

Bảo Anh Lạc-22

COMMENTARY
ON
AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA
(Fourth Edition)

Dr. Bhikkhunī Giới Hương

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ON THE FOURTH EDITION

This is a revised and enlarged edition of the *Commentary on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva*, which was first published seven years ago. The second and third editions were printed in 2012 and 2014 at Phương Đông Publishing. This edition was also printed at Hồng Đức Publishing, HCM City, Việt Nam. In presenting this edition, I have maintained the contents in the first edition. However, for the sake of clarity, a few changes have been made, errors have been corrected, the equivalent Pāli and Sanskrit terms have been added to the glossary, and a summary, as well as discussion questions, have been added at the end of each chapter.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge with special thanks Bhikkhunī Viên Ngộ, Bhikkhunī Viên Quang, Hisayo Suzuki, and Pamela C. Kirby (English editors who worked as my assistants for English translating, proofreading, design, and publication).

Dr. Bhikkhunī Giới Hương
University of California, Riverside
March 7, 2019

FOREWORD

By the Most Venerable Như Điển

The ancient wise ones often said, “The learning ocean is vast without shoreline, diligence is the shoreline, the blue sky is the destination, determination is the stairway to it.” After the coffin lid closes, we do not need to learn any more; however, if we are still alive, we must learn many things. We must learn what needs to be learned so that our understanding is enriched.

At the end of 2017, Venerable Bhikkhunī Giới Hương in the United States asked me to read and edit the contents of *Rebirth Views in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, which I did. This time, she requested that I work on the *Commentary on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva*.

I am on the way to Saint Petersburg and Moscow in Russia to attend the inauguration of Thảo Đường Pagoda and I took advantage of this opportunity to do Buddhist works in the daytime, while I read, corrected spelling, and wrote this introduction at night.

The book has six chapters. The first one introduces the history of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in Vietnam, China, and Korea following the tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It has many simple-to-understand stories, but when proceeding to the second, third, fourth, and fifth chapters, readers have to use their intellect to explore them, because the author has incorporated the penetrating hearing method of Avalokiteśvara to form this work.

The content of this work directly relates to the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, especially to the twenty-five bodhisattvas presenting their own ways of awakening. The author has skillfully incorporated the Śūraṅgama Sūtra into the *Commentary on Avalokiteśvara*

Bodhisattva, which helps readers to have the opportunity to get acquainted with both works. The author explains emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*; Pāli, *suññatā*) in detail, making it possible for us to read with great pleasure.

With regard to the section on Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva practicing the recitation of Amitābha Buddha's name, we find that the author has ingeniously incorporated Pure Land views to introduce the practice to readers here and disseminate this Pure Land idea.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva finally chose to listen to the nature inside the mind, the method used by Avalokiteśvara. Among the twenty-five bodhisattvas' methods, this is the best because it matches the *saha* people's capacity. Because Ānanda just focused on listening, learning, and understanding, he lacked the practice to awaken completely. At that time, Ānanda only attained the first stage of awakening and was a stream-enterer. He failed to overcome the outflows (Skt. *āśrava*; Pāli, *āsava*), although other bhikkhus or bhikkhunīs in the Saṅgha were able to attain penetration by Avalokiteśvara's hearing method.

Venerable Upāli, who sought to find his own nature, also surpassed the eight princes to renounce first, even though the eight princes came to see the Buddha before him. These eight had to go through a week filtering their ego (Skt. & Pāli, *māna*) and arrogance (Skt. & Pāli, *atimāna*) as proud princes of the Kapilavastu kingdom to adopt the Saṅgha lifestyle. Therefore, the ancient wise ones made a verse to praise the virtue of Venerable Upāli:

Becoming a monk before eight princes
Enlightening the perfect penetration in the
Śūraṅgama Assembly
Spreading the Vinaya of śrāvaka-yāna
From here, the Buddha Dharma flourishes.

Regarding the full text, as well as the meaning of this book, the author wants to introduce the practice from gradual to instant enlightenment, namely, *śamatha* (stillness), *samāpatti* (contemplation), and *dhyāna* (concentration). If a practitioner is going from the gradual to the instant enlightenment process, he or she can transform *alaiya* consciousness to be the Great Mirror Wisdom to win perfect enlightenment.

I would like to introduce this valuable book to readers from every corner. In my opinion, if you read this Avalokiteśvara book first, you should also read the author's other book, *Rebirth Views in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. These books will complement each other regarding the search for the true mind.

Conversely, if you read the book *Rebirth Views in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra* first, you should also read this book, *Commentary on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva*, so that both significant and realistic perspectives are fulfilled mutually.

I came to know that Venerable Bhikkhunī Giói Hương is translating both books into English to serve English readers. This is not a simple task, because from my perspective, foreigners may find it complicated to understand and practice emptiness and the Amitābha essence. But with the responsibility of being a professor at Vietnam Buddhist University with a PhD and an English literature degree, she has attempted to accomplish works in both Vietnamese and English languages, despite being busy with many duties. How extraordinary this is! I therefore hope that you try to read from the first page to the last page, for your own sake as well as the sake of others.

Most Venerable Như Điển
Founding Abbot of Viên Đức Monastery, Hannover
Viên Đức Monastery, Ravensburg, Germany

PREFACE

Avalokiteśvara is a female bodhisattva. There are many female Buddhists (*upāsikā*), but those who become sages or Buddhas are scarce.

According to the Southern Buddhist tradition (Theravāda), there exists the *Therīgāthā* (*Songs of the Elder Nuns*), which consists of seventy-three stories about the lives, cultivation, strenuous effort, and realized experiences of the elder nuns who were female *arahants* or on the way to *arahantship*. From accounts in the Buddhist Mahāyāna tradition, there are many sūtras related to several female bodhisattvas, such as Mahāsthāmaprāpta and Avalokiteśvara. The latter is assumed to be the most unique as she is the Great Compassionate Mother. She endows sentient beings with pleasure and saves them from misfortune; in particular, she takes sounds as her contemplative object and deeply listens to sentient beings crying from the suffering in life. Thus, in the mind of every Buddhist, she is a perfect symbol of the Compassionate Goddess in Buddhism.

Those who are inclined to the feminine loving mother's tenderness and aspire to get free from suffering and gain happiness put their trust in worship of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

The boundless love of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is comparable to the love of the mother in a family, the gentlest of all. She no longer incarnates as a Buddha or a bodhisattva residing high in the sky but appears in our popular belief as a gentle mother who soothes her childrens' suffering with her hands. If these things can be done, Buddhism in general and Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) in particular will manifest in real life. Only a great mother with much thinking (84,000 heads), with penetrating eyes (84,000 eyes), and with innumerable means (84,000 hands), who is full of love

for sentient beings, is ready to save people from a sea of suffering, can bring warm comfort and inspire people to practice compassion, equality, selflessness, and altruism. Buddhism is a compassionate religion, of which Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is the symbol of the Compassionate Goddess. Her outstanding power can save sentient beings from seven disasters and exterminate the three poisons, namely, greed (*abhiḥhā*, *visamalobha*), anger (*byāpāda*, *dosa*), and ignorance (*avijjā*), satisfy two wishes (having a baby girl or baby boy), embody thirty-two manifestations, and make use of fourteen methods to preach the doctrine.

In the Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra, the Buddha told Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva to choose an appropriate method for human beings in the saha world to cultivate the way. Twenty-five sages rose in turn and presented their own ways of attaining enlightenment. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva chose Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's universally penetrating hearing method as the best one because living beings are easily subjected to sound. Realizing that the Śūraṅgama Sūtra is exquisite with profound meanings, I made up my mind to compile a book about the context and the contents of the gradual twenty-five saints' expositions, in which the emphasis is on the method of universally penetrating hearing. My work concentrates on *Quan Âm Quảng Trần* (*Commentary on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva*, translated into Vietnamese by Bhikkhūnī Bảo Giác) and on Chapters V and VI from the Śūraṅgama Sūtra (translated into Vietnamese by Upāsaka Tâm Minh). In this book, I also would like to introduce the life, origin, and meanings, as well as other items related to the titles of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. For this reason, the present work is called *Commentary on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva (Quan Âm Quảng Trần)*. "Quảng" means "extensive" and "Trần" means "exposition." This book makes an attempt to comment on and explain the wondrous attributes of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in order to recommend the cultivation of the way.

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

I sincerely pay homage to our Venerable Master Hải Triều Âm, who has instructed me on how to comprehend the deep meaning of Mahāyāna sūtras, particularly the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, with simple examples and words from her actual practices and experiences. May the merits and virtues gained from this work be transferred to our master and all living beings. May all beings start out to practice the method of returning to the hearing and entering the stream of the self nature of listening ability, where they can detach the external sound from what is heard.

The stainless and pure light
Of the sun of wisdom eliminates all darkness
The wonderful method of the listening ability
Illuminating the whole world.
Profound tranquility, wonderful insight, and perfect
penetration in the present,
Temporarily penetrating and practicing the hearing-
nature in vajra samādhi.
I am looking forward to all good, knowing friends' instructions for
improving my work in future editions. My deep thanks for all
kinds of guidance.

Devotedly paying homage to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva of great
compassion and the universally penetrating listening.

Dr. Bhikkhunī Giới Hương
Hương Sen Temple
March 18, 2010



The Thousand Arm-Eye Bodhisattva Statue
At Thánh Ân Temple, Hà Nội

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

CHAPTER I

GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF AVALOKITEŚVARA

The Terms

Quan Thé Âm is known as Avalokiteśvara in Sanskrit. In Chinese, it is Kuan-yin, which means “to perceive the crying sounds of the world and save beings from suffering.” Bồ tát is bodhisattva in Sanskrit (Pāli: bodhisatta). It is the common name of those who have a great mind to search for the enlightened way, like Buddhas and those who have the heart of the great mother, ready to sacrifice themselves to protect their children. It can be said that Avalokiteśvara, the compassionate bodhisattva, is a revered image in the heart of every devout Buddhist, especially among ordinary people.

The Three Saints

The Amitābha Buddha statue stands between Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva on the right and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva on the left. This is the unique picture of the three sages according to Pure Land beliefs.

Iconography

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva can be worshiped in the form of either a man or a woman. Legend says that before the Tang Dynasty in such countries influenced by Chinese Buddhism as Tibet and Korea, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was worshiped as a male figure. According to Tibetan Buddhism, the fourteenth Dalai Lama is an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva after a number of births. In Vietnam, a female figure depicted as a compassionate mother is universally worshiped.

While Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva symbolizes wisdom, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva embodies the Buddha's compassion. For a long time, people in Asia have venerated, worshipped, and trusted Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Life is impermanent, with many ups and downs, sickness and suffering. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva often appears and helps people, especially when they recite her name in times of distress or danger. This is why she is known as "the savior of beings in distress." In America, even in Theravāda temples, the statue of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is worshiped in the main hall or in the yard to meet the needs of popular beliefs. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the worship of Avalokiteśvara is traditional in temples, houses, halls, or in the open air. Buddhists also wear a chain with a pendant that has an image of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the hope of receiving her compassion and miraculous protection. Many people worship her icon instead of Śākyamuni Buddha and other Buddhas in their homes. This belief is also manifested in the worship of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the open air—in the front yard, at the entrance, or on the open top story. This is called "open-air Kuan Yin." The worship of Avalokiteśvara is a belief that carries within it the spirit of Buddhist compassion, but it also symbolizes the aspiration for a spiritual source in order to "get free from suffering and gain happiness." The natural consciousness of humans in general and Buddhists in particular is inclined to femininity and a loving mother's tenderness, so the worship of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is the very expression of this tendency in the Vietnamese mind.

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

Vietnamese Buddhists usually refer to Avalokiteśvara as “Gentle Mother” and the Avalokiteśvara festival as the “Mother’s Day.” The boundless love of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is comparable to the love of the mother in a family, the gentlest of all. She no longer incarnates as a Buddha or a bodhisattva residing high in the sky but appears in our popular belief as a gentle mother who soothes her children’s suffering with her hands. Through this belief, Buddhism can enter the hearts of ordinary people, and they can understand compassion in Buddhism. Only mothers who bring comfort, warmth, and love can lead people to compassion, equality, selflessness, and altruism.

The Names

There are eight titles of Avalokiteśvara often mentioned in Buddhist scriptures:

Bodhisattva Observer of the World’s Cries
Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Cries
Sovereign Perceiver Bodhisattva
Sovereign Regarder Bodhisattva
Kuan Yin Bodhisattva
The Great Kuan Yin
Sound Revealing Bodhisattva
Savior of the World

According to the Shingon sect of Japan, Cundī Bodhisattva is one of six names of Avalokiteśvara referred to in the Nichiren sect:

Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara
Sacred Avalokiteśvara
Horse-Necked Avalokiteśvara
Eleven-Faced Avalokiteśvara
Cundī Avalokiteśvara
Talismanic Wheel Avalokiteśvara

Among the names of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara is the one most often recited, particularly in instances of trauma, war,

or accident. In the “Universal Gateway” chapter of the Lotus Sūtra (Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra), as well as in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha said that those who often recite the name of Avalokiteśvara gain the greatest benefits, as compared with the benefits gained by beings who accept and uphold the names of 62,000 million titles of other bodhisattvas as follows:

In three thousand of the great worlds, there contain a hundred suns and moons and as many bodhisattvas as the countless sand grains in 62 million Ganges rivers. They who self-practice the dharma to set a good example for all living use different skillful methods to befriend, teach, and convert creature beings to be awakened. Because I used one penetrating organ that led to realization through the faculty of hearing, my body and mind embrace the whole dharma realm. I teach all living beings to concentrate their minds on calling my name and other 62 million bodhisattvas’ names. The merits from reciting Avalokiteśvara’s name that follows are the same as those derived from calling on the names of all these bodhisattvas. World-Honored One, my single name does not differ from those uncountable ones because of my practice and training that led to my true enlightenment.¹

Celebrations

Every year, there are three days of celebration in her honor:

- The 19th of the second month in the lunar calendar is Kuan Shi Yin Bodhisattva’s birthday.
- The 19th of the sixth month in the lunar calendar is the celebration of Kuan Shi Yin Bodhisattva’s enlightenment.
- The 19th of the ninth month in the lunar calendar is the celebration of Kuan Shi Yin Bodhisattva’s renunciation.

¹ Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Kinh Lăng Nghiêm), translated into Vietnamese by Tâm Minh; translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, HCM City Publishing, p. 183–184. *Quoted English translations from this work have been revised by the present author in the present work.*

The Icon

The icons of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva are made in different forms, but most popular is the icon of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva standing in a lake, holding a willow branch in her right hand and a jar of pure water in her left hand. There is also a picture of Avalokiteśvara flanked by a bird holding a string of beads in its beak and a child standing in attendance with joined palms. Buddhists also often depict her standing on a lotus flower, riding a dragon or a fish in the clouds, and standing in a waterfall or in a lotus pond. A popular icon describes her standing on an island to rescue shipwreck victims; the ocean is symbolic of the cycle of birth and death. Another image is the thousand-armed and thousand-eyed Avalokiteśvara, known as Cundī Bodhisattva, who is the manifestation of Avalokiteśvara with eighteen arms and three faces.

Head: There are from one, three, five thousand to eighty-four thousand heads. The heads symbolize the painstaking planning and the charge of shouldering the responsibility for dealing with difficulties.

Eyes: There are from two, three to eighty-four thousand eyes (the eyes represent the understanding, wisdom, and the teaching of people to lead them to happiness according to their levels).

Hands: There are from two, four to eighty-four thousand hands. (the hands symbolize the spread of compassion). Out of this compassion, innumerable flexible and skillful means are invented to save sentient beings. The many heads, hands, and eyes are symbolic of her heart and mind for all living beings. She uses flexible skillfulness to save suffering beings. She, who is regarded as an active and loving bodhisattva, is ready to appear to aid every being if need be. The willow branch and the jar are symbolic of compassion and enlightenment, which she will sprinkle on human beings to extinguish or relieve the burning defilements, sufferings, and afflictions in the sentient beings' heart.

The icon of Avalokiteśvara on top of a dragon, a whale, or a white

lotus flower or in the wavy sea implies that we are living in a world full of bitter sufferings, but we will get free from them if we sincerely call upon the name of Avalokiteśvara.

* * *

Legends of Avalokiteśvara

Avalokiteśvara is a bodhisattva, ready to save beings from suffering and lead them to bliss. She is eulogized in literary works, legends, verbal expressions, theater, spoken drama, music records, films, and scriptures, as well as on the internet. Actually, the belief in Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is a very deep faith. The three following stories are briefly related for this ancient legend.

Quan Âm Nam Hải (the Southern Sea Kuan Yin)

According to a Chinese legend, Avalokiteśvara was the third daughter of a king. After she grew up, she was determined to leave home to become a nun despite her father's objections. Eventually, the king got angry and decreed her death because children must not disobey their parents, dresses are never worn higher than one's head, and a child must sit at the place shown by his parents. This is the foundation of Chinese feudalism in ancient times. Yama took the princess into hell, where her pureness, holiness, compassion, and tranquil mind radiated, giving everyone relief and freshness, making them forget their misery and transforming their minds. Thus, she turned the hells (niraya) into the Pure Land for the sake of people in distress. Yama wanted to release her (he was afraid that she could wipe out the title and meaning of his netherworld). Then they sent her to Mount Putuo (Phổ Đà), in the East Sea, where the princess became a savior of fishermen. When her father became seriously sick, she cut out some of her flesh to treat him. After being cured, the king felt grateful to her and had a statue of the princess made.

