajñāpāramitā*? Why is it claimed here that the true character of dharmas as presented in this sutra is alone in qualifying as embodying *prajñāpāramitā*?

2. RESPONSE: DUE TO WORLDLINESS, WRONG VIEWS, AND SHORTCOMINGS

Response: The worldly and common classics are not reflective of genuine reality because they are dedicated to the establishment of the state, the preservation of the family, the person, longevity, and pleasure. Because the non-Buddhist monastics fall into the dharmas of erroneous views whereby their minds are affectionately attached, they, too, are not reflective of genuine reality.

Although the Dharma of the Śrāvaka-disciples does contain the four truths and although they do employ impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and non-self in the contemplation of the true character of dharmas, because their wisdom is incomplete and is not acutely sharp, they remain unable to act on behalf of all beings. Although they do possess genuine wisdom, because it is not employed for the sake of succeeding in the dharma of buddhahood, it does not qualify as "*prajñāpāramitā*."

For example, Sariputra and the others have not even heard the names of the various samādhis which the Buddha enters and exits. How much the less have they been able to know them directly? Why is this the case? When the Arhats and the Pratyekabuddhas first generated their resolve, they had no great vows and they had no great kindness or great compassion. They have not sought to create all forms of merit. They have not made offerings to all of the Buddhas of the three periods of time throughout the ten directions.

They have not sought to know the true character of dharmas in a way which utterly fathoms the truth. This is because they have sought only to gain liberation from the sufferings of aging, sickness, and death.

H. THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE BODHISATTVĀ'S PRACTICE

From the time they first formulated the resolve to realize bodhi, the bodhisattvas have possessed vast and magnificent vows. They have possessed the great kindness and compassion, have sought to create all forms of merit, and have made offerings to all of the Buddhas of the three periods of time throughout the ten directions. They possess great sharp wisdom with which they have sought [to fathom] the true character of dharmas.

They have dispensed with all of the various kinds of contemplations such as the so-called contemplation of purity, the contemplation of impurity, the contemplation of permanence, the contemplation of impermanence, the contemplation of blissfulness, the contemplation of suffering, the contemplation of emptiness, the contemplation of substantiality, the contemplation of self, and the contemplation of the absence of self.

They have relinquished all such contemplations as these which involve the powers of a mind beset by erroneous views, which merely contemplate the true character [of dharmas] in the context of outward conditions, and which [focus on concepts such as] neither pure nor impure, neither permanent nor impermanent, neither blissful nor suffering, neither empty nor substantial, and neither self nor devoid of self.

They have refrained from attachment to any such contemplations as these and have refrained from couching their realizations in them, this because [those contemplations] are inherently linked to mundane worldly dharmas. [Those contemplations] do not correspond to the supreme meaning with its universally pervasive purity, irrefutability, and infallibility, [and hence they do not correspond to] that place in which the Āryas course. These are the considerations which determine what qualifies as "*prajñāpāramitā*."

1. QUESTION: HOW THEN DOES ONE REALIZE *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ*?

Question: We already know that the substance and characteristics of *prajñā* constitute a dharma which is devoid of characteristics and which cannot be "obtained." How then is the practitioner able to succeed in "obtaining" realization of this Dharma?

2. RESPONSE: PRACTICE IN ACCORD WITH THE SKILLFUL-MEANS INSTRUCTIONS

Response: The Buddha uses skillful means to explain the Dharma. If the practitioner practices in a way which accords with those explanations, he will succeed in obtaining realization of it.

3. ANALOGIES: ASCENDING A CLIFF; CROSSING THE WATERS

This is comparable to being faced with a dangerous path up a precipitous cliff. If one follows the steps, one will in fact be able to ascend it. It is also just as with a deep body of water. It is through the use of a boat that one succeeds in crossing on over it.

1. THE BODHISATTVĀ'S ADOPTION OF SIX-PERFECTIONS PRACTICE

Whether he has learned from the Buddha, his disciples, or the Sutras, the bodhisattva newly established in his resolve [should contemplate] thus: "All dharmas are ultimately empty and devoid of any fixed nature amenable to either grasping or attachment. The dharma of supreme reality puts an end to all frivolous discourse. Nirvāṇa has the character of being the most conducive to peace and security. It is my aspiration to bring all beings across to liberation. How then could I seize upon nirvāṇa for myself alone? Because the power of my merit, wisdom and superknowledges is not yet complete, I am as yet unable to lead beings forth. I should therefore perfect these causes and conditions by cultivating giving as well as the other five *pāramitās*."