In China, fishermen usually pray to Avalokiteśvara for safety whenever they are at sea. That is reason Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is known as the Southern Sea Avalokiteśvara.

Quan Âm Thị Kính (the Respectful Kuan Yin)

A common legend in Vietnam is called “Quan Âm Thị Kính.” The bodhisattva is said to have been born many times to cultivate the way. In the tenth kalpa, she was a daughter called Thị Kính from the Mãng family of Korea Island.

She was married to Thiện Sĩ, who was from the Sùng family. In her husband’s home, she kept her duty well as a submissive wife to her husband and a daughter-in-law to her husband’s parents. One day, while her husband was sleeping after reading, she saw a hair under her husband’s chin. With a penknife, she went to her husband, intending to cut off the hair. Suddenly, he woke up to see her with a knife. Thus, he shouted, thinking that his wife wanted to kill him.

Despite Thị Kính’s explanation, her husband’s family insisted that she wanted to kill her husband and they forced her to leave their house. She had to return to her parents’ home and later made the decision to go forth to become a nun. She disguised herself as a man under the dharma name Kính Tâm to hide her bitter past and forget the mundane life.

Although her appearance was male, she could not hide her tenderness and beauty. Many girls admired and loved her. One of them, Thị Mầu, was a daughter in a rich family. She flirted with Kính Tâm, but the latter refused. Thị Mầu was pregnant with her manservant’s child, but she accused Kính Tâm of being the father. Kính Tâm was looked down on and slandered by numerous Buddhist followers, but she still kept silently patient. After the abbot of the temple where she lived begged the villagers’ forgiveness for what Kính Tâm had done, Kính Tâm secluded himself in a hut in the garden of the temple to prevent the temple from being affected by the slander.

Thị Mầu gave birth to a baby boy, who she brought to Kính Tâm. The latter, out of compassion, received the baby. Every day, Kính Tâm went out through the back door to beg milk for the baby.

When the child was three years old, Kinh Tâm fell seriously ill. Kinh Tâm wrote a letter and asked the child to hand it to the abbot of the pagoda and the Mãng family. When reading the letter, the abbot recognized that Kinh Tâm was a woman. Thị Mầu killed herself in shame. Thiện Sĩ, who showed repentance, went into the monkhood, died, and turned into a bird, which is included in the Avalokiteśvara icon. Actually, the mistake belonged to Thiện Sĩ's parents, not to him. It is said that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who is Thị Kính herself, also gave help to her foster child, Thị Mầu's son, and took him as her disciple attendant to the Southern Sea. As a result, we see the picture in which Avalokiteśvara, wearing a white coat with a blue miter, is flanked by a bird holding a string of beads in its beak and a young novice standing in attendance with joined palms. In the countryside, people often prefer this kind of image.

As a victim of injustice, Thị Kính gave no explanation. Wrongly accused of killing her husband, she became a nun. When Thị Kính was accused falsely of having a love affair with Thị Mầu, she only needed to admit being a woman to exculpate herself easily and quickly. Yet, she remained silent about the child until she passed away. Her practice of patience is a worthy incredible lesson for us to learn. In *Ten Mindful Things on Samādhi Precious Jewel Treatise* (Luận Bảo Vương Tam Muội),² the Buddha teaches that instead of cowardly trying to exculpate ourselves and justify our mistakes, we should find the way to enlightenment amidst our misfortune. In life, we do not look forward to being freed from misfortune, because the absence of misfortune will lead to arrogance and pride. The Buddha did not regard miseries as resisting causes, but as accordant causes that helped him advance on the right path or patience pāramitā. Those who speak badly to us are our teachers; those who call us names are our teachers as well.

This legend is invaluable. The Sūtra of Practicing Compassion and Endurance illustrates Quan Âm Thị Kính (the Respectful Kuan

² Luận Bảo Vương Tam Muội, *Ten Mindful Things on Samādhi Precious Jewel Treatise*, 2001, <https://hoavouu.com/luanbaovuongtammuoi.pdf>.

Yin) in a pictorial story so that it may be handed down among the masses of people. This master work is the eulogy of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's practice of endurance pāramitā.

Diệu Thiện Bodhisattva

The story of Diệu Thiện Bodhisattva was handed down orally in Vietnam and China. It was written in the six-eight word distich meter.

It is said that a princess went forth to convert her wicked father. She was the third daughter of the king of Hùng Lâm State in India. Before she was born, the king had wished to have a prince to inherit his throne. When the queen gave birth to a baby girl, it created deep resentment in his mind.

Unlike her two older sisters, the third princess was fond of reading Buddhist scriptures and wanted to become a nun. She refused to get married, so she was imprisoned in the palace. In the royal family, since there was no prince to inherit the throne, they should have had a prince consort, but this third princess failed to marry anyone. This made the king angry. He failed to convince the princess to give up her role as nun, but he pretended to allow her to lead a life at Bạch Trúć Pagoda, and then he forced the monks to ask her to give up the role. If not, he would take steps:

- If the princess did not stop being a nun, he would kill the monks in pagoda. However, this did not shake her will to renounce.
- Because of this hostility, the king ordered that the pagoda be burned, but fortunately, it was raining heavily.
- Struck with rage, the king gave the order to kill the princess, but a storm broke and the executor's hammer was flung away by lightning from the sky.
- When the princess was executed, a supernatural white tiger appeared to bring her to Hương Pagoda. Since then, she stayed there with the name Diệu Thiện and tamed all wild animals.

Consumed with guilt, the king became seriously ill with ulcerations covering his body. No one could heal him. His hands were lost gradually and he became blind. When the princess heard this bad news, she returned to visit him. She willingly offered her eyes and arms to cure the king. As a result, she converted all the royal members, the king, queen, and her two sisters.

The above stories praise the benefit of merit and virtue of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, especially the righteousness and filial piety of a daughter to her parents. Her parents turned from evil deeds, as her righteousness awakened them from ignorance into insight.

Residences of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva

Because her power and vows are to save beings from suffering, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva exists everywhere in the ten directions. If any being single-mindedly calls her name, she will appear to help. However, it is said that the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva stays in the following places:

- According to Amitābha Sūtra, she stays in the Pure Land.
- In the Commentary of Avataṃsaka Sūtra, she sat in Bô-đà-lạc Mountain in the Southern Sea.
- In regard to the Avalokiteśvara Sūtra, she stays in Mount Putuo (Phổ Đà), Zhejiang province. On this mountain, she sits cross-legged and transforms into many sambhogakāya (manifestations), depending on the situation, to save beings. Accompanying Avalokiteśvara is Long Nữ (a female dragon) and Thiện Tài, who symbolizes the virtue of a bodhisattva.

Though the bodhisattva is born in the secular world, she is peaceful and gentle and leads a pure life.

- According to the view of Chinese Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara exists in Mount Putuo in Eastern China. This is one among four of the most sacred places (Tứ đại danh sơn) of the four bodhisattvas.

Many Sūtras Mention Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva

Avalokiteśvara beliefs are derived from Indian and Mongolian traditions. Later, thanks to translations and interpretations of the Avalokiteśvara Sūtra, such beliefs were handed down in China, Tibet, Japan, Vietnam, and other Asian countries where Buddhism took hold. In Chinese culture, belief in Avalokiteśvara is shown by the fact that among forty-two thousand Buddhist texts in Đôn Hoàng cave, there are 1,048 sūtras of Saddharma Puṇḍarīka (Universal Gateway chapter) and two-hundred sūtras of Universal Gateway. Many discourses mention Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, including the following:

- Samādhi Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra (255 AD)
- Samādhi Saddharma Puṇḍarīka, “Universal Gateway” chapter (286 AD)
- Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra, “Universal Gateway of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva” chapter (406 AD)
- The Thousand-armed and Thousand-Eyed Great Mercy Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Discourse says in many eons, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva became a Buddha with the name Chánh Pháp Minh (Dharma Light) Tathāgata. Out of great vows of compassion, he embodies a bodhisattva to save beings.
- The Subha Vyūharāja Sūtra narrates that he was constantly an attendant of the Sakyamuni Buddha.
- According to the Mantra sect, he was an embodiment of Amitābha Buddha.
- In the Samādhi-Avalokiteśvara Sūtra, the Buddha confirms that Avalokiteśvara was an ancient Buddha.
- The Mahākaruṇā Puṇḍarīka Sūtra says in past lives,

Avalokiteśvara was a prince, the son of King Vītarambha. At the same time, the Ratna-Garbha Tathāgata was born to teach and convert living beings. Because of penetrating the Buddha's teachings, the king made vows to win the supreme bodhi mind and to save sentient beings in low realms. The king and his prince offered food and residence to the Buddha for three months and they cultivated diligently. When their virtues were perfect, the king became an Amitābha Buddha in the Western Pure Land. The prince also became a bodhisattva and helped the Amitābha lead beings to the Pure Land.

- In the Kṣitigarbha (Earth Store) Sūtra, the Buddha praises Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who has the affinity for saving living beings in the saha world.
- Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra (Heart Sūtra), a brief discourse of the Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, also narrates that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who deeply practiced prajñā pāramitā, saw clearly the emptiness of the five *skandhas*.³
- The Practicing Compassion and Endurance Sūtra says the legend of the Respectful Avalokiteśvara (Quan Âm Thị Kính) was handed down among the masses.
- Śūraṅgama Pāramitā Sūtra, Chapter VI, teaches the method of returning to the listening ability of Avalokiteśvara.
- Two of the most important sūtras about Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva are the Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra and the Saddharma Puṇḍarīka. What are the different meanings of these sūtras?

³ Five aggregates: form (Skt. *skandha rūpa*), feelings/sensations (*skandha vedanā*), perception (Skt. *skandha saṃjñā*, Pāli: *saññā*), volition (Skt. *skandha saṃskāra*, Pāli: *saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (Skt. *skandha vijñāna*, Pāli *viññāṇa*).

Differences in the Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra and the Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra

The name Avalokiteśvara signifies important meanings of both self effort and other-saving effort, but the objects, methods, and applications are manifested differently in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra and the Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra (Lotus Sūtra).

In the Lotus Sūtra, the Buddha says, “Out of perceiving the sound to save beings from suffering, she has the name Avalokiteśvara.” The objects are the outside sounds in the world. It is called the “other-saving effort” (altruism), the good result from later wisdom. In the Śūraṅgama-Samādhi Sūtra, the Buddha teaches, “Thanks to the method of turning the listening nature inward, Avalokiteśvara is famous in the ten directions.” What is heard? The object is the listening-nature. This is a method that requires self-effort initially and the blessing of the Buddha to succeed. These sūtras elucidate the meaning of her name clearly, supporting each other.

What is the meaning of “Quan Thé Âm”? “Quan” means observing, using the eyes to get sounds or forms as in the Lotus Sūtra, in which Avalokiteśvara uses the sounds heard. “Quán” is contemplation; it means to penetrate the real meaning. It does not mean to reach the significance of sound, but the absolute nature from the hearing-nature, as in the preface of the Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra.

We will define the meaning of the ear, auditory consciousness, and hearing-nature. The ear is an organ of the body. When we hit a bell, the vibrations of the bell touch the eardrum, which tells us that it is the sound of the bell. When the bell rings, auditory consciousness corresponds to the mind consciousness, and the hearing nerve connects to other nerves to help us recognize the sound of a bell. If the ear-organ works well, we will hear well. The hearing nerve of a living person connects with the karma of that person for the sound to be activated.

The Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra points out the practicing process of

Avalokiteśvara for attaining enlightenment, while the Lotus Sūtra explains the result of the cultivating process. The Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra mentions the seed of practicing, returning to the inner listening of self nature. Because of this nature, the Tathāgata ability will manifest. Based on this true essence, the world, human beings, and karma continue to be born. While the Lotus Sūtra emphasizes listening to the external suffering sounds, the Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra emphasizes that each person should save himself or herself first.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Avalokiteśvara narrates about his method through the process of hearing and reflecting to enter samādhi (concentration).⁴ He transforms from external hearing to his internal hearing-nature. His ears are like the speakers for receivers of outside sounds. Once the hearing and what was heard disappear, sadness and happiness, love and hatred, up and down are nothing to rely on, and the emptiness of awareness reaches an ultimate perfection, attaining two ultimate things. First, he gains a strength of compassion equal to that of all the Buddhas in ten directions. Second, he sympathizes with all living beings on the six paths. For ordinary people like us, our compassion and sympathy are limited because we neither have the power to know other people's minds nor have the universal hearing ability.

The method of Avalokiteśvara is “returning to the hearing” (not chasing after the objects of sound, returning to the hearing to hear self nature). It means self nature manifests from hearing/listening. In this method, we never hear by our ear-organs. If we do, we will follow the outside forms or sounds. Whether there is a noisy sound or a quieter sound, the hearing-nature of Avalokiteśvara can shine on them. Sounds that emerge from the mouth move from the mind consciousness and brain and out the mouth, the process from the

⁴ According to Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattvas are depicted as female figures, so we use she/her. However, in other sources and traditions, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is in a male form, so we use the male pronouns. Whether female or male, Avalokiteśvara is a bodhisattva or an ancient Buddha.

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consciousness to voice to make a sound. The noisy sound is illusory, but even the sound of stillness is also false. Please do not grasp stillness with the idea that the noisy sound movement is opposite from stillness. Both are illusory and must be emptied. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra teaches that even though we close off vision, sound, touch, knowing, and so on from the outside, we attach to the eye's darkness, the ear's stillness, the nose's suffocation, the tongue's taste, the body's non-touch, and the mind's non-thinking; we just keep the stillness of mind which is also the unmoved figure of consciousness. We have the habit of either attaching to movement or stillness. Avalokiteśvara transcended both extremes to return to the supreme nature and basic wisdom.

In the Lotus Sūtra, Avalokiteśvara hears outside sounds to save suffering sentient beings and gain the resulting wisdom. The sound is the means of converting human beings in the outside world; the ear-consciousness arises from many causes to. It is karma that pushes beings into the wheel of life. Human beings in the six paths cry and mourn without pause, from a king with his highest power, to a beggar, a worm, a pig, a kitchen, a fish, a man . . . everyone cries from misery, according to the situation of the person facing suffering, namely birth, aging, sickness, and death (jarāmaraṇam); being far from the loved, being close to the hated, not getting what is desired, and the flourishing five aggregates. Besides the suffering of sickness, there are other miseries, such as accidents, war, and death, so people cry endlessly in this mundane world. In the Lotus Sūtra's "Universal Gateway" chapter, the Buddha says, "It is generally assumed there are hundreds, thousands, ten thousand, millions, immeasurable living beings who are undergoing various trials and suffering. If they hear this Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and singlemindedly call his name, at once he will respond or perceive their voices so that they will all gain deliverance from their suffering. Because of this, he is called the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds. He has great vows. If people need someone in a Buddha's body in order to be saved, he manifests as a Buddha to preach the dharma for them. If people need someone in a young boy or young girl's form, he manifests as a young boy or young girl and preaches the law for

them. He can manifest up to thirty-two kinds of sambhogakāya, and most them are in embodiment of a female.”⁵

Similarities Between the Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra and the Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra

Both the Śūraṅgama and Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtras point out thirty-two wonderful applications, fourteen kinds of fearlessness, two wonderful virtues, and two transcendent virtues. However, the Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra only mentions thirty-two sambhogakāya, while the Lotus Sūtra points out thirty-three sambhogakāya.

Wonderful Application

From compassionate power, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva manifests thirty-two sambhogakāya to preach the dharma to liberate all existent beings from suffering:

1. A Buddha’s body
2. A Pratyeka Buddha’s body
3. An Enlightened Conditional body
4. A Sound-Hearer’s (Śrāvaka’s) body
5. A King Brahma’s body
6. A Lord Shakra’s body
7. A heavenly freedom’s body
8. A heavenly great freedom’s body
9. A heavenly great commander’s body
10. Four Heavenly Kings (Catummahārājika)
11. The prince bodies of Four Heavenly Kings
12. A human king’s body (rājā)
13. A businessman’s body
14. A householder’s body

⁵ The Lotus Sūtra’s “Universal Gateway” chapter, “Saddharma Pundarika” or “The Lotus of the True Law,” p. 295, http://www.bdk.or.jp/document/dgtldl/DBET_T0262_LotusSūtra_2007.pdf.

15. A chief minister's body
16. A brāhmaṇa's body
17. A monk's body (bhikkhu)
18. A nun's body (bhikkhunī)
19. A layman believer's body (upāsaka)
20. A laywoman believer's body (upāsikā)
21. A noble woman's body
22. A young boy's body
23. A young girl's body
24. A heavenly being's body
25. A dragon's body
26. A yaksha's body
27. A gandharva's body
28. An asura's body
29. A kimnara's body
30. A mahoraga's body
31. A human's body (manussa)
32. A non-human's body
33. A vajra deity

Manifestions of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva

There are six stories about the manifestations (sambhogakāyas) of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva:

1. In the Tàn Dynasty, Bào Sơn Mountain, Thi Ninh Province, there was a monk named Trúc Pháp Nghĩa who traveled everywhere and mastered the deep meaning of the sūtras, especially the Lotus Sūtra (Saddharma Puṇḍarīka). There were more than hundreds of disciples following him. In 372, he suffered from heart disease. Although he was treated by many methods, his disease did not ease up. He began to put trust in and recite the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Since he was a preacher of the Lotus Sūtra, he remembered the “Universal Gateway” chapter that mentions Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Some days later, he dreamt he was completely cured of his disease by a monk. To treat him, that monk disemboweled his stomach, and the patient saw the impure things in it. Afterwards, the monk wiped out the stomach and said,

“You are recovered.” When the patient got up with the healed incision, he recalled what was said in the “Universal Gateway” chapter in the Lotus Sūtra, “If people need a monk’s body (sambhogakāya of a bhikkhu) to be saved, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva will manifest and preach the discourse for them.”

We know that he appears and preaches the dharma for many people by manifesting as all kinds of beings. For example, he manifests as a monk to cure beings—first to accompany and later to convert. For the sake of beings, he instructs them to understand the dharma through the illness, according to how the monk penetrates the significance of the Lotus Sūtra.

If we drive to remote roads in bad weather with thunder and lightning, and suddenly our motorcycle breaks down—we do not know how to repair it or to call for help. At that time, we can only offer a prayer. Suddenly, a couple driving on the same road stops and helps us repair our motorcycle. They are also called Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who is a good friend (sambhogakāya of hders).

2. In the Tống dynasty, many people lived by mining bronze from a deep and big hole. When they worked in this hole, one of the workers said, “Brothers, a girl outside brought a basket with a nice yellow fish. And most importantly, the girl is beautiful like a heavenly fairy.” The workers ran out of the hole to watch the girl, but she disappeared. Suddenly, the hole collapsed with dust and was full of smoke. Fortunately, there was no one in the hole, and they believed the girl was Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva to come to save them from death (sambhogakāya of a noble woman).

3. An old lady could not mend clothes herself. Her sight was too dim to thread a needle, and she sighed and spoke out, “What should I do, my great Kuan Yin?” Suddenly, a boy playing in the yard ran to her and helped her thread the needle. This is called the case of Avalokiteśvara appearing as a boy or a girl (sambhogakāya of a child) coming to help.

4. In the Tang dynasty, the XII Nguyên Hòa Year, at Kim Sa

Stream, there was a beautiful woman who often brought a basket to market, and many men wanted to marry her. However, she said that if someone could learn by heart the “Universal Gateway” chapter in the Lotus Sūtra (Saddharma Puṇḍarīka) in a day, she would marry that person. On the second day, there were twenty people who were willing to learn the sūtra by heart. She then replied, “I cannot marry all of you, so there is an option. If someone can read by heart the Vajracchedika-prajñapar Amitābha Sūtra, I will follow that person for my whole life.” The next day, there were ten people who could recite the sūtra clearly. She also said, “In three days, if someone can recite by heart the Lotus Sūtra, seven chapters, I would be happy to become that man’s wife.” However, there was just one person, Mā Sanh, who had the good memory to learn by heart all the Lotus Sūtra. Because she was very beautiful, he tried to remember each word in that sūtra so that he could get married to her. At the wedding, everyone congratulated the couple, but then the bride died suddenly. In a few minutes, her corpse was so smelly that people hurried to bury her. Later, a certain monk asked Mā Sanh to dig up her tomb, and they realized her corpse was covered by gold. After that, the monk proclaimed, “That woman is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva manifesting to convert lust; lust is illusion.” He then took the corpse and disappeared (sambhogakāya of an upāsikā).

5. In India, there was a Giói Hiền scholar with leprosy who worked as the minister of Nalanda University. His arms and legs were very painful, as if being burned. He intended to kill himself many times by stopping eating. One day, he dreamt that three people were standing in front of him, a gold person, a crystal person, and a platinum person who were telling him, “You were a king in a previous life, and you killed many people so that you suffer from leprosy in this life. If you repent sincerely, reciting many sūtras, you will recover.” The gold one explained that “the crystal is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. The platinum is Maitreya Bodhisattva, and I am Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva.” The gold one gave him a cup of water, told him to take it and said, “There will be a Chinese monk who seeks to study with you; you should guide him heartily.” The Chinese monk who came to learn from him was Huyền Trang,

who became a famous expounder of the dharma. This proved that Avalokiteśvara manifests many bodies to save sentient beings (sambhogakāya of a teacher).

6. If we are on plane that is about to crash, at that moment, we should remember to recite the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. If we do not recite his name, our lives are in extreme danger. If we recite his name single-mindedly, our lives will not only be saved, but also other people on the flight will be safe (sambhogakāya of a pasika/pasaka).

7. When we are traveling by train and come to know that suddenly it is about to derail, if we do not recite Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's name, all passengers on that train may face risks. Reciting "Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Cries" is a call for help. He who hears the cries, even from thousands of miles away, appears immediately to save us from accidents. How efficacious his name is (sambhogakāya of a pasika/pasaka)!

8. If we are traveling on a ship and unfortunately, the ship runs out of fuel, has encountered pirates, or is shipwrecked, the passengers face danger. In such dangerous moments, if we have the clarity of mind to recite "Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva" until our last breath, the danger will pass safely. If we wholeheartedly recite his name, winds will die down, disaster will be averted, and we can reach the shore eventually. There are numerous sacred stories of Kuan Yin at sea (sambhogakāya of a pasika/pasaka).

9. A group of robbers intended to rob properties on a ship, but when they met the scared victims on the ship, naturally they transformed their evil minds and became compassionate. Why was this so? On the ship, there were many people who sincerely recited the name of Avalokiteśvara. Unbelievable, marvelous things happen when there are spiritual, sacred responses between victims and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva (sambhogakāya of a pasika/pasaka).

FOURTEEN KINDS OF FEARLESSNESS

Both the Samādhi Śūraṅgama Sūtra and the Lotus Sūtra mention the virtue of fearlessness. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva bestows fourteen kinds of fearlessness on those who are in fear. Because of his compassion, he manifests many bodies to protect sentient beings if they single-mindedly call his name. He bestows safety, refuge, and fearlessness on beings. The fourteen kinds of fearlessness are as follows:

1. Those in the ten directions who undergo suffering recite the name of Avalokiteśvara and gain deliverance.
2. Someone gets stuck in a great fire, but the fire cannot burn him.
3. Someone is washed away by a great flood, but he could not be sunk.
4. Someone goes to the land of rakshasa, but demons cannot harm him.
5. Someone faces the threat of swords and staves, but he will be shattered into many pieces.
6. Someone sees hungry ghosts (pittivisaya), but they cannot see him.
7. Someone is imprisoned in fetters and chains, but the restraints are broken.
8. Evil-hearted bandits cannot rob him.
9. Someone is beset with lust (sarāgam) and craving (trishna), but he is able to cut off his desire.
10. Someone has wrath (kodha) and ire (sadosam), but he can shed his ire.
11. Someone has ignorance and stupidity, but he can rid himself of ignorance and stupidity.
12. Someone wishes to give birth to a baby boy, she will have a baby boy.
13. Someone wishes to give birth to a baby girl, she will bear a baby girl.
14. Someone recites the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, he will gain the benefit of merit and virtue equal to someone else who upholds the names of other Bodhisattvas.

In brief, the fourteen kinds of fearlessnesses include two

deliverances (thanks to reciting his name), relief from seven disasters (fire, water, demons, swords, evil ghosts, prisons and robbery), deliverance from three poisons, greed, anger, and ignorance, and satisfying two wishes (sons and daughters). Therefore, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva also has the name “Bestower of Fearlessness.” There is a paragraph saying:

This Bodhisattva and Mahasattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds can bestow fearlessness on those who are in fearful, stressful or difficult circumstances. That is why in this saha world everyone calls him a Bestower of Fearlessness.

This means when human beings are in a fear state, Avalokiteśvara often bestows fearlessness on them, and because of this, people in this mundane world call him a Bestower of Fearlessness. The Lotus Sūtra emphasizes that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva bestows freedom from fear of robbery, starving, poverty, and war.

The first kind of fearlessness and the fourteen points out that the virtue of reciting his name and merit of upholding the other Bodhisattvas' names are equal. Why is this so? Because when someone recites the sentence, “Namo Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva,” this name symbolizes the whole “Universal Gateway” chapter in the Lotus Sūtra or the whole Tripitaka. While whole-mindedly reciting the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, we can realize the power of his compassion and can eliminate the three poisons, greed, anger, and ignorance. Reciting his name is truly miraculous. When we grieve (soka), suffer (dukkha), or fear something, we call out the name of our favorite person, whether it be our mother, father, grandparent, or friend, and then we feel warmth inside and our sadness is gone. When the most wonderful thoughts arise in us, there is a little bit of Avalokiteśvara virtue inside our relatives. We can gain peace because our relatives' manner is somewhat similar to the Bodhisattva. Moreover, when we recite the name of Kuan Yin Bodhisattva, of Endless Stream, of great compassion over time and space, of a noble one who cuts off completely the poisons of greed, anger, ignorance, and lust, the Bodhisattva moves to respond boundlessly. Thus, once we call the name of

Avalokiteśvara, it awakens the essence of compassion to inspire us to overcome difficulties (thambha), conflict (sārambha), misunderstanding (kleśa), disasters (viddesanā), fighting (makkha), and suffering (dukkha), as well as overcome the fear of physical and emotional suffering. Thus, in the Samādhi Śūraṅgama Sūtra, all bodhisattvas in other realms are called Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva as the Bestower of Fearlessness.

FOUR WONDERFUL EFFORTLESS VIRTUES

Kuan Yin Bodhisattva gains four inconceivable and effortless wonderful virtues. They are:

1. Many marvelous appearances (sambhogakāya)
2. Speaking out numerous powerful mantras (although people only know a few mantras, like the mantras of the Great Compassion and Rebirth to Pure Land).
3. Making beings renounce treasure
4. He often helps living beings be free and gain what they like.

First, he appears in many marvelous forms and speaks numberless mantras. He manifests one head, three heads, seven heads, nine heads, eleven heads, until there may be 108 heads, 1,000 heads, 10,000 heads, and 84,000 vajra heads.

He can appear with two arms, four arms, six arms, twelve arms, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen, twenty, twenty-four arms, until there may be 108 arms, 1,000 arms, 10,000 arms, and 84,000 mudra arms. He manifests two eyes, three eyes, four eyes, nine eyes, until there may be 108 eyes, 1,000 eyes, and 84,000 purely precious eyes. He manifests sometimes compassionately, sometimes awesomely, sometimes in samādhi, sometimes displaying wisdom to rescue and protect living beings so that they may attain the great self mastery. Because Avalokiteśvara attains perfect penetration of the six sense-organs, he gains the first wonderful, inconceivable

and effortless virtue, which is beyond human thought and words, “Attaining the real hearing-nature, his organ is detached from the object, seeing, hearing, touching, and knowing, which become the pure unity (freed from human karma and knowledge).”⁶

The second wonderful, inconceivable, and effortless virtue of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, “He is able to manifest shape after shape, to recite mantra after mantra. These shapes and mantras dispel the fears of living beings.”

The third wonderful, inconceivable, and effortless virtue of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, “When he goes in any world, he can make it so that living beings renounce their physical and material valuables to seek his sympathy.” We know that he gained enlightenment, but he did not stop creating merits by listening to and saving beings. This is the reason why people make offerings to him everywhere. Due to the direct result of his compassion’s previous existences and the dependent condition, he is always honored and worshiped.

The fourth wonderful, inconceivable, and effortless virtue of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, “He can make offerings of rare treasures to the Tathāgatas in the ten directions and meet the needs of living beings on the six paths. If someone seeks a spouse, he obtains a spouse; seeking children, he can have children; seeking samādhi, he obtains samādhi; seeking a long life, he obtains a long life; and even if seeking the great nirvana (Pāli: nibbāna), he can obtain great nirvana.

TWO SUPREME STATES

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva attains the dharma door of Universally Penetrating Hearing and gains two supreme states.

1. In the upper state, united with the wonderfully enlightened mind of all Tathāgatas in the ten directions, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva

⁶ Ibid, The Lotus Sūtra, p. 295.

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gained the strength of compassion equal to that of all of the Buddhas to save living beings.

2. In the lower state, united with all living beings in the six realms in the ten directions, he regards all living beings with kindness and points them in the direction of the supreme bliss of bodhi.

Besides two supreme states, there are twelve vows of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva as the Peaceful Sūtra quotes:

1. Hearing the crying of beings in the three realms
2. Saving people in danger of drowning
3. Listening to cries and rescuing sentient beings
4. Conquering raksas and destroying evil spirits
5. Sprinkling sacred water to calm the mind of mundane people
6. Making people practice equanimity at all times
7. Destroying the three evil realms of hell, ghosts, and animals
8. Relieving prisoners
9. Saving all beings in the suffering ocean
10. Guiding beings to the Pure Land
11. Endless longevity
12. Cultivating diligently

The twelve vows of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva represent his willingness to save beings from suffering and bestow bliss on them. Seeing Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's image and hearing his name, we feel that his love (Pāli: mettā), compassion (Pāli: karuṇā), joy (Pāli: muditā), and equanimity (Pāli: upekkhā) spread throughout our mind and body. With his majestic appearance, compassionate heart, and twelve vows, he comes to the world of saints and mundane people to teach people to understand dharma and share liberation and happiness together. The twelve vows are a message of peace and happiness for human beings.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is a symbol of purity and inner miraculous sounds (Wonderful Sound, Perceiver of the World's Sounds, Brahma's Sound, Sea Tide Sound). These sounds surpass

those sounds in the world; therefore, we should constantly reflect on them. If we take refuge in Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva with our whole heart, then our vows and wishes will be accepted. We are protected and blessed by his power and our defilements will be transformed. The reason we are in fear is that our mind and speech are impure. We accumulate so much craving, hatred (Pāli: *sadosaṃ*), and delusion (Pāli: *samohaṃ*). Avalokiteśvara has affinity with sentient beings in this saha world, so we often call his name whenever we face suffering. Even in a nightmare, people call his name for safety. By calling his name, our minds become peaceful and disaster may wonderfully change into fortune, and we may get rid of suffering (Pāli: *parideva*).

Buddhism is religion of love and compassion and Avalokiteśvara is the symbol of the compassionate goddess. His great powers are rescuing us from seven disasters, cutting off the three poisons (greed, anger, and ignorance), satisfying two wishes, manifesting thirty-two bodies, and using fourteen ways of preaching dharma. “Sweet water in his pot” means food nourishing our body and mind, especially supporting our spiritual practice, making suffering vanish, and making our minds as well as bodies peaceful. The quantity of this water is as much as vast space, and thanks to it, people gain hope from his vows to save all mundane people. His holy cause, virtue, result, and merit are unbelievable.

If we could see his majestic appearance, it would be a big comfort because his body is crystallized by numerous merits and great compassion, which he has cultivated from many previous lives.

Avalokiteśvara’s love is boundless and selfless. It is pure love without dual objects, human, self, living beings, or lifespan. That love has no duality or non-discrimination. The love is of all for one, one for all. The holy water from Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is like food to nourish the body; most importantly, it nourishes our spiritual life. That makes the pain disappear and the defilements cool. That we recite the name of Avalokiteśvara means we call all names of other Bodhisattvas in the universe at the same time. Thus, those who recite the name of Avalokiteśvara gain the greatest benefits as compared with those gained by beings who

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accept and uphold the names of 62,000 million titles of other bodhisattvas.

It can be said that Avalokiteśvara is neither a male bodhisattva nor a female bodhisattva. Avalokiteśvara is the force of love and compassion, which is omnipresent. We are just ordinary people, but faced by crises, we are ready to help others. At that time, there is Avalokiteśvara inside us. In other words, we are the manifestation of Avalokiteśvara in this world. When a glimpse of love appears in our heart, when we utter a word to comfort others, when we take care of others, when we keep a consoling eye on others, right at that time, Avalokiteśvara manifests in such thoughts.

Because of not being bound by any tie, Avalokiteśvara goes everywhere, while we are not free. We stay at one place today and another tomorrow. In the upper level, united with the wonderfully enlightened minds of all Tathāgatas in the ten directions, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva gained the strength of compassion equal to that all the Buddhas to save living beings. Hence, he can penetrate all kinds of sounds around the world. Whenever people face suffering, he appears to save them from floods, fires, swords, war, misunderstanding, hungry ghosts, and so forth.

Human beings are full of distress, affliction (Pāli āsava), craving (Pāli trishna), hatred, delusion, and doubt and cheating (Skt. abhūtavādi; Pāli, musāvāda). We praise ourselves while criticizing others, so our hearing and our powers are limited and we are dominated by fear.

Avalokiteśvara means our inner nature. Avalokiteśvara means enlightenment of the immateriality, the nature of all things, leading beings to the state beyond thought and words as the Heart Sūtra says, “Non-birth, non-death, non-purity, non-defilement, non-increasing, non-decreasing.” The wonderful state can transform fear and create a state of non-obstruction and non-fear, as the Only Way of Consciousness Commentary (Vijñānavāda) teaches. The five skandhas become five wisdoms, such as the great perfection wisdom, the equal insight essence, the contemplating insight

(vipassanā), the gaining wisdom, and dharma world insight.

THE MIRACLE OF RECITING AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

In the Buddhist texts, there are many stories about miraculous results when reciting the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in Buddhist caves, Buddhist holy places, literature, drama, and movies. Once someone heartily calls his name, Bodhisattva Observer of the World's Cries, he will come to respond.