1. THE PRACTICE OF GIVING AND ITS EFFECTS

On account of the causes and conditions associated with the giving of material wealth, one gains great riches. On account of the causes and conditions associated with the giving of Dharma, one gains great wisdom. One is able then to employ these two types of giving to lead forth poor and destitute beings and cause them to enter the path of the Three Vehicles.

2. THE PRACTICE OF MORAL VIRTUE AND ITS EFFECTS

On account of the causes and conditions associated with upholding the precepts, one is reborn among men or gods as one who is honored and noble. And one succeeds oneself in becoming liberated from the three wretched destinies while also causing other beings to avoid the three wretched destinies.

3. THE PRACTICE OF PATIENCE AND ITS EFFECTS

On account of the causes and conditions associated with patience, one blocks off the poison of hatred, gains a physical body which is handsome, and becomes foremost in awesome virtue. Whosoever

sees such a person becomes delighted, respectful, faithful, and humble in mind. One is then well able to speak Dharma for their benefit.

4. THE PRACTICE OF VIGOR AND ITS EFFECTS

On account of the causes and conditions associated with vigor, one is able to destroy that laziness with respect to the Dharma of the Path [which commonly accompanies] merit-based karmic rewards in the present and future lifetimes. One succeeds then in obtaining the *vajra* body and an unmoving mind. One employs this body and mind to shatter the arrogance typical of the common person, thereby bringing about the realization of nirvāṇa.

5. THE PRACTICE OF DHYĀNA AND ITS EFFECTS

On account of the causes and conditions associated with dhyāna, one demolishes the scattered mind, separates from the offenses associated with the five desires, and finds happiness in being able to explain for beings the dharma of transcending desire. Dhyāna is the station upon which *prajñāpāramitā* depends and in which it abides. It is in reliance upon dhyāna that *prajñāpāramitā* is spontaneously produced. This is as explained in the Sūtras: “The bhikṣu singlemindedly devoting himself to meditative concentration becomes able thereby to contemplate the true character of dharmas.”

6. THE FIRST THREE PERFECTIONS AS CRUCIAL TO GAINING MERIT

Additionally, one realizes that, within the desire realm, the gateway to all forms of goodness is for the most part closed on account of the offense karma associated with miserliness and greed. When one cultivates *dāna pāramitā*, one demolishes these two phenomena and opens up the gateway to all forms of goodness. Out of a desire to keep it open forever, one cultivates the way of the ten good karmic deeds.

As for [the cultivation of] the *pāramitā* of *śīla* (the perfection of moral virtue), when one has not yet gained dhyāna absorption or wisdom, because one has not yet left behind desire, one is liable to destroy the *pāramitā* of *śīla*. For this reason, one engages in the cultivation of patience. When one develops a knowing awareness of these three endeavors [devoted to giving, moral virtue, and patience], one becomes able to open up the gateway to merit.

7. THE FUTILITY OF FOCUSING SOLELY ON MERIT

One additionally knows that the rewards gained as effects from these karmically meritorious actions are impermanent. One may

enjoy the bliss among gods and men but then may once again fall back down into suffering. On account of having had one's fill of these impermanent rewards for meritorious deeds, one then seeks to realize the *prajñāpāramitā* [which correctly perceives] the true character [of dharmas].

8. THE FACTORS CRUCIAL TO REALIZING *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ*

a. THE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIGOR, *DHYĀNA*, AND *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ*

How, then does one go about bringing it to realization? It is essential that one employ single-mindedness. Then and only then will one be able to gain it. This is analogous to seizing the precious pearl of the dragon king. One must be single-mindedly observant and must also be able to avoid touching the dragon. If one can succeed in this, then one gains something which is as valuable as [the entire continent of] Jambudvīpa.

In one's single-minded devotion to *dhyāna* absorption, one gets rid of the five desires and the five hindrances. Striving to succeed in gaining the bliss of the mind, one makes great use of vigor. It is for this reason that, after patience, it is the *pāramitā* of vigor which is next explained. This is as stated in the Sutras: "The practitioner makes his body erect and sits straight up with his attention fixed directly before him. He devotes himself exclusively to seeking meditative concentration, doing so with such determination that, even if he were to cause his own flesh and bones to become withered and emaciated, he would still never desist or retreat from the endeavor."

b. WHY VIGOR ISN'T EMPHASIZED WITH THE FIRST THREE PERFECTIONS

It is for this reason that one practices vigor as one pursues the cultivation of *dhyāna*. If one happened to possess wealth and then engage in giving, this would not be sufficient to constitute any real difficulty. If one happened to fear falling into the wretched destinies or if one happened to feel anxiety about the possibility of losing one's fine reputation and then, based on that, one decided to engage in observance of the moral precepts or in the practice of patience, this would not really qualify as something of any particular difficulty, either. It is for this reason that, within the sphere of the first three of the perfections discussed above, one does not yet speak of the practice of vigor.

c. WHY VIGOR IS ESSENTIAL TO REALIZATION OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ*

Now, however, one is seeking to develop meditative concentration from within his own mind, this for the sake of *prajñāpāramitā* and

[perception of] the true character [of dharmas]. Because this is an endeavor which is so difficult, one must realize that vigor is essential to success. If one then cultivates in this manner, one will become able to gain the realization of *prajñāpāramitā*.

d. QUESTION: ARE ALL FIVE *PĀRAMITĀS* PREREQUISITES FOR *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ*?

Question: Is it essential to cultivate the other five *pāramitās* after which, only then one gains realization of *prajñāpāramitā*? Or might it also be possible that one could cultivate only one or two of the other *pāramitās* and then succeed in realizing *prajñāpāramitā*?

e. RESPONSE: NOT FIXED, AS EACH SUBSUMES ALL OTHERS

Response: With respect to the *pāramitās*, there are two types [of cultivation]. As for the first, within a practice which corresponds to and accords with a single *pāramitā*, there are contained all of the other *pāramitās*.

As for the second approach, one accords with the time, and, [as appropriate], specifically cultivates a given *pāramitā*. [One's practice] then takes on the name of the one which currently predominates. This is analogous to the case with the four great elements when they exist in combination. Then, although they are not separated from each other, it is the one which predominates in any given circumstance which determines the designation which is applied.

In the case of the practice which corresponds to and accords with a single *pāramitā*, the other five *pāramitās* are contained right within it. In a case such as that, one does not abandon the other five *pāramitās* as one proceeds with acquisition of *prajñāpāramitā*. In the circumstance where the designation corresponds to the particular practice adopted at any given time, it may be that it is on account of one particular [*pāramitā*] or on account of two¹¹ [*pāramitās*] that one succeeds in the acquisition of *prajñāpāramitā*.

f. REALIZATION OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* THROUGH GIVING

Take for example the case of one who has set his mind on *anuttarasamyak-saṃbodhi* and has thus embarked on the cultivation of giving, he may seek at this time to discover just what constitutes the characteristics of giving, only to find then that those characteristics are neither singular nor different, that they are neither permanent nor impermanent, that they are neither existent nor nonexistent, and so forth. This is as discussed in the section on the analysis of the components of giving.¹²

Based on his understanding of the true character [of the dharmas involved in practicing the perfection] of giving, he then comes

to understand all dharmas in this very same way. This is what is meant by achieving realization of *prajñāpāramitā* (the perfection of wisdom) through one's cultivation of the practice of giving.

g. REALIZATION OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* THROUGH MORAL VIRTUE

Or perhaps in other cases there are those who undertake the observance of the moral precepts, refrain from tormenting beings, and who then find that the mind becomes free of regrets. If, in such a case, one were to seize upon the specific features [of the precepts] and then become attached to them, then one would be prone to initiate disputes. Such a person, although initially not cherishing any hatred towards beings, may consequently engender hatred towards other beings on account of thoughts of hatred and affection linked to particular dharmas.

Therefore, if one desires to refrain from tormenting beings, one should cultivate a stance of uniformly-equal regard in the midst of all dharmas. If, [failing to do so], one makes discriminations whereby one regards this as an offense and regards that as being free of offense, then this is not a practice which accords with *śīla pāramitā*. Why is this so? It is because, if one detests offenses and feels affection for the absence of offenses, then one elevates oneself and falls yet again into the path of tormenting other beings.

Therefore, when the bodhisattva contemplates those who commit offenses and those who do not commit offenses, his mind remains free of both detestation and affection. If one carries on one's contemplations in this fashion, this is an instance of the singular practice *śīla pāramitā* resulting in the realization of *prajñāpāramitā*.

h. REALIZATION OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* THROUGH PATIENCE

The bodhisattva takes up this contemplation: "If one fails to acquire the patience with respect to dharmas, then he will not be able to be constant in his practice of patience. There has not otherwise yet been a being who has been able to maintain patience when subjected to coercive force. If it comes to the point where one's agony becomes intense, then one becomes unable to endure it any longer." This is analogous to the circumstance of a convict who, terrorized by beatings, prefers the suffering of death [by suicide].