There are many sacred stories of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva:

1. If we are on plane in the sky and it is about to crash, at that moment, we should remember to recite the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. If we do not recite his name, our lives are in danger and we feel hopeless. If we recite his name single-mindedly, our lives are not only saved, but also other people on the flight are safe.

2. Should we be traveling by train and come to know that it is about to derail, if we do not recite Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, all the passengers on that train may face risk. Reciting "Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Cries" means a call for help. He who hears the cries, even thousands of miles away, appears immediately to save us out of compassion. How efficacious is his name!

3. Should we be traveling on a ship and the ship is out of fuel or pirates are encountered, if we are of whole mind during the dangerous moments and recite Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva until our last breath, the danger will turn out safely. If we wholeheartedly recite his name, we can reach the shore eventually. There are many stories of Kuan Yin at sea.

4. A group of robbers intended to rob a ship, but when they met the scared victims, their evil minds were transformed. Why was it so? Because on ship there were many people sincerely reciting the name of Avalokiteśvara. So, the unbelievable, marvelous thing happened. There were spiritual, sacred responses between the victims and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

5. In the Quin Dynasty, there was a man named Ngô Doãn Thặng, who often called the name of Buddha and upheld the mantra of

great compassion. One day, he was saved from drowning. Since then, he put much trust in the Buddha and made a vow to burn his arm to offer to the Buddha. When the fire was out, surprisingly, the scar was arranged in four letters, “Come to Pure Land.” Many people trusted and followed Ngô Doãn Thăng. He had a temple named Trấn Tây Phương built and a statue of Buddha cast. He recited the name of Mahāsthāmaprāpta and he saw the Bodhisattva manifested in the light. When he was about to pass away, he saw many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas come to lead him to Pure Land. He smiled and expired.

6. There was a case in which a lay Buddhist lost control of his car on a hill. At that time, he whole-mindedly recited the name of Avalokiteśvara. Thanks to his devoted chanting, the car suddenly stopped before going over the cliff and the driver was saved. It was a miracle resulting from reciting the name of Avalokiteśvara.

7. Mrs. Âm from Sơn Tịnh village, China, went to Trà Bồng Mountain, Thạch Động Cave, to prostrate to the Buddha. This was a cave where Venerable Chon Dung stayed. One day, Mrs. Âm saw a big tiger; it roared and wanted to bite her. She cried, “Namo Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva” loudly and then she fainted. It was an urgent and sincere reciting. When she woke up, she thought she had died, but it turned out that the tiger had just licked her face and left. Why did the tiger leave? The answer is because she sincerely chanted the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. In a desperate situation, if we wholeheartedly chant the name of Avalokiteśvara, one time is equal to thousands of times in other circumstances. Hence, we must single-mindedly recite his name. The messages of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva for human beings is the message of cutting off suffering and bestowing bliss, a message of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, a message of patience (Skt. *kṣānti*; Pāli, *khanti*), and message of enlightenment (Skt. & Pāli, *bodhi*). If there is no misery with eight sufferings,⁷ three

⁷ The eight sufferings are the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, death, having to part from those one loves, having to meet with those one hates, being unable to obtain what one desires, and suffering due to the raging aggregates.

calamities,⁸ and eight disasters (adversities),⁹ then Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva will not manifest one arm and one eye for us, much less appear with up to eleven arms and one hundred eyes. The compassion, patience, and sympathy present in Avalokiteśvara is latent in us. If we often uphold his name and accumulate good seeds of love, compassion, patience, listening, and understanding, then we can receive his goodness. How miraculous is the connection created!

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER I

This chapter is the general introduction of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. According to Asian Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is like a female Buddha holding a willow branch to save human beings from suffering. She is the greatest mother among mothers and has countless heads and arms emerging on a dragon's head to prevent human beings from drowning. She has various names and sacred embodiments (sambhogakāya), which is well illustrated by many sūtras and legends, such as Quan Âm Nam Hải, Quan Âm Thị Kính, and Quan Âm Diệu Thiện.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the Buddhist term Avalokiteśvara refer to?
2. What are the meanings of Avalokiteśvara's images?
3. What are the basic meanings of Avalokiteśvara illustrated in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra and the Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra?

⁸ The three calamities, There are two sets of three calamities, lesser and greater. The greater are about fire, water, and wind; the lesser are about war, epidemic, and famine.

⁹ The eight adversities in the saha world are circumstances in which it is difficult to see a Buddha or hear his dharma:

- i. Rebirth in hells where beings undergo sufferings at all times due to bad karma in previous lives.
- ii. Rebirth as a hungry ghost or in the ghost-world, where beings never feel comfortable and have nonstop greed.
- iii. Rebirth in an animal realm, where beings have no ability and knowledge to practice dharma.

4. Compare Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna tradition with arahants or bhikkhunīs in the Theravāda tradition.
5. Please narrate a sacred story about Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva that you experienced.



Walking around the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Statue at Hung Sen Temple, Perris, California, USA

CHAPTER II

METHOD OF HEARING AND REFLECTING

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva arose from his seat, bowed at the Buddha's feet and said, "World-Honored One, I remember when, as many kalpas ago as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges, there was a Buddha in the world named Avalokiteśvara (Contemplating the World's Sounds). Under that Buddha I developed the bodhi mind. He taught me how to enter samādhi through a process of hearing and reflecting."¹⁰ Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva relayed that an ancient Buddha named Worldly Sound Contemplation taught him the method of returning the hearing-insight, the reflecting-insight, and the cultivating-insight. Thanks to practicing hearing, reflecting and cultivating, he entered samādhi.

Hearing-insight, in the common sense means great learning or knowledge. When someone hears the sound of a lecture by the ear-

¹⁰ Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra, (Bảo Giác), p. 176.

organ, the sound combines with wave vibrations of the ear, and the auditory nerve carries the signal to his brain, which translates it into a sound that he recognizes and understands according to his karma. However, the hearing-insight means hearing-nature without distinguishing sounds. As the sound arises, he realizes hearing-nature or fundamental bodhi vividly. He can enter bodhi from the door of hearing-nature, without using the six consciousnesses¹¹ to distinguish things.

At the beginning of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha teaches the way to obtain wisdom by means of knowing the fundamental bodhi and the fundamental birth and death. Understanding this, we do not race towards the six sense objects¹² of fundamental birth and death; we will attain hearing-nature, fundamental bodhi. This is called hearing-wisdom. It is like a light bulb, which is substance. Its function is light. The bulb and its function appear and pass away, but the electricity remains forever. Likewise, we live and die like a broken bulb according to our karma, but our hearing-nature (as does electricity) always exists in the world, whether there is sound or silence.

Hearing-insight means to realize self nature existing forever, just as electricity is always available in homes and other places. That we recognize the sound by the sixth consciousness sense and ear-consciousness is like the common sense of hearing, just the same as useful electricity making a light bright.

¹¹ Six consciousnesses: eye-consciousness (that is, consciousness based on the eye), ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness.

¹² Six sense objects: visual sight, sounds, odors, flavors, touch, and mental objects.

Reflecting-insight has the general meaning of thinking about something again and again, making discriminations of good and bad. Reflecting relies on insight without depending on consciousness, as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva transmitted from the fundamental birth and death to the fundamental bodhi. Once Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva hears something, he does not attach to the sound and react to the sound. He does not follow the outside sounds. When we do not follow the six objects, we return listening to self nature, until we are infused with that skill. When we succeed in this concentration, we will attain the *vajra samādhi* (diamond-like concentration) of hearing.

Cultivating-insight means practicing the Buddha's teaching according to common understanding, such as daily meditations on the four themes of mindfulness, the body is impure, receiving *vedanā* is suffering, the mind is impermanent, and phenomena (dharma) are non-self. Here, "cultivating wisdom" has a deep meaning, to keep concentration while acting, walking, standing, lying, sitting, and so on. Keeping mindfulness of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra means avoiding following the six objects outside, except for focusing on the ever-concentrated mind.

Reflecting-insight is to reflect on hearing-nature, while cultivating-insight is to focus on the samādhi of hearing-nature, regardless of noise, movement, or stillness. Focusing means to reflect on; they have same meaning. Please note that at first, we focus on reflecting on hearing-nature. Once in samādhi, no matter how disturbing the circumstances are, the mind is unshakable. One does not distinguish between the duality of right or wrong.

The cultivator needs to keep the Buddha's precepts strictly to avoid dropping into hell. This can be likened to someone in society committing robbery or killing and becoming imprisoned. Thus, the most basic method of hearing and reflecting is to uphold the precepts perfectly, and then the cultivator is able to enter samadhi.

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Wisdom arises by means of detachment from the six consciousnesses. When the practitioner is not subjected to the six consciousness senses, he has the insight to catch this hearing-door. The six organs can be likened to lightbulbs. Buddha-nature, seeing-nature, hearing-nature, smelling-nature, tactile-nature, knowing-nature, and identity-nature can be likened to electricity. The eye-consciousness is to see sights and distinguish them. The ear-consciousness is to hear sounds and distinguish them.

Electricity (the Buddha-essence) always exists, whether we turn the bulbs on or off. Whether there is brightness or darkness, motion or stillness, clearance or obstruction, bitterness or sweetness, touch or lack of touch, cognition or lack of cognition, seeing-nature and hearing-nature still exist. If we focus on hearing-nature, we will obtain primal wisdom (Skt. & Pāli, *samāpatti*) and start to transform living beings, to obtain later wisdom (Skt. *dhyāna*; Pāli, *jhāna*).

Reflecting insight first leads to the practice of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who lives in the fundamental Bodhi by reflecting on hearing-nature. Ceasing to follow the cycle of birth and death means to purify the six organs and then focus on bodhi nature. It is living in hearing-nature, rather than in the ear-organ, the sound sense, or the ear-consciousness. We commonly hear by the ear-consciousness, but Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva hears by his perfected essence through hearing-nature. To understand the Buddha's teachings and realize hearing-nature is the main cause and object for becoming Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. We practice reflecting on hearing-nature days for days until we are infused with it and then enter samādhi. It requires determination, diligence, and patience, through a long challenge. We should take note carefully that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva applied the three knowledges, hearing, reflecting, and practicing, for his cultivation. He would like to advise that we should follow up on these knowledges before

cultivating hearing-nature.

Initially, I entered the flow through hearing-nature and forgot worldly objects. Since the sense objects and sense-organs were quiet, the two characteristics of movement and stillness crystallized and did not arise. After that, gradually advancing, the hearing and what was heard both disappeared. Once the hearing was ended, there was nothing to rely on, and awareness and the objects of awareness became empty. When the emptiness of awareness reached an ultimate perfection, emptiness and what was being emptied then also ceased to be. Since production and extinction were gone, still extinction was revealed.

Suddenly I transcended the mundane and transcendental worlds, and the perfect brightness prevailed throughout the ten directions. I obtained two supreme states.¹³

First, I was united above with the inherent, wonderfully enlightened mind of all the Buddhas high above in the ten directions, and I gained the strength of compassion (karuṇā) equal to that power of all the Tathāgatas. Second, I was united below with all living beings in the six realms of existence below in the ten directions, and I gained a plea of compassion equal to all living beings.”¹⁴

Reaching these stages of cultivation, the practitioners attain three voids of no-self (self-*śūnyatā*), no-dharma (*dharma-śūnyatā*) and no-self or Dharma (*self-dharma-śūnyatā*). This means opening the six knots of movement, stillness, six-sense-organs, awakening, emptiness, and extinguishment.

¹³ Master Hua, *The Surangama Sūtra*, Commentary by Tripitaka Master Hsüan Hua, Volume VII, Dharma Realm Buddhist University, Buddhist Text Translation Society, Talmage, California, p. 235.

¹⁴ Giới Hương, trans., *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Bảo Giác), p. 176.

I. Self-śūnyatā: This stage cuts off three fetters, detachment from external objects, detachment from movement and stillness, and detachment from organs.

1. Detachment from external sense objects: The sūtra says, “At first from hearing-nature, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva reflects on the inner flow without following outside objects.” Earlier, detaching from the objects of sound, he focuses on hearing-nature. The mind-store has its functions, such as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and knowing. The Buddha picked hearing, which represents the other five organs. Ten times,¹⁵ the Buddha emphasized hearing in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra. However, the Buddha taught that we have to cut off specific and common karma. By means of this method, we will attain Buddha-nature. It means hearing-nature and seeing-nature playing the role as one.

Based on this meaning of practice, practitioners will experience the pure mind in the dharma realm. “Seeing-nature” means “hearing-nature.” Both essences are the same. The seven categories and four departments¹⁶ are also called Tathāgata Store (*Tathāgatagarbha*, source of all phenomena), which is in the dharma realm.

Hearing-nature still hears clearly without the ear-organ. It still sees clearly without the eye-organ. Hearing-nature is pure, tranquil, and free from thought. If there is a single false thought, myriad of worlds appears in the ten directions. The ear-consciousness often

¹⁵ Giói Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Tâm Minh), p. 60.

¹⁶ Seven elements: earth, fire, water, wind, space, reasoning, and perception.

Four departments:

Five aggregates: form, feelings/sensations, perceptions, volition, and consciousness.

Six organs: organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

Twelve entrances: six sense-organs, six objects (sights, sounds, scents, tastes, textures, and mental objects).

The eighteen realms: six organs, six objects, and six consciousnesses.

contacts and attaches to all kinds of sounds.

In order to perceive hearing-nature easily, we need to meditate at dawn. We can hear all sounds wonderfully and clearly. It is like the shadows that are reflected on a mirror.

Entering the Dharma Door of a Saint Lineage

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva entered the dharma door of a saint lineage. He is of Buddha-nature, not racing out to external sounds. There is not a single false thought in turning the light inwards on oneself. In the stillness, we hear stillness. This is why we know the wonderful mind is latent; it is not that we attain it by means of cultivation.

If we do not believe it, we will never attain it. Hearing-nature is the Buddha's perfect nirvana in the ten directions and is the Patriarch's Right Dharma Eye Treasury.

The four words of “focus on hearing-nature”, mean returning to inner hearing and not seeking sounds outside, although one can listen to all at the same time. This nature is so amazing it is called wonderful hearing-nature. This is the state in which a cultivator is in a position on the way to seeing the Path.

We get used to hearing all kinds of sounds and grasp them and attach to them; countless sensory perceptions and various emotions, such as liking and disliking, arise. Moreover, developing technologies produce many devices for us to entertain our sense-organs, such as radio, TV, MP3 and so on; we race out towards all the different sounds much more than in the past.

From today onward, we should practice returning our hearing to hear inwardly. This means we practice the dharma door of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in order to remove knots that constitute the organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

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Entering the saint lineage, we will not get caught in the low realms of heavenly beings (*deva*), asuras, people (*manussa*), animals (*tiracchānayoṇi*), hungry ghosts, and dwellers in the hells (*niraya*). Once we focus on awareness nature, there is no discrimination.

We become easily angered whenever we hear offensive sounds; the method of returning hearing to hear self nature helps us remove anger or defilement.

When entering the saint lineage, we only live with wisdom, not chasing after the movement and stillness of sound and other objective states. Not chasing after the objects of sound means to return the hearing to hear self nature. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva transforms objectification. All the “dust”—the defiling objects of the six sense objects as perceived by the six sense-organs—are transformed. Every day, we follow sounds to distinguish everything, but now we practice not grabbing them, thus letting the six consciousnesses return inward to produce insights. The Buddhas all taught Venerable Ānanda that the root of the cycle of rebirth is the six organs and from them nirvana emerges as well.

What does the cycle of rebirth mean? Because the eye-organ races out to shapes and the ear-organ chases after all sounds, greed, hatred, and delusion arise. Greed, hatred, and delusion push human beings to commit murder, theft, sexual misconduct, and so on. People constantly cycle in the net of *saṃsāra*. Basically, the root of *saṃsāra* is in the six organs, so the Buddha taught that monks or nuns need to restrain their six organs. Monks or nuns leave home to enter the temple so that they can avoid the attractive and harmful conditions to create karma for rebirth in *saṃsāra*.

In such a good environment as the temple, the renunciates who have opportunities to study many sermons from the Buddha cannot decrease the three poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance gradually. This situation can be compared to having a bomb inside

us that can explode suddenly. In order to prevent the fuse from lighting, we have to prevent the six organs from running after the six sense objects. We can attain nirvana based on our six organs.

Treatment is born from diseases. The six organs produce many kinds of diseases, and we heal based on the six organs. In the past, we often chased objects, now we practice returning to our Buddha-nature. Because we often follow external sights, we are unaware that the six organs are made of soil, water, wind, and fire and are not our nature. We should contemplate the impurity of our body every day. We then feel detached from this body. We know that the six organs which accompany retribution are impure and empty; they are the first link in the twelve cause-conditions¹⁷ (*pratītyasamutpāda*, *paṭiccasamuppāda*). If we are able to remove this first chain, the cycle of rebirth will be cut off. We would then be liberated from suffering. Contemplating the impurity of the body will help us to become disgusted with our bodies. Contemplating the six-organs, six-objects, and six-consciousnesses supports us to realize the illusion of outside things; letting them go means that we dwell on our Buddha-nature. However, it cannot be quick for a mundane person to become a saint; it may take time, and we need to cultivate for many lifetimes. By contemplating daily, we are able to detach from the six organs easily and attain a high state of calm. There is a process of six knots (movement, stillness, organs, awareness, emptiness, and extinct) to remove in order that the practitioner entirely live with Buddha-nature as below.