It is for this reason that one must develop the patience with respect to dharmas. [Once this patience has been perfected], there no longer exists any being who physically beats or curses someone. Nor does there exist anyone undergoing such acts. It is solely on account of past-life actions based on inverted views producing

[present-life] karmic retribution that one speaks of “undergoing” [such abuses].

At this point, one no longer makes any such discriminations whereby there exists anyone who possesses patience with respect to such circumstances which might require patience. As for patience with respect to dharmas, it is on account of having deeply entered into their ultimate emptiness that it then qualifies as “patience with respect to dharmas.” When one acquires this patience with respect to dharmas, one is never again prone to becoming hateful towards other beings. That wisdom which corresponds to the “patience with respect to dharmas” is just this “*prajñāpāramitā*.”

i. REALIZATION OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* THROUGH VIGOR

As for vigor, one constantly abides in the midst of good dharmas and is able to bring all good dharmas to completion. In an instance where one employs wisdom to analyze and make distinctions with respect to dharmas, one then develops a penetrating understanding of the nature of dharmas. It is at this point that vigor then serves to assist the realization of wisdom.

Additionally, one realizes that the true character [of the dharma] of vigor transcends both body and mind, corresponds to reality, and involves no movement. It is in a manner such as this that vigor may enable the generation of *prajñāpāramitā*. All other manifestations of vigor are like mere conjurations and are like experiences taking place in a dream. Because they are false, deceptive, and unreal, we do not discuss them here.

j. REALIZATION OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* THROUGH *DHYĀNA* MEDITATION

If one employs a deep mind to focus one’s thoughts, one becomes able to perceive the true character of dharmas in accordance with reality. As for the true character of dharmas, it is not such as can be realized through seeing, hearing, bearing concepts in mind, or through knowing. Why is this so? The six sense faculties and the six sense objects all fall within the sphere of effect-related retributions associated with false and deceptive causes and conditions. Herein everything one knows and perceives is also entirely false and deceptive. All of these instances of false and deceptive knowing are such as cannot be trusted.

As for that which actually *can* be trusted, it is only that wisdom cognizing the true character [of dharmas] acquired by the buddhas across the course of *asaṃkhyeya* kalpas. Because this wisdom is anchored in single-minded contemplation of the true character

of dharmas while in the midst of dhyāna concentration, it is this circumstance which constitutes the development of *prajñāpāramitā* from within the practice of dhyāna meditation.

k. *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* REALIZATION INDEPENDENT OF THE OTHER PERFECTIONS

In some cases, there may be those who gain a penetrative understanding of the true character of dharmas entirely apart from the practice of the other five *pāramitās*, this being accomplished simply through listening, reading, reciting, contemplating, and analyzing. In a case such as this, it is based on these provisional approaches to developing wisdom that *prajñāpāramitā* is born.

l. REALIZATION OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* THROUGH ANY NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS

In other cases, it may be that *prajñāpāramitā* is born from within two or three or four other *pāramitās*. This is analogous to those cases wherein someone hears just one of the Truths and then succeeds in completely gaining the fruits of the Path or someone else hears two, three, or four of the Truths and then gains the fruits of the Path.

There are those persons who, for the most part, are greatly deluded with respect to the truth of suffering, but for whom one need only explain the truth of suffering, whereupon they then succeed in gaining the Path. The circumstances may be just the same in relation to the other three of the Truths. In other cases, it may be that there is someone who is entirely deluded with respect to all four of the Truths, but once one explains all four truths for them, they straightaway gain realization of the Path.

For example, the Buddha once told the Bhikshus, "If you are able to cut off desire, I guarantee that you will realize the path of the *anāgāmin*." One should realize from this that, if one simply succeeds in cutting off desire, hatred and stupidity will then be cut off as well.

Within the six *pāramitās*, the circumstance is just the same. It is for the sake of demolishing excessive miserliness that one speaks of the dharma of giving. One should know that the other evils also become demolished thereby.

It is for the sake of demolishing all of the various evils that a complete discussion of all six is presented. Therefore, since some practice each one singularly and others pursue a comprehensive practice of them all, all six *pāramitās* have been explained here so as to universally address the needs of everyone. It is not the case that they are set forth only to address the needs of a single class of individuals.

m. REALIZATION OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* THROUGH NO SEIZING ON PRACTICES

Then again, if the bodhisattva refrains from taking up the practice of any particular dharma, because he does not apprehend any dharma whatsoever, he may thereby succeed in realizing *prajñāpāramitā*. How can this be the case? All practices are essentially false and unreal. In some cases, they possess faults in the near term. In other cases, they possess faults in the more distant term.

In the case of unwholesome dharmas, in the near term, they are involve karmic transgressions. In the case of good dharmas, there may be a time when, after a long while, they become so transformed that one becomes attached to them and thus generates distressful suffering on their account. In that case, they involve karmic transgressions in the distant term.

These circumstances are analogous to the certain cases involving both fine food and bad food, both of which have been mixed with poison. When one eats the bad food, one immediately becomes displeased. When one eats the fine food, although one will immediately be pleased, still, after a long while, in both cases, one's life will be stolen away. In fact, neither of the two should be eaten. All good and bad practices are comparable to these circumstances.

1) OBJECTION: WHY DID BUDDHA EXPLAIN THREE CLASSES OF PRACTICE?

Question: If this is the case, why did the Buddha speak of the three classes of practice: the practice of Brahmā; the practice of the gods; and the practice of the Āryas?

2) RESPONSE: ALL EXCEPT THAT OF THE ĀRYAS INVOLVE FAULTS

Response: The “practice of the Āryas” qualifies as such on account of being free of [attachment to] any practice. How is this so? In all of the practices of the Āryas, one does not depart from the three gateways to liberation [consisting of emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness].

In the case of “the practice of Brahmā” and “the practice of the gods,” however, they are both generated on the basis of a seizing on the mark of the existence of a being. Although at the time of engaging in such practices, they are free of any particular faults, in every case, they later involve defects. Moreover, even in the very present, if one seeks to discover their reality, one discovers in every case that they are essentially false.

In the case of the Worthies and Āryas, because they would practice these two sorts of practice with an unattached mind, they themselves would in fact be free of any sort of fault in that connection.

3) IN "NO-PRACTICE" PRACTICE, NOTHING WHATSOEVER IS OBTAINED

If one is able to practice the dharma of "no practice" in this manner, in every case, nothing whatsoever is gained. Inverted views, falseness, and afflictions are finally not produced at all. Because one remains as pure as empty space, one succeeds then in realizing the true character of dharmas. One takes having nothing whatsoever which is gained as that which is gained. This is as discussed in the section devoted to "the prajña of non-attainment."

In the case of form and other such dharmas, it is not on account of being made empty that they are empty. Rather, it is the case that, from their very origin on forward to the present, they have always been inherently empty.

In the case of form and other such dharmas, it is not on account of one's wisdom somehow failing to extend to include them that there is nothing whatsoever which is gained. Rather, it is the case that, from their very origin on forward to the present, they have always been inherently devoid of anything whatsoever which can be gotten at.

Therefore one should not be asking, "How many *pāramitās* does one practice in order to gain *prajñāpāramitā*?" It is because, out of pity for beings, the Buddhas accord with mundane conventions and thus then speak of "practice." It is not the case that this really represents the ultimate meaning.

4) QUESTION: IF SO, HOW CAN *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* BE SOUGHT?

Question: If there is nothing whatsoever gained and nothing whatsoever practiced, how can the practitioner seek for it?

5) RESPONSE: DIFFERENTIATION OF THE CONCEPT OF "GAIN"

Response: Having "nothing whatsoever which is gained" is of two different sorts. As for the first, it refers to the realm of worldly desires where, when there is that which is sought and it does not end up according with one's intentions, this constitutes having "nothing whatsoever which is gained." As for the second, it is because no fixed characteristics can be gotten at in the true character of dharmas that one then speaks of having "nothing whatsoever which is gained."

It is not the case that there is actually an absence of meritorious qualities, wisdom, or superior roots of goodness. It is on account of being like the common person who engages in making discriminations with respect to worldly dharmas that there might be anything at all which might be gained. So, too, it is with respect to all of the

meritorious qualities associated with goodness. It is only on account of according with the minds of those in the world that one speaks of having anything which might be gained. Within the mind of the Buddhas, there is nothing whatsoever which is gained.

J. CONCLUDING STATEMENT ON THIS EXPLANATION OF *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ*

This has been but a summary explanation of “*prajñāpāramitā*.” It shall be discussed more extensively in due course.