¹⁷ Twelve cause-conditions (*pratītyasamutpāda*, *paṭiccasamuppāda*):

i. *Avijjā* (*avidya*), ignorance, lack of wisdom, which is the root of all evils. Obscurations as to self of persons and self of phenomena.

ii. *Sanhāra* (*saṃskāra*): karma formations, compositional action, wholesome or unwholesome thoughts, speech and bodily deeds.

iii. *Viññāna* (*vijñāna*): consciousness, normally six consciousnesses, but is taken as eight in the Yogācāra School.

2. Detachment from movement and stillness: The sūtra says, “Since the sense objects and sense-organs are not dualistic, then two opposite characteristics of movement and stillness do not arise.”¹⁸ The beginning phrase of entering the saint lineage is difficult. We must practice not following outside objects, but this is challenging. Even if we diligently practice, movement and stillness arise constantly. The two opposite forms of the six organs (brightness and darkness, movement and stillness, clearance and obstruction, flavored and flavorless, touched and untouched, knowing and unknowing) in turn often cover over our awareness nature.

Space came out of delusion. In space, ignorance caused the appearance of forms. Forms and false thoughts are the cause of countless living beings. Due to karma or ignorance, there is space,

iv. *Nāma-rūpa*: name and form, corporeality and mentality, mental and physical existence. Four mental aggregates and one physical body.

v. *Āyatana (shadayatana)*: six bases, six sense-organs/spheres of eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch, and mental faculty.

vi. *Phassa (sparsha)*: sense impression. Contact, a mental factor and period in which the objects, sense power/organ and consciousness come together, causing one to distinguish an object as pleasurable, painful, or neutral.

vii. *Vedanā*: feeling, sensation, posited as a mental factor that experiences pleasure, pain and neutral feeling; pleasure leads to a strong desire for more while pain generates an avoidance desire.

viii. *Tanha (trishna)*: craving, attachment, a mental factor that increases desire but without any satisfaction.

ix. *Upādāna*: clinging, grasping, a stronger degree of desire. Four basic varieties: desired objects, views of self, bad system of ethics and conduct; and other bad views.

x. *Bhāva (bjava)*: process of becoming, existence; a period lasting from the time of fully potentialized karma up to the beginning of next lifetime.

xi. *Jāti*: rebirth

xii. *Jarāmaraṇa (jarāmarañam)*: aging and death; decay and death.

¹⁸ Giói Hương, trans., *Sūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác)*, p. 176.

brightness and darkness. Do not be dull; we will become stream-enterers. Obviously, if there is no karma, then there neither space, nor brightness, nor darkness. Once there is no brightness or darkness, there is neither movement nor stillness.

The Buddha said that if a person who has his pure eyes looks without rest at space, the staring will cause fatigue, and then of his own accord, he will see strange flowers dancing in space. It is a symbol of the skandha of form. The categories of skandha of form are brightness and darkness, movement and stillness, clearance and obstruction, flavored and flavorless, touched and untouched, knowing and unknowing (twelve opposite categories of the six sense-organs). Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who entered the dharma door of the saint lineage, never grasps the forms that come from the above twelve opposite categories of the six sense-organs.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Chapter IV, it is said that the root of knots is in the six sense-organs. If there are no six sense objects, there are no knots. “Attractive sounds” are subjective sounds, the kind of sounds that bind our mind, such as voices, praise, and criticisms of like and dislike. “Unattractive sounds” are objective sounds, the kinds of sound that do not bind our mind or disturb our ego, such as blowing wind, singing birds, and so on. We need to practice returning to hearing the self nature for days to contemplate the play of movement and stillness and detach from sounds easily.

This is like a person with bright eyes living in a dark house. If he is suddenly awakened, his mind illuminates all of the ten directions, from the heaven realm to the hells, to the tiniest movement. Whoever lives with his hearing-nature will have the main cause to be a Buddha, while whoever engages in the mundane consciousness, in the triple sense-organs, object, and consciousness will have limited power.

Avalokiteśvara doesn't grab movement or stillness. Since his eyes

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are not weary, he does not see sky flowers. He doesn't hear the sound of vehicles, movement, or stillness.¹⁹ Cultivating up to this level is called "Transforming the Form Skandha."

Initially, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who destroyed the two knots of movement and stillness to enter the saint lineage, dwelled on his hearing-nature and saint lineage and did nothing further.

Next, he attained the neither-hearing-nor-what-is-heard-state, neither subject nor object. Sounds of what is heard once disappear, and then the ear-organ also will vanish, because both dualities relate to each other. They appear and disappear at same time. At that time, he lived with the intuitive nature that illuminates the dharma realm, Amitābha Land.

At the first knot, the cultivator can remove the outside sound attachment. After removing the outside sound attachment, the second knot, the stillness without sound, appears. He easily grasps at stillness. Thus, at his level, he must avoid dwelling on the stillness. This means the duty of the cultivator is to avoid attaching to the twelve opposite faces of the six sense-organs, such as brightness and darkness, movement and stillness, clearance and obstruction, flavored and flavorless, touched and untouched, knowing and unknowing.

In fact, the cultivator neither destroys nor kills any object, once dwelling in the hearing-nature; the brightness and darkness of the eye-organ, the movement and stillness of the ear-organ, the clearance and obstruction of the nose-organ, the flavors and flavorlessness of the tongue-organ, the touch and lack of touch of the skin-organ, the knowing and unknowing of brain-organ will

¹⁹ A brahma focused on meditation and he didn't hear anything though twelve cows went through his place. His power was praiseworthy, but Buddha's power was greater than that. He dwelt in meditation without hearing movement and stillness while it was thundering. He sat in meditation with equanimity.

naturally detach because they are originally illusion. In such a way, he step-by-step opened the six knots from his six sense-organs , which are the twelve opposite categories of inner or external objects. His status will then be in the saint lineage. At present, we still use the methods of reflecting-insight and cultivating-insight. However, both insights are to hear self nature without attachment to the movement and stillness of the sound. The dharma door of returning hearing to hear self nature is wonderful and simple. Our hearing-nature hears the sounds without chasing after them, without movement and stillness—naturally, the cultivator will obtain a skillful result.

1. Detachment from organs

The sūtra says, “After that, gradually advancing, the hearing and what was heard both disappeared.” The ability to hear is the illuminating wisdom, while what is heard is the organ-nature.²⁰ Once the movement and stillness disappear, there is no external object or sense-organ. The organ and nature are analogous to ice and water. Ice and water cannot separate. However, ice is solid and water is liquid, so it cannot be one. The ear faculty disappears, as ice melts into water. There is neither organ nor sense-object; there are neither false views nor false thoughts as well.

The cultivator attains the enlightenment of selflessness (equivalent to arahant hood). It is like a person who is wearing three coats—when he removes two coats—the third coat will appear. The organ appears, but it is the origin of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and knowing. These sense-organs are illusory and disappear with the flesh body.

If the eye, the faculty to receive brightness and darkness, is empty, brightness and darkness will also be nothing.

²⁰ It is at a high level of the pair of the ability to hear and faculty-nature, which is different from the pair of ears and sound.

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If the ear, the faculty to receive movement and stillness, is empty, movement and stillness will also be nothing.

If the nose, the faculty to receive clearance and disturbance, is empty, clearance and disturbance will also be nothing.

If the tongue, the faculty to receive flavors and flavorlessness, is empty, flavors and flavorlessness will also be nothing.

If the skin, the faculty to receive touch and lack of touch is empty, touch and lack of touch will also be nothing.

If the mind, the faculty to receive knowing and unknowing, is empty, knowing and unknowing will also be nothing.

After contemplating this phenomenon without a receiver, an ear, or sound, and deeply entering samādhi, the cultivator attains the position for terminating the six sense-organs . This method is simple but highly effective, so it called the wonderful way. We feel happiness or misery, which is called the skandhas receiving from the six-objects. Sense-objects are empty—where is consciousness from? It vanishes automatically. Hearing vanishes, the self disappears, and self and dharma, as well as all phenomena, also disappear. The skandha of perception does not exist anymore. The cultivator attains the enlightenment of selflessness.

If we still see and hear everything and attach to what we see and hear, that is self-concept. In contrast, if we detach through this, we attain the enlightenment of selflessness. Once movement, stillness, as well as the organ disappears, we obtain a state unbound by any ties.

In Chapter V, “Two Difficult Problems”²¹ of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Venerable Purnamaitrayaniputra (Punnamantaniputta) asks the Buddha why the mountains, rivers, earth, and other phenomena

²¹“Two Difficult Problems” of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, p. 153.

continuously appear suddenly. The Buddha replies that ignorance causes one to see flowers in the sky. The cultivator opens three knots of movement, stillness, and organs and attains the enlightenment of selflessness. “Without faculty” means no-self. “Without movement and stillness” means no-dharma. This is the level of entry into the saint lineage. We just understand according to our limited knowledge. We must be patient to listen to the truth which is called “Uncreated-Dharma Patience” (Anutpattika-Dharmakshanti). Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva declared clearly that we only are calm when the sense-organs, objects, and consciousnesses naturally disappear without any hard effort. Our Buddha-nature is divided into six sense doors, such as sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, and knowing. Once we open one knot at the eye, then the other knots at the rest of the organs will unlock naturally. This level is called Terminating Sense-organs.

I. **Dharma-śūnyatā**: to obtain this state, we have to remove two fetters of the fourth and fifth, i) detach from illuminating awareness, ii) detach from double emptiness. The stream-enterer eliminates external attachment; due to this fruit, the cultivator only has subtle defilements remaining.

1) **Detaching from illuminating awareness**: After the ability to hear and the objects of hearing both vanish, measureless quietness is revealed. This is the object of awareness. The awareness of the object is the subject. The cultivator attains the state of illuminating awareness of both subject and object. Whenever he attaches, there will be faults even in subtle meanings.

2) **Detaching from double emptiness**: After opening the third knot (removing movement, stillness, and organs), by uncovering the subject and object of awareness, the subject and object of emptiness is revealed. When the emptiness of awareness reaches an ultimate perfection, emptiness and what was being emptied then also cease. This level is called “detaching from double emptiness.” The cultivator does not stop at such a state. He

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eliminates one organ; five other organs are cut off. There is neither seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, nor knowing. He continues dwelling in hearing-nature, awareness, and double emptiness. He does not race out to external sounds to become arrogant or superior.

At that time, awareness nature does not divide into six parts according to the human being's karma. It is only Amitābha nature. He does not dwell on hearing or the six organs, but the awareness and the object of awareness are present. He continues dwelling on awareness and the object of awareness. Gradually, awareness and the object of awareness become empty. When the emptiness of awareness reaches an ultimate perfection, emptiness and what was being emptied also cease. However, we can easily see that we are awakened and what is awakened. We stand aside and see the sea of enlightenment as an object while the sea of enlightenment is inside us; we make intuitive nature into an external object. Therefore, the awakened and what is awakened must be avoided.

If we stay in such a state, we easily fall into the eternal state of “selflessness,” which is called the deep hole of non-activity. The arahant's nirvana is an inactive state without karma. Why? Because once arahants enter nirvana, they do not go out to save suffering living beings. Bodhisattvas hold that it is a limited mind. As soon as they attain the state of selflessness, they still grasp the Object of Bliss nirvana (dharma-śūnyatā).

If cultivators do not practice further, they easily fall into a deep hole of non-activity. Reaching this level, arahants remove skandhas of formations and other skandhas stop working, so they are still in a deep hole of non-activity. Arahants hold that their nirvana is unsurpassed. They don't know that going further from this state of selflessness, they will attain the perfect penetration of Buddha-nature.

We only need to sit in meditation—do not race to make the mind subject to production and extinction. By sitting in meditation

without moving, we will attain wonderful enlightenment step-by-step. On the other hand, if we are in chaos and engage in much karma, then we will drop into the six realms of existence.

Cutting off the skandha of formation (attaining arahantship), the subject and object of emptiness/nirvana appears. We should detach from double emptiness and proceed to the liberated state of true nature. We will see ourselves and Buddhas to have the same nature, which covers all the dharma worlds. Because Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva united with living beings in the dharma realm, he saw their suffering clearly and manifested many bodies to teach them and save them from disasters.

In this state, Bodhisattvas cut all delusions, as numerous as dust and sand, and obtain the state in which all phenomena are empty (dharma-śūnyatā).

II. Self-śūnyatā and dharma-śūnyatā: Removing the sixth and last knot, since appearance and disappearance are gone, tranquil extinction is revealed. There is neither awareness nor emptiness; tranquil extinction is revealed. There is no arising or passing away or other phenomena. The six knots of movement, stillness, organs, awareness, emptiness, and extinction are unbound. The last subtle object to appear and disappear automatically without effort is called “no-action virtue while benefiting others.” When the time comes, that virtue will be revealed to make the dharma way wonderful.

“Tranquil extinction is revealed.” Extinction does not mean the opposite of chaos, due to its eternal origin free from chaos. Tranquil does not mean the opposite of appearance, because the true origin is without appearance and disappearance. This is the intuitive nature and Tathāgata Store. Transforming the skandha of formation, a cultivator attains the enlightened position that is equal to arahantship according to the Theravāda tradition. A cultivator cannot transform the skandha of formation, even at the level of

detaching from illuminating the awakened and what is awakened. Detaching from double emptiness is to reach nirvana. This level seems too high to reach, but the Buddha still said that the deep hole of ignorance of attachment to nirvana must be overcome. Only when we reach the level of detaching from nirvana will the skandha of consciousness be transformed.

This can be called self-*śūnyatā* and dharma-*śūnyatā* because appearance and disappearance are gone and tranquil extinction is revealed to return to Buddha-nature. Out of compassion, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva guides us one-by-one to reach Buddha-nature. This is his insight.

Regarding beneficence towards other beings, the Lotus Sūtra teaches that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who contemplated external sounds, responded to such sounds to save beings from suffering. Regarding beneficence towards himself, according to the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, he returned hearing to hear self nature, which pervades the ten directions. This is self benefit. All Buddhas called him the Sound-Contemplating One because he attained true hearing-nature to hear the universal sound. We do not need to change all kinds of sounds. What we need is to return hearing to self nature. Sound is an illusion that naturally disappears. We benefit ourselves by returning to the hearing-nature. We skillfully benefit others by turning to the sounds of suffering beings and helping them out of difficulties. Thus, there are external objects and internal objects. We can contemplate inside and outside as well.

The Lotus Sūtra only mentions the effect without the cause, while the Śūraṅgama Sūtra talks about the cause without effect. Hence, they are related to each other. We need to study both of these sūtras; we will then understand the virtue and name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

Bodhisattva Observer of the World's Sounds or Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds—both these names are about the

sounds that living beings use to express their wishes. However, “Perceiver” has a deeper meaning regarding sound than

“Observer.” Bodhisattvas respond to worldly sounds to save

others, but once they cultivate themselves, they contemplate the sounds to return hearing to hear self nature. Altruism is to realize the significance of numberless sounds in order to save beings. Self effort and sounds are false ear-consciousness and must be dropped.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva said that he observed hearing-nature to pervade the ten directions. The contemplating object is hearing-nature, that is, he attains real hearing-nature penetrating throughout the world, the main dharma door to enter hearing. He was freed from the five impurities²² and five skandhas to settle down in real hearing, which is the result of deep applications of self-effort.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva attained the real nature of hearing, the Buddha essence, so that he can respond to whatever living beings wish, including saving them from disasters and suffering. While we may understand other beings’ suffering, if we do not care at all, it may be that we have not attained hearing-nature. We must not only understand all kinds of sounds but also hear hearing-nature, so that we can help ourselves and others. Therefore, we must practice samāpatti (mindfulness) and dhyāna (insight).²³ The word “contemplating” in the name of the observer and perceiver of the World’s Sounds (in Vietnamese “Quán Thế Âm”) and the perceiver of the sound (Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, in Vietnamese “Quán Thế Âm”) reveals the benefit to both self and other beings because of the aim to return to self-hearing-nature and the external suffering voices from the world. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva contemplates in order to cultivate and benefit others. He contemplates all kinds of sounds to hear self

²² Five impurities: the impurities of kalpa, view, defilements, living beings, and living duration.

²³ Samāpatti can also mean the base wisdom; dhyāna is the afterward wisdom.

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nature; he contemplates all kinds of sounds to observe the worldly sounds.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva said that living beings discriminate all kinds of sounds, so much that they produce greed, hatred, and delusion; therefore, the hearing dharma door is necessary for them. If people turn away from external sounds, they can hear their hearing-nature. This method is called “returning our hearing-nature.” Once they stop racing out to external sounds, they will cut off saṃsāra. This dharma door is simple and easy because we do not need to put much effort outside, we just return inward as the main cause for practice. Hearing-nature is measureless long life and measureless light. Hearing-nature is our Buddha essence. Once we return to our hearing-nature, the five impurities will disappear and we can clearly hear sounds far and near. That why it is called simple but of essence. With this practice, we can gain the wonderful cause.

The name of Bodhisattva Observer of the World’s Sounds is the proper practice for all kinds of human beings. Once living beings get stuck in difficulties, they use sounds to pray to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Accordingly, he catches such sounds and responds to save beings. The name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is suitable in the world because living beings favor sound. When they are in misery, they shout out and sincerely recite his name to plead for their needs. Thus, the honored name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is a unique dharma door for practice in the saha world.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha teaches the dharma door of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in detail. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who is our Buddhist teacher, practiced and achieved success in hearing-nature. If we cultivate without a master, we become lost easily. To avoid losing the way, we need a dharma teacher.

Our first religious master is Sakyamuni Buddha, our second is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra teaches we must keep the precepts strictly and purely as white ice. We must repent our mistakes sincerely until we get good signs that we have been forgiven. We must detach from everything and return to the hearing-nature, and then this hearing ability will pervade the ten directions.

All Buddhas made great vows of self-support and other-support. If we only take care of ourselves, this is not called a great mind. The way that Buddhas show us to become a Buddha is practicing the dharma door of returning to hear hearing-nature. Returning to the inner essence is the main cause for becoming great.

The Buddha explained in detail and Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva summarized praise of the dharma door of perfect penetration of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. This is a unique dharma door in comparison to the others. Returning to our inner hearing is the easiest and most useful way to enter.

In brief, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva opened the six knots as follows, entering the saint lineage and ignoring external objects. Since we focus on hearing-nature, the two characteristics of movement and stillness do not arise (“knots of movement and stillness”). After this, gradually advancing, hearing and what is heard both disappear. The sense-objects and sense-organs are no more (“knot of organ”). Once there is nothing to rely on, the awareness and the objects of awareness are revealed (“knot of awareness”). When the emptiness of awareness reaches an ultimate perfection, emptiness and what is being emptied then also cease to be (“knot of emptiness”). “Without the appearance,” the tranquil extinction is revealed (“knot of extinction”). Removing these six

knots, the five skandhas and five disappearances, impurities²⁴ will vanish; we attain the dharma door of universal hearing.

By only focusing peacefully on hearing-nature, the five skandhas and five layers of impurity disappear. Once the layers of ignorance end, measureless long life and light reveals all of the dharma worlds. Simply returning to samādhi of hearing-nature, we can remove the five layers of ignorance. This is easy because its origin is an illusion. Once we do not touch it anymore, it naturally disappears. That is why this method is called the wonderful way.

If we only live by our Buddha essence and hearing-nature, ignorance will be transformed step-by-step. We can be freed from consciousness, self-karma, and community-karma. Knowing how to return hearing-nature is a wonderful insight or an awakening without beginning that we have recently come to understand. Such wisdom seems like a temporary appearance due to our knowledge, but in fact it is our eternal, original nature. Whether we acknowledge it or not, it is revealed far and near. Now we know how to use this energy to return inward, that is, using insight to reflect on the nature that the Buddha says is the practice of hearing. Hearing insight engages in hearing, which is used as the object of reflection. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva taught that in hearing-nature, we hear by the ear-organ, but hearing-nature that is not the ear-organ, ear-consciousness, or mental-consciousness is the bodhi essence. He saw that seeing-nature, which is of the eight consciousnesses, binds self-karma and community-karma.

He realized that everywhere is illuminated and he is everywhere. His hearing-nature is also in the ten directions so that he can save all living beings. Wherever living beings pray to him, he is able to hear their wishes. There is no gap between him and them. He dwells in hearing-nature. He detaches from external sounds, ear-consciousness, and mental-consciousness. The feelings

²⁴ Five impurities: the impurities of kalpa, view, defilements, living beings, and living duration.

of happiness/sadness, hate/love naturally disappear, without hard effort. We study the Buddha dharma; that means we learn how to detach from objects, body, and mind. We fortunately have true nature to dwell on, so we are willing to detach from all illusions.

We should be clear about the root of rebirth and death and the root of bodhi-essence. If we do not learn seriously the practice of Avalokiteśvara, we are controlled by the five skandhas. When we are free from them, we are still ourselves, one substance, because these five skandhas are an illusion. Only when we are awakened do they disappear. We do not need to cultivate hard. Regarding samāpatti, the Śūraṅgama Sūtra mentions the practice of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who wholemindedly concentrated on hearing-nature. Due to detachment from the five skandhas and five impurities, this is called main samādhi. Bodhisattvas in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra attain this state, although we cannot grasp its deep meaning. The Buddha reminded us countless times that we have the same hearing-nature as the Buddha, while the ear-consciousness and mental-consciousness lead to the wrong way of the six realms of existence. Let us receive the bodhi essence and avoid producing the cause of rebirth and death. To attain wisdom, we must transform ignorance. Once ignorance disappears, the insight will be bright. Knots are the symbols of ignorance. Owing to delusion, the ignorant knot constitutes the ear-organ and karma nonstop. Avoid creating karma for the six sense-organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin, and mind in numberless bodies.

The method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is to hear the hearing-nature. Once we attach to objects, we lose concentration. Therefore, we should keep mindfulness. This is the detailed guidance from the Buddhas who focused on hearing essence to attain universal enlightenment, “After transforming the skandha of consciousness, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva got out from firm samādhi.”²⁵

²⁵ Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 177.

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He explained meticulously how to untie the six knots and attain self-*śūnyatā*, dharma-*śūnyatā*, and self-dharma-*śūnyatā*, so that we can easily practice. However, he cultivated simply by concentrating on hearing-nature and by doing so the delusion of knots and impurities were naturally removed.

The Buddha knew clearly our prejudice, which is as deluded as seeing sky flowers. When our eyes are tired, sky-flowers appear. If our eyes are well, there are no sky flowers and at that time, we can focus on *samādhi*. We do not run here and there to search for the way; instead, we settle down in hearing-nature, and then gradually, we can reach states attained by Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

APPROPRIATENESS FOR ALL KINDS OF HUMAN BEINGS

The dharma door of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is appropriate for living beings in the saha world. This can be compared to a bird standing firmly on a branch of a tree by means of its claws. Similarly, living beings rely firmly on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's method. The ear-organ is keener than other organs. The eye-organ is dim because it cannot see behind itself. The organs of nose, tongue, and body are also dull because they only know when they touch objects. The mental organ is keen, but it cannot take action if there are no according perceptions, feelings or formations. So, the ear-organ is the best among the six sense-organs. It is perfect due to three good characteristics:

- a) Universal: it can hear sounds from the ten directions.
- b) Penetration: it can hear sound through a solid wall or darkness.
- c) Constant: it can hear all the time, even during sleep.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva advised us to contemplate hearing-nature due to these perfect characteristics. Moreover, in saṃsāra, living beings who are fond of their voice favor shouting and praying. He responds to save them according to their sincere sounds. However, when we pray, we must focus and hear the prayers with our own mind. At that time, we return to hearing-nature, which is the same essence as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. It means we meet him in that Buddha essence. He is with us in the dharma realm, but since we keep busy racing out for wealth, beauty, fame, and multitudes of things in the world, we feel far away from him. As soon as we return to hearing-nature from us and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and can hear clearly our prayers to him, we return to him. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who cultivated the ear-organ, attained penetration. He contemplated hearing-nature, which is without increase/decrease, appearance/disappearance, smoothness/obstruction. He contemplated that the movement and stillness had clearly disappeared and then he entered universal hearing-nature. When he entered hearing-nature deeply, the subject and object of hearing were removed. His unique awakening in the ten directions was revealed.

However, the awakened and what is awakened was still present. Then, proceeding further in practice, the awakened and what was awakened recently were transformed, meaning he attained dharma-sūnyatā. At that time, there remained some subtle mistakes, just as a person who wakes from a dream still remembers a few images. Therefore, he did not attain complete awakening. He then went ahead in his cultivation and suddenly realized the same nature between ignorance and enlightenment. He did not see any difference between him in the past and right now. Therefore, all distinguishing objects/subjects and good/bad disappeared. Emptiness and what was being emptied ceased to be. He attained

the insight into the non-origination of dharmas and the pure nature of nirvana.

Suddenly I leaped over both the mundane and super-mundane, thereby realizing all-embracing brightness pervading the ten directions and acquired two unsurpassed merits.

1. The first was in accord with the fundamental Profound Enlightened Mind of all the Buddhas high up in the ten directions who possessed the same merciful power as the Tathāgata.

2. The second was in sympathy with all living beings in the six realms of existence here below in the ten directions and shared with them the same plea for compassion (karuṇā).²⁶

The perfect realm in front of our eyes is real. This realm is not bound by space or time, mundane or supramundane, and action or inaction. It is united above with Buddha's compassion and below with living beings' plea for compassion. The real realm coming from our mind is perfect and undepictable.

The bliss tranquility and wisdom,
which is wonderfully clear,
Transmission of vajra samādhi
of all beings is like an illusion.
Profound tranquility, wonderful insight
and perfect penetration in the present,
Temporarily penetrating and practicing
hearing-nature in vajra samādhi.

²⁶The Śūraṅgama Sūtra (*Kinh Thủ Lăng Nghiêm*), translated into Vietnamese by Bhikkhunī Bảo Giác; translated into English by Bhikkhunī Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, HCM City Publishing, 1999, p.176.

This verse summarizes Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's process of attaining enlightenment and his unique method, "profound tranquility, wonderful insight and perfect penetration in the present." Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva dwelled on hearing-hearing-nature, detached from appearance/disappearance, and focused on the constant real nature. Five layers of skandhas ceased, which means freedom from birth and death. The five skandhas, which are organ-object-consciousness, turned into Buddha-nature. He practiced "the liberated cause without falling," that is, there was no longer subtle defilements in his consciousness. He was outside of the three realms of passion, materiality, and immateriality and obtained wonderful insight and perfect penetration. If Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva attained the perfect penetration, why did he still manifest many bodies? He manifested many bodies because he wanted to remind living beings not to attach to the fruit they attained, which is called perfect penetration.

After unbinding the six knots of movement, stillness, organs, awakening, emptiness, and extinction, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva gained the state of perfect penetration. His simple way was to detach for attainment. By dropping the six knots, he gained valuable power of mind. In contrast, we grasp at many things with nothing in our hands, so we feel suffering, hate, revenge, and so on.

Out of compassion returning to the saha world, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva manifested many bodies (kayas) of śrāvakas, bodhisattvas, pratyekas, Buddhas, bhikkhus, bhikkhunīs, and so forth to remind cultivators following the Śūraṅgama Sūtra to return our hearing-nature and achieve profoundly tranquility, wonderful insight, and perfect penetration.

Normally, while we are studying, do we know that we are awakened? Are we sure that we are totally awakened? We do not find the way to enlightenment; we only say we are awakened and

others are not awakened yet. Our words still are bound in relative pairs, such as good/bad, sleeping/awakening, ignorance/enlightenment, and so forth. When we study, we should know that we are studying but do not need to know that we are awakened. This means there is no state of awakening or un-awakening. Likewise, if we think that we have gained perfect penetration, we do not have perfect penetration because it indicates the opposite, imperfection. We must go beyond the perfect penetration.

“Temporarily penetrating and practicing hearing-nature in vajra samādhi.”²⁷ Hearing-nature, if it is vajra (firm and constant as a diamond), why does the sūtra say that it temporarily appears? A bubble is illusory (Pāli & Skt. samohaṃ) because it appears and disappears constantly. Cultivation is an illusion because in fact our original nature is inherently vajra; however, if we do not put effort in practice, we fail to gain full enlightenment. It is illusory, but we must spend time contemplating śamatha to distinguish between true and false, practice samāpatti to follow the truth and return to fundamental wisdom *and* engage in dhyāna to recognize the truth of the mundane world, the harmonization between the true and false, and obtain the afterward wisdom. We have good roots in Buddhism, so we can understand up to here in the Samādhi Śūraṅgama Sūtra. But if we are lazy in conduct and lack mindfulness, we study and then forget again. As a result, we continue being mundane people and travel in the cycle of rebirth.

If we want to enter samādhi, we must put effort in listening to lectures, reciting scriptures, realizing the Buddha-nature, and detaching from the beginningless defilements gradually. Once we focus on hearing-nature, we will detach from organ-object-consciousness and we can realize that hearing-nature pervades all the dharma realms (the best time to experience this samādhi is

²⁷ Ibid., The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, (Bảo Giác), p.176.

about 3 or 4 a.m.). No matter how hard we study, such study is inferior to a single day of practice.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva called this method the illusory transmission of vajra samādhi of all beings. We cultivate so that we can return to our original nature. The reason why he says cultivation is emptiness and illusion is that our nature exists inside already.

We are only awakened to receive back our real nature. Nothing increases or is made new; therefore, our practice is empty.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva paid attention to hearing-nature, thus removing the five skandhas. Then he became one with the dharma world, Buddha, and living beings; therefore, he can save living beings in up to ten directions. In contrast, we are human beings, so our energy and compassion are limited.

What does “temporarily penetrating and practicing hearing-nature in vajra samādhi hearing-nature” mean? “Penetrate” means to soak, just as when flowers marinate in tea, tea takes on a floral fragrance. If we penetrate hearing-nature, our hearing ability will become so great as to hear sounds from the ten directions. This method is called “vajra” because its concentration is so solid that it can cut off the five hindrances and unite with the compassion of all Buddhas. Due to the same great compassion as that of all Buddhas, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva can manifest countless bodies in the ten directions to teach and transform living beings. The Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra and Śūraṅgama Sūtra declare that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva has thirty-two sambhogakāya. In actuality, this number represents numberless bodies in the universe.

Seeing and hearing are both illusory?

The three realms seem like sky flowers

Returning hearing-nature, delusion ceases

When objects are no more, awareness is revealed

Perfect pureness, brightness pervades
Everywhere, tranquil extinction is revealed.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER II

This chapter shows the process of attaining hearing-nature. Due to the cause, there is an effect; what goes around comes around. If you want to know why Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva has the ability to hear the sounds of human beings in the ten directions, you have to study and practice the hearing methods called “Contemplating the World’s Sound” that he learned from an ancient Buddha. “He can open the six knots because he cultivated hearing-insight and reflecting-insight to enter the saint lineage and attained dharma-śūnyatā, self-śūnyatā and dharma-self-śūnyatā.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the meanings of hearing-insight, reflecting-insight, cultivating-insight, entering the flow, and detaching from worldly objects?
2. Explain the process of opening the six knots of movement, stillness, six sense-organs, awakening, emptiness, and extinguishment.
3. Why can the perfectly penetrated hearing-nature hear human beings’ sounds in many countries?
4. Compare the methods of reciting the Buddha’s name and hearing-nature. Which is easier and why?
5. Many people believe in and pray to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Do you and why?



The Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Statue
at Linh Ứng Bãi Bụt, Đà Nẵng
Photo: Võ Văn Tường

CHAPTER III

THIRTY-TWO SAMBHOgakāYA

World-Honored One, I earned the merit from Avalokiteśvara Tathāgata, so I could transmit “temporarily penetrating and practicing hearing-nature in vajra samādhi hearing-nature.” I gained the same power of compassion as that of all Buddhas and could manifest thirty-two bodies in all countries.²⁸

As a result of having a power of compassion identical with that of all Buddhas, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva could manifest thirty-two sambhogakāya. He went to all countries to teach and convert living beings according to their qualities. He manifested various bodies without manifesting and converted beings without converting. In other words, without manifesting and converting, he manifested and converted. For example, to support conversions, he can manifest the bodies of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekas, bhikkhus, bhikkhunīs, and so forth. According to popular belief, he also

²⁸ Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 177.

appears as numberless bodies of Brahmas, gods, demons to skilfully guide others in the dharma for their liberation. He appears as the same species as the being he is helping to form a connection for the being's future salvation. Although the Śūraṅgama Sūtra broadly speaks of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva appearing in thirty-two bodies, he can indeed manifest countless bodies to convert measureless living beings in the six realms of existence.

1. World-Honored One, if bodhisattvas who enter samādhi to attain the freedom of saṃsāra flowing have superior understanding as well as perfected penetration, I will appear as a Buddha to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation.

2. If solitary learners are inflowing seek the self-liberation of nirvana, I will appear as a pratyeka to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation.

3. If learners who have transformed the twelve links of dependent origination reveal a supreme nature after the dependences disappear, I will appear as a conditionally enlightened one to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation.

4. If learners attain śūnyatā from the Four Noble Truths enter tranquil extinction and gain a sublime understanding, I will appear as a śrāvaka (sound hearer) to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation.²⁹

Pratyeka Buddhas (conditionally enlightened ones) are hermits who enlighten themselves. They contemplate and liberate themselves because they are unfortunately often born in a time without a Buddha. The conditionally enlightened ones are sages who contemplate twelve causalities to attain enlightenment.

²⁹ Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 177.

Śrāvaka are sound hearers. Sound refers to echo, while “hear” means “listen.” Śrāvaka becomes an awakened one due to hearing the sound of dharma. To experience śūnyatā, we must realize the real nature of our bodies and others. We detach from the self and outside things.

The Four Noble Truths consist of suffering, the origin of suffering, cessation of suffering, and the way leading to liberation. Suffering comes from greed, hatred, and delusion. The Noble Eightfold Path can cut off the origin of suffering. In other words, the eight factors can uproot craving, anger, delusion, conceit, doubt, wrong views, defilements, and so on. Once we attain the non-reality of the self (self-śūnyatā), the three poisons (greed, hatred, and delusion) are uprooted. Bodhisattvas who have obtained this śūnyatā can detach from everything and devotedly transform all beings without clinging to self.

By obtaining a superior nature, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva can manifest as a sound hearer (śrāvaka), skillfully teach the dharma, and lead beings to enlightenment. The sound hearer who attains arahantship enlightens self-śūnyatā and transcends the cycle of rebirth.

What is the non-reality of the self? We, who have the habit of attaching to our bodies as real, cling to our views, our ways of life, and our methods of cultivation as real. Bodhisattvas enlighten the nature of the illusory body, which is formed of earth, water, wind and fire, so that they do not indulge the body. Living beings cling to their impure bodies; fond of the bodies, they do not know that grasping the body leads them to saṃsāra. Bodhisattvas become disgusted with their flesh bodies by giving up attachment to them.

Without earth, water, fire, and wind, the flesh body cannot be formed. If someone maintains his deep attachment to the body, he will get stuck in the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death

(*jarāmaraṇam*). However, the nature of the body is the nature of awareness. As a result of this nature of awareness, the bodies can act, speak, and think. Both sound-hearers and conditionally enlightened ones who have not realized this true nature of awareness, just have insight into the illusion of the flesh body (self-*śūnyatā*). In the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, the Buddha uses the image of sound-hearers and conditionally enlightened ones raising their hands up (doing good deeds, born as human beings or in the heavens) and not putting their hands down (avoiding the bad deeds of hells, animals, and ghosts). Hands are up or down like the good or bad functions, but they have not realized the hands nature, which is originally without up and down (the real nature comes over both categories of bad and good). Putting the hands down means to form bodies at hell, animal, and ghosts.

Raising hands up, combining earth, water, wind, and fire to be as the human body or the divine golden body of heaven. But yet, sound-hearers (*śrāvaka*) and conditionally enlightened ones (*pratyeka*) have not realized their boundless Buddha-nature. It is useless for someone to enter nirvana without teaching and converting living beings.

It is as if we possess a cloth but we do not use it—how useless it is. The cloth is like Buddha-nature—once we use a cloth to wear, it is useful. The function of Buddha-nature is for the sake of humans and other beings. If someone enters nirvana without benefiting others, that is called the small vehicle. Hence, Avalokiteśvara manifested voice hearers' bodies to persuade them to realize Buddha-nature.

“The realization” refers to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the awakened one who realized his Buddha-nature. We have the knowledge that our Buddha mind pervades all worlds, but this knowing is useless because we are still tied up with craving, hatred, and delusion. This is the difference between realization and

understanding. “Realization” has a stronger meaning than “perceiving.”

We are on the level of perceiving mental consciousness, while Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva experienced the realization of Buddha-nature. Some people perceive the real nature but cannot cut off their lust and craving, so they cannot attain realization. “The realization” means freedom from bonds with the Buddha-nature pervading in all ten directions. This is called profound tranquility, wonderful insight, and perfect penetration.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva made great vows that learners who transformed twelve links of conditioned causation revealed a supreme nature. After the conditions disappeared, he manifested the conditionally enlightened one to transform the law.³⁰

Brahmas abide in the material heavenly realm.³¹ Śrāvaka, pratyeka,

³⁰ The sensual realms, A-Tu-La (*asurakāya*), nguròi (*manussa*), súc sanh (*tiracchānayoṇi*), ma quý (*pittvisaya*), và đđia ngục (*niraya*) and six desire heavens (lust and form remain, *kāmasugati-bhūmi*)

- I. Four Heavenly Kings (*catummahārājika*)
- II. The Trayastrimsha Heavenly Beings (*tāvatiṃsa, tettiṃsā*)
- III. The Suyama Heavenly Beings (*yāmā*)
- IV. The Tushita Heavenly Beings (*tusita*)
- V. The Blissful Transforming Heavenly Beings (*nimmānaratī*)
- VI. The Transforming Heavenly Beings of the Comfort from Others (*paranimitavasavattī*)

³¹ The material heaven (without lust but form remains; *rūpāvācarabhūmi*)

The first dhyāna, the Community Heavenly Beings (*brahmapārisajjā*), the Brahma Minister Heavenly Beings (*brahmapurohitā*), and the Great Brahma Heavenly Beings (*mahābrahmā*)

The second dhyāna, the Lesser Light Heavenly Beings (*parittābhā*), the Limitless Light Heavenly Beings (*appamāṇābhā*), and the Light Voice Heavenly Beings (*ābhassarā*)

The third dhyāna, the Lesser Purity Heavenly Beings (*parittasubhā*), the Measureless Purity Heavenly Beings (*appamāṇasubhā*), and the Prevalent Purity Heavenly Beings (*subhakiṇhā*)

and conditionally enlightened ones dwell in the immaterial heavenly realm.³² After the sambhogakāya in the immaterial heavenly realm is declared, it continues to be embodied in the heaven realm of form. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva appeared as gods living in the material realm and encouraged them to gain their Buddha-nature. The sacred tranquil and wonderful nature of all Tathāgatas is present from our Buddha mind. Our gods' and Buddhas' minds are pure, equal, and perfectly penetrate one another. Our mind already possesses four virtues, such as mystery, tranquility, purity, and sacredness. We have the same four virtues as the Buddha, but as a result of the obstacles of illusion and grasping, we cannot present it perfectly.

We are living with three gradual steps³³ as follows,

i) Removing the accessory causes of rebirth (by leaving home for the temple)

The fourth dhyāna, the Blessed Birth Heavenly Beings (*punyaparsavas*), the Blessed Love Heavenly Beings (*anabhraka*), the Abundant Fruit Heavenly Beings (*vehapphalā*), and the Without Thought Heavenly Beings (*akaniñhā*)

Five Without Returning Heavenly Inhabitants (*suddhāvāsa*) belong to anāgāmi-phala saints, the Without Defilements Heavenly Inhabitants (*avihā*), the Without Heat Heavenly Beings (*atappā*), the Good View Heavenly Beings (*sudassā*), the Good Present Heavenly Beings (*sudassī*), and the Absolute Form Heavenly Beings (*aghaniwīha*).

The five realms without defilements, heavenly inhabitants to the absolute form heavenly beings (*aghaniwīha*) are called the pure dwelling (*suddhāvāsa*) where the no-return sages (*anāgāmi-phala*) are living.

³²The immaterial heavenly realm (detaching their bodies and desire; *arūpāvacara-bhūmi*)

1. The state of infinite space, (*ākāsānañcāyatana-bhūmi*)
2. The state of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana-bhūmi*)
3. The state of nothingness (*ākīñcaññāyatana-bhūmi*)
4. The state of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-bhūmi*)

³³Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, The Cycle of Life in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Báo Anh Lạc, 2008, p. 183.

ii) Transforming the main cause of rebirth (by ordaining)

iii) Restraint from six sense objects (by keeping precepts)

On the spiritual ladder, these three ways will lead from the mundane to the saints. This is also called the process of *samatha*, *samāpatti*, and *dhyāna*.

First of all, we have to learn, think, and contemplate the dharma to distinguish between true and false. After that, we should focus on the true nature to purify the layers of ignorance. Once we practice living with the Buddha-nature by meditating regularly, we start to teach and convert human beings for the sake of others. For example, if a person possesses a piece of cloth, he should know how to sew and use it effectively.

When we return to our original nature, we teach and convert people and at the same time, we attain the later insight. According to the fruit of saints, the more practice, the more later knowledge is gained. The practitioner can benefit both himself and others. The process of *śamatha*, *samāpatti*, and *dhyāna* generates the tranquil, pure, and sacred nature force. We are living in the saha world, but we do not know Buddha-nature is in our flesh, bones, and Amitābha Buddha exists inside us, not in the further Pure Land. Reality and unreality are one.

Because of ignorance, we hold that we are in the saha world while Amitābha Buddha is somewhere else, somewhere “out there,” but he resides in our mind; he is our mind.

Bodhisattvas cultivate and live according to their experience of insight. Likewise, by observing and illuminating the sound, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva attained four virtues of the mystery, tranquil, pure, and sacred. Our mind and the Buddha mind are as two mirrors opposite each other. If one mirror radiates light, the other does too. In contrast, if the other mirror reflects something,

this one also does. Hence, this is the relative relationship between Bodhisattva (main subject) and environment (object). Four virtues of the mystery, tranquility, pure, and sacred are bright in both Buddha and all living existences including us.

How do four virtues of the mystery, tranquil, pure, and sacred present in the environment of Bodhisattva? The environment where we live means the world of the external objects which is what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and the images attach with our six consciousnesses. We depend and attach to the objects while bodhisattvas are awakened and freed from material objects except the mystery, tranquil, pure, and sacred environment.

To return to the mystery, tranquil, pure, and sacred environment of Buddha-nature, we need to go against the present bad karma which causes the cycle of saṃsāra. We need to strictly uphold the precepts of not killing, not stealing, refraining from sexual intercourse, and not lying, as pure as transparent ice. After that we must practice meditation to keep our minds pure. There is a saying, “Once the mind is calm, the external world will be peaceful.” Then the objects will no longer delude us. Focus on the pure mind and wisdom arises. If everything we see is pure, the world around us will be peaceful. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha said that keeping the precepts is the most important. Tien Tai Master declared that keeping the precepts without the four foundations of mindfulness, the practitioners are like pickpockets who wear robes as renunciates in the temple but are without significance. The four foundations of mindfulness are the most important way to generate insight and belong to nature, while keeping precepts belongs to form or action. People without insight are like the blind falling down easily.

“Giving” means to detach from greed and awaken from the illusion of body, objects, and mind. The purpose of practitioners is to become enlightened, but most just like to collect merit. They prefer

to make offerings in order to be praised and well known. They are called “self” people who will be born in heaven to inherit their own good fortune for a long time and will no longer remember to cultivate the way. The more people enjoy their benefice, the more they become entangled in Mara’s way. Starting out without bodhi is just as cultivating a field without seeds; we cannot reap fruits. The main purpose for attaining Buddhahood is to benefit oneself and others. If we only prefer to perform charitable acts to accumulate merits in order to be rich in the future, while we neglect our main goal, then we will continue in saṃsāra. Therefore, starting out with bodhi is how we can generate wisdom. This is most important for getting out of the cycle of saṃsāra.

1. If living beings keep far from lust and purify their bodies, I will appear as a Brahma king to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation.³⁴

“Brahma” means pure. People in the secular world often crave and have five desires: money, sex, fame, food or drink, sleep or rest. Brahmas do not indulge in these desires. They consider them illusions. For this reason, they possess marvelous appearances. They do not need money, but they still like the beauty, wonderful sounds, and delicious tastes.

We know that Avalokiteśvara is enlightened, so what did he teach us? He taught us that heavenly living beings are disgusted at sights, sounds, smell, taste, and touch. They are cheated by the objects because they think they are real and do not realize the meaning of suññatā as arahants. Living beings in heaven do not grasp at sense objects. This means they are partly awakened to the illusory nature of objects. They long to get rid of the mundane world and desire to

³⁴ Giói Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 178.

transcend the saha world. Knowing that, Avalokiteśvara was represented as a brahma with the most power and highest position to preach the dharma for them to go beyond the cycle of birth and death. Knowing that there are happiness and joy in the realm of form heaven, Avalokiteśvara appeared as a Brahma to teach them to be awakened.

2. If living beings wish to be a heavenly lord, I will appear as Sakya to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.

3. If living beings wish to attain physical superpower to fly in ten directions, I will appear as Isvaradeva to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.

4. If living beings wish to attain physical superpower to fly through space, I will appear as Mahesvara to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.

5. If living beings wish to be a leader of ghosts and their country, I will appear as a great warrior to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.

6. If living beings wish to rule the world and protect its inhabitants, I will appear as Four Deva Kings to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.

7. If living beings wish to be born in the heavenly kingdom and command ghosts, I will appear as a prince of the Four Deva Kings (*catummahārājika*) to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.³⁵

If someone is bothered with desire, is interested in meditating and

³⁵ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 178.

doing charity, he will be born as a heavenly lord. How can living beings become a deva lord in heaven? A *sakra* is a lord in the sixth heavenly realm. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva manifested the body of Shakra to teach heavenly beings to cultivate the way to become sakras following their wish and level. No matter if they have low or high status, he teaches all of them provided they are comfortable in cultivation.

If someone wishes to attain physical superpower to fly, he will enable them to accomplish their wish. Thus, there are a lot of deities; they fly throughout ten directions and space. If someone wishes to fly throughout the ten directions, Avalokiteśvara teaches them how to attain physical mastery. If someone wishes to be a leader of heavenly beings, Avalokiteśvara teaches them how to create the benefit of merit and virtue to attain this position. He instructs them to give up this passion for the heavenly realm so that they can be reborn in the higher realms.

“Being a heavenly Lord to rule over the world” means to govern all kinds of ghosts and protect their lands. The Kshitigarbha Sūtra and the *Commentary* (Nhị Khóa Hiệp Giải) declared that “There are thirty-six ghosts and spirits in this world. If devas are not powerful, people will not live peacefully.”

In the sixth heavenly realm, Sakra sits at the center surrounded by Four Deva Kings (*cattumahārājika*). They who govern the saha world support devas to control and prevent trouble from ghosts and spirits. If anyone wishes to be born in the sixth heavenly realm to prevent trouble from ghosts, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva appears as Sakra to accord with their qualities to preach the law.

8. If living beings wish to become kings, I will appear as a king to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.

9. If living beings wish to be heads of noble clans, enjoy being a venerable among their inhabitants, I will appear as a *grhapati* (elder person) to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.

10. If living beings wish to be intellectuals, keep themselves noble, I will appear as an *upāsaka* or *upāsikā* to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.

11. If living beings are fond of governing the country, I will appear as a magistrate to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.³⁶

If someone wishes to be a king who is noble, lofty, and respectful, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva manifests as a king to teach and convert beings.

If someone wishes to lead a pure and solitary life, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is represented as an *upāsaka* or *upāsikā* to speak dharma for them. *Upāsaka/upāsikā* is a lay devotee who has good qualities, understands the teachings of saints, and leads a pure life.

In the Tang Dynasty, Lý Thâm Huyèn, who was a lay Buddhist, composed the *Vataṃsaka Commentary* and often preached this text. Many tigers came to hear his teachings. When *Upāsaka* Lý reached the age of ninety-six, there were many radiant lights around his house. Thanks to this merit and wonder, it is said that *Upāsaka* Lý was Avalokiteśvara's embodiment.

If someone wishes to become an officer to handle political matters in the country, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva will appear as the body of a magistrate and teach them how to benefit for sake of people.

³⁶ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 179.

12. If living beings are interested in magic spells and fortune telling for their benefice, I will appear as a Brahmin to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.

If someone likes reckoning and incantation, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva will appear as the body of a brahman (even this body bears the meaning of wrong view and is not a perfect one) to speak the law for their sake. In the Buddha's time, brahma also predicted the future to guide people to lead a healthy and long life.

13. If someone wishes to be a renunciate, live purely in a monastery, and keep the Buddhist precepts, I will appear as a bhikshu or a bhikshuni to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation.

14. If men want to keep five Buddhist precepts, I will appear as an upāsaka or an upāsikā to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation.

15. If women wish to fulfill a traditional role or non-traditional role, whatever their aspirations, I will appear as a queen, princess, or noblewoman to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation.”

16. If there are virgin lads, I will appear as a gentleman to skillfully guide dharma for their liberation.

17. If virgin women do not wish to marry, I will appear as a maiden to skillfully guide them to dharma for their liberation and to fulfill their wish.

18. If *devas, dragons, yaksas, gandharvas, asuras, kinnaras, mahoragas, mahoragas*, humans, and non-humans wish to escape their heavenly karmas, I will appear to skillfully guide

dharma for their liberation and fulfill their wish.³⁷

Out of compassion, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva embodies according to one's wishes. Dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, kinnaras, mahoragas, humans, and non-humans who wish to escape their heavenly destinies are taught how to free their karmas by Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. In fact, in the universe there are a total of twelve species in whose shapes Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva manifested to preach the law and lead them to higher realms. Those species possess goodness. Whoever has the good heart to take action for the sake of others, he will use his sambhogakāyas to fulfill their wishes.

In short, thirty-two sambhogakāyas of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva meet the needs of all countries and are formed by means of the hearing-nature samādhi and effortless wonderful strength.

Samāpatti means concentration or meditating wisdom. Thanks to this power, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva can manifest many physical masteries.

It is said that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva has many affinities with living beings in the saha world and that he made great vows to manifest numerous bodies to teach and convert them. Once someone single-mindedly calls the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, he will respond. This way is called “the unbelievable wonderful response” (words and concepts cannot describe it).

³⁷ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), pp. 179–180.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER III

By attaining the hearing-nature, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva can manifest many bodies in order to convert each existent being. This sacred ability is rare, unique, and wonderful.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the words: “Vajra samādhi of penetration practice of hearing-nature, effortlessly wonderful strength, and four incredible effortless virtues.”
2. Explain the sentence: “At the upper level, I gained the same power of compassion and enlightenment as that of all the Buddhas.”
3. Explain the sentence: “At the lower level, I have the same plea of compassion as all living existences in six worlds throughout ten directions.”
4. List thirty-two bodies. Why does the Bodhisattva manifest many bodies?
5. What should we, the mundane people, practice to have the wonderful display of these thirty-two bodies?

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA



The Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Statue

at Việt Nam Temple, Texas, USA

Photo: Võ Văn Tường

CHAPTER IV

FOURTEEN KINDS OF FEARLESSNESS

I. Fourteen Kinds of Fearlessness

World-Honored One, by using the vajra samādhi of penetration and practice of the hearing-nature and wonderful effortless strength, I have the same plea of compassion for all living existences in six worlds throughout three times and ten directions. They can receive fourteen kinds of fearlessness from my pure body and mind.

This refers to the wonderful capability of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Besides thirty-two sambhogakāyas, he also bestows fourteen kinds of fearlessness on living beings. Because living beings sincerely pray, he develops his bodhi mightiness to help them transcend all suffering by means of fourteen kinds of fearlessness.

Penetration of hearing means to focus on the hearing-nature to be awakened and live with the Buddha-nature.

Cultivation of hearing-nature means not attaching to illusory

sights.

The wonderful effortless strength means the miracle of achieving success, even without effort.

Satisfy at his will means that he can help living beings as his will. He manifests many bodies, such as form, formless, thought, non-thought, and so on. We are in the realm of human beings. We live on thought and forms. Deva realms have form and formlessness. The heavenly realm of formlessness is highest because all living existences in this realm have neither form nor thought. Their infinite bodies are as the subtle state of meditating, which is called a non-imaginary realm.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha said there are twelve kinds of living beings: those born from egg, womb, moisture, transformation, material, immaterial, thought, without thought, neither material, neither immaterial, neither thought, neither without thought. In brief, Avalokiteśvara has the ability to manifest everywhere in any of the above twelve kinds of living beings.

If someone wholeheartedly recites the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, he will respond by appearing with the same kind of body as the person praying to meet their needs. It is important that people be single-minded when chanting his name; he will come and help them. We should create affinities with him through praying to him regularly and wholeheartedly. We will feel the power of his love and compassion.

Upāsaka Phạm Công Thiện³⁸ said that reciting the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is like chanting the mysterious nature

³⁸ See: <http://www.daophatngaynay.com/viet/triet/phamcongthien> Quan-am.htm

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

inside us. If we are worried or fearful, we call the name of our loving relatives and our sadness and worry will be relieved a little. If the best and most sacred things suddenly arise, our mind and body will become peaceful.

Although our secular relatives retain the defilements of greed, hatred, and foolishness, there are still some good qualities of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in them. We call the names of the Buddhas, whose great love and compassion will be bestowed upon us. We pray and honor the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who completely uproots lust (*sarāgam*), revenge (*sadosam*) and ignorance (*avijjā*).

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva can manifest as the goddess of compassion in three thousand of the great kalpas in all space and times. Her mighty response will be beyond words. Reciting Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's name generates the energies of love and compassion, which have the ability to overcome difficulties, disasters, defilements, and fear in the saha world. That is the reason in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra that the Buddha teaches, "Many countries in the ten directions called Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva a 'Fearlessness Bestower' who grants peace for others. Majshuri Bodhisattva praised him in verses, 'He has wonderful power to bestow fearlessness upon all living beings.'"

All living creatures have the ability to be Buddhas. Thus, we must practice with our hearing-nature. As soon as we are aware of our hearing-nature, we approach our Buddha-nature. At the upper level, compassion and the strength of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva are equal to that all of Buddhas, so he can manifest thirty-two bodies to speak dharma for the sake of others. At the lower level, he also displays Buddha-nature and the same plea of compassion for all living beings on the six paths and the ten directions. He will respond if they call him. He comprehends and sympathizes with the suffering of living beings and devoutly wishes to save them.

All of his altruism is done by using the vajra samādhi of penetrating and practicing hearing-nature and effortless, wonderful strength. It means that if we focus only on the hearing-nature, the wonderful function of mind and virtue will be illuminated.

We must practice living with the Buddha-nature that is our infinite life, which neither increases nor decreases and is solid as a diamond.

Once five layers of ignorance³⁹ disappear, our mind will focus on the Buddha-nature. At present, we live with the illusory consciousness. We attach to objects that we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and feel. If we can lead a life with mindfulness and samādhi, we can benefit others. Once we single-mindedly call the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, we can feel the fearlessness inside us.

1. The first fearlessness: By using the hearing-nature to focus on the sounds of those suffering, I can lead living beings in ten directions out of their misery to liberation.

The *first fearlessness*: From the bottom of our heart, we worship and prostrate to the figure of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. By remembering and chanting his name clearly, we practice returning to our hearing-nature. This returning to our hearing-nature is returning to the same nature of Buddhas and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. As a result of concentrating on our nature, we no longer feel fear.

2. The second fearlessness: By returning my seeing to the inner nature, I can lead living beings out of a raging fire.⁴⁰

³⁹ Five layers of ignorance refer to the five aggregates (*skandhas*).

⁴⁰ Giới Hương, trans., *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Bảo Giác), pp. 181–182.

The *second fearlessness*: “By returning my seeing to the inner nature, he can cause living beings to be freed from a raging fire.” To avoid being burnt, we should turn our seeing inward. Why was Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva not on fire? He was not on fire because he doesn’t see through the eye-organ; he sees with the seeing-nature. We, the mundane people, see with the eye-organs—we see sunlight, shadows, and so on. Without such conditions, we cannot see. Thanks to sunlight, we can see. Sunlight is warm or hot and is a symbol of fire. We are on fire. Playing with fire, we will be burnt. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas are not on fire, so they are capable of saving us from fire.

If we return to the same nature as the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, we will receive the same wonderful merit and be protected from fire. Normally, we live with the illusory consciousness. Sometimes we are awakened and hear sounds with our hearing-nature. Sometimes we forget to listen to the sound with our hearing-nature. As a result, we are on fire.

3.The third fearlessness: By returning my external hearing to the inner nature, I can lead living beings to avoid drowning.

By entering the lineage of saints, a practitioner who returns to the hearing-nature removes the external object and is freed from two types of noise and stillness. Noise and stillness are made from the waves of vibration in space. It is only an illusory wave, but we think it is real, and attach to what we hear. Because we are easily shaken by these sound waves, it is as if we have to get in a boat to avoid drowning. After returning to the hearing-nature, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva transformed the external objects, noise, and stillness, did not play with the illusory waves, and was not engulfed by water. He who is freed from drowning has the capability to save beings from drowning.

4. The fourth fearlessness: By transforming the illusory thinking and killing, I can protect living beings as they enter the ghost land.

The *fourth fearlessness* means once we recite Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's name, we shall inherit his merits because he has two virtues, uprooting false thoughts and stopping killing. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva transformed false thoughts so that ghosts could not see him. Ghosts have no forms, they exist only by thoughts. When we recite Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's name, we can enjoy the merit from him so that ghosts cannot see us, even if we are in ghost land.

This is reason why in the *Afternoon Chanting for Ghosts* (Mông Sơn Thí Thực), the patriarch advised “The chanting person who makes offerings to ghosts, must single-mindedly contemplate the food transforming everywhere.” Ghosts are able to take food, thanks to this contemplation. Ghosts who are existent beings can read our thoughts. If we produce good or bad thoughts demons will read them. Our mind travels everywhere and ghosts can catch us easily. Once we stop illusory thinking and reflect on our hearing-nature, they cannot follow and make trouble for us.

5. The fifth fearlessness: By practicing the wonderful hearing-nature without six sense-organs, I realized hearing to be the same nature as the sound. Therefore, I can protect living beings from execution. The sword will be broken into pieces and become useless as if slicing into water.

The *fifth fearlessness* means that due to Buddha-nature and compassion, if living beings are about to be stabbed, the knife will break into pieces. Since our skin reflects the enlightened mind without the existence of six sense-organs anymore, the sword cannot cut it. Our body brightens as the dharma realm, so knives break into pieces and cannot touch us.

It is said that if someone who is scared of ghosts should recite the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, they will inherit his powerful mightiness and will no longer be afraid.

6. The sixth fearlessness, When I penetrated the hearing-nature, I saw that light illuminates the dharma realm to remove the darkness of ignorance. The devils (*yaksa, raksa, kumbhanda, pisaci, and putana*) who approach living beings cannot see the beings.⁴¹

The fourth and sixth have the same meaning. The fourth explains that if someone cuts off delusive thoughts and killing, ghosts cannot harm him as he enters the ghost land. The sixth states that when the hearing-nature is cultivated, and the dharma realm is bright without darkness, ghosts who stay near living beings cannot see them.

In the *Awakened Advice from the Patriarch on the Mount* (Quy Sơn Cảnh Sách), the patriarch declared that when we are in solitude (the place where we see easily), we do not generate bad thoughts and ghosts will see us but not harm us. Their main karma is killing. If we do not take life, we will not be harmed, as we do not have the same karma as the ghosts. When ghosts see Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, they can never harm him, because he does not create killing, does not live by evil thoughts like them. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva hears the sounds and always reflects on his original nature. Therefore, his six sense-organs are removed. The knot of six sense-organs is ended, so the sound faculty becomes wonderful. If this is an ear faculty (subject), it will have the sound (object). If this is not of an ear faculty, it will not have the sound. There is only the essence nature of the hearing and the sound.

⁴¹ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), pp. 181–182.

7. The seventh fearlessness: When sound disappears totally without false thoughts, hearing is reversed; I can help living beings get rid of canyons and handcuffs.

It is said that at this seventh state, the sound and ear-organ are removed. There is neither hearing (subject), nor sound (object). One does not attach to false thoughts and then the canyons and fetters cannot trap.

8. The eighth fearlessness: When sound is removed and the hearing-nature is perfected, the energy of compassion arises; I can help living beings traveling to a dangerous area avoid robbers.

The eighth state means that once the sound is gone, there is neither movement nor stillness, and six objects do not exist. His hearing-nature melts in all the ten directions. Thus, he is united with the same compassionate source of Buddhas, and robbers cannot touch him. As a result of converting thieves, once they pray for their safety, he also manifests the thieves' bodies to save them and to speak the law for them.

9. The ninth fearlessness: When penetrated with the hearing-nature, worldly objects are not affected and the sensual cannot attract. I can help living beings who are fond of lust and can transform their lust into purity.⁴²

We fear everything because we are not pure in our mind, speech, and body. Our thoughts are false, weak, and pointless. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha said as a consequence of craving, people cannot avoid the state of fear in this and the next lives. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who entered the hearing-nature

⁴² Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 181.

lineage, separated from worldly objects and beautiful forms, and will help living beings transcend lust.

10. The tenth fearlessness: When hearing is pure without objects, the sense-organs and the external state are mingling perfectly. I can help living beings who are full of rage and hate get rid of these defilements.

As a result of attaching to the six organs and subjects as objects, he can cause existent beings to transform all hatred.

11. The eleventh fearlessness: When the object has been removed, bright reality is penetrated and the dharma realm and body, as well as the mind, are like crystal, transparent and smooth. I can cause the *icchantika* (the dull) get rid of stupidity and ignorance.

When the object has been removed and he returns to the bright nature means at that time, he is not shaken by the six objects. For example, fragrance cannot cut water or wind blow the light. It's like talking to a brick wall—it means nothing. When we are not affected by objects, the brightness is not shaken. Both mind and bodies are like crystal, transparent and unobstructed.

Be careful! We must be careful of our stubborn habits, which are a result of our ignorance. When we release these harmful habits, difficulties become opportunities to develop our spiritual practice. The mind and body of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva are pure and peaceful as crystal, helping us gain freedom from ignorance.

12. The twelfth fearlessness: When six sense faculties and the Buddha-nature are one, the hearing-nature is returned. On the base of the unshakened bodhi place (*bodhimanda*), I can travel all over the worlds (without destroying them) to offer to Buddhas as numerous as dust particles in ten directions. I

serve each Buddha in the role of son of the Dharma King. I can grant the wishes of childless women to have smart and virtuous sons.⁴³

When six sense faculties disappear, the hearing-nature is returned means there are neither sounds nor ear faculty anymore. The ear faculty is a machine to hear. It disappears—the flesh ear-organ still exists but is not used anymore.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva only uses the hearing-nature to hear universally. Although he does not move from his bodhimanda, he can travel through worlds without destroying them. He does not move from his seat, but he can manifest in many kayas, such as hens, fish, pigs, and so on, in order that he has same kind of body to easily transform them. He manifests without letting them know. He leads a peaceful life with them. That is called “without destroying the worlds.” No one knows that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva appears among them. He usually manifests around the world and is represented as a son of the Dharma King to make offerings to the Medicine Buddha. How wonderful his embodiment is!

The son of the Dharma King can make offerings as numerous as molecules, while our offerings are limited. Reciting his name, we are able to dwell on his virtue, merits, and wisdom (as children can inherit from their parents). Thus, if someone wishes to have a child, her wish will come true. Chanting the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva creates lots of affinities between him and us.

13. The thirteenth fearlessness: Six sense-organs are so harmonized with their six functions that they illuminate perfectly in ten directions. The great insight is perfect. The

⁴³ Ibid., (Bảo Giác) p. 183.

śūnyatā of Tathāgatagarbha is formed. I inherit the sacred dharma methods from Buddhas as numerous as all molecules in the ten directions. I can help childless women have blessed and virtuous daughters whom everyone admires and respects.

The śūnyatā of the Tathāgatagarbha means neither form nor shape, but it has the true essence so it is called śūnyatā. Six bases are now perfectly luminous. He has obtained the perfect penetration of the sense-organs. “Inherit the sacred dharma methods from countless Buddhas” means we luckily receive the precious dharma methods from countless Buddhas. *Inherit* means to receive, follow, and preserve. Although we are inheritors of the precious methods, we are still students, while they are the great religious masters. Our duties are to learn, uphold, cultivate, and preserve the sacred dharma methods. *Recognizing the true nature* (the sacred dharma methods) means to be same as the Buddha-nature. We must possess this ability of recognizing the true nature and have the ability to preserve it. As a result of attaining this power, if a woman wishes to have a daughter, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva will come, bestow a daughter on her, and make her wish come true.

14. The fourteenth fearlessness: In the system of three chiliocosms, having billions of suns and moons, there are countless bodhisattvas (dharma princes), as many as grains of sand in sixty-two Ganges rivers. They serve as role models to teach and convert living beings by using many different skillful means. Because I attained the perfect penetration from six sense-organs, the faculty of the ear-organ becomes especially wonderful. After that, my body and mind miraculously pervade all the dharma worlds. I can lead living beings to read his name which earns as much merit as reading the names of countless bodhisattvas. Reciting his name is equal to reciting countless names because he attained perfect penetration.

These virtues are called the fourteen kinds of fearlessness

which I bestow upon all existent beings.⁴⁴

Why did Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva say that if someone recites his name, he or she will obtain as much merit as if they had read the name of all bodhisattvas? Because Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva attained perfect penetration of the ear-organ, the merit of reading his name and other bodhisattvas is equal.

Sakyamuni Buddha said the merit account of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is unspoken and unbelievable. Much merit comes from the origination of perfect penetration of the ear-organ, which helps Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva go through the dharma realm, while his body still exists at a certain place

What is the wonder of the ear faculty? It means that he realizes the Buddha-nature using his ear faculty. His mind and body are one and the same as those of bodhisattvas and Buddhas. That is why the Buddha said that when someone reads his name, his or her merit is the same as if they had read the names of all bodhisattvas and Buddhas. Praying to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is the foremost.

He said he has obtained perfect penetration of the sense-organs. This means that if we obtain the hearing-nature that is united with Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's mightiness, we will not suffer anymore. We will be free from all disasters. The penetration of the sense organ is perfect. Once we turn to our hearing-nature, we and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva are one. There is no more suffering. Getting back the hearing-nature means to abide in Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. We will transcend the misery and suffering. When we recite the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, we will gain merit and blessing from his power. Thanks to his merit and blessing, we separate from disasters. It is as if we dwell under the shadow of a

⁴⁴ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), pp. 183–184.

big tree and avoid being sunburned.

Chanting his name, we can be united in his mightiness. Reading his name sincerely, we worship and take refuge in him so that our mind and body are peaceful.

FOUR INCREDIBLE EFFORTLESS VIRTUES

Tathāgata, owing to the perfect penetration of the ear-nature and the unsurpassed bodhi path, I gain four incredible effortless virtues.

According to living beings' wishes and levels, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva manifests incredible effortless virtues. He obtains perfect penetration and goes through all realms without obstacles to save living beings. He is worshiped by them and he enables them to accomplish their wishes.

What are four incredible effortless virtues? “Effortless” means to appear naturally without striving. Once we detach from false thoughts, dwell on samādhi, at that moment, we reflect on the hearing-nature brightly. When the mind is calm without sound, the hearing-nature will illuminate all directions as all landscapes appearing in a mirror. When we pray to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, we are living with our true nature. We who are pure without false thoughts can gradually enter the lineage of saints.

Bodhisattvas and Buddhas hand down their dharma way and merit to us. As followers of the Buddha, we learn from their merit and blessing how to cultivate the way to attain enlightenment and form three Triple Gems in this world. If we recite the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the merit and blessing is equal to the merit and blessing of one who chanted the names of all bodhisattvas.

Using seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and knowing to

cultivate awareness can lead us to our Buddha-nature. If we just turn to our bodies, we can understand right away. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha taught that these six functions: seeing-nature, hearing-nature, smelling-nature, tasting-nature, touching-nature and knowing-nature are as one.⁴⁵ From the eye-organ, seeing is generated. From the ear-organ, hearing is born. From the nose-organ, smelling arises. From the tongue-organ, tasting originates. From the skin, touching is born. From the mental-organ, knowing exists. According to duties and functions, they are divided into six parts, but in their real nature, they are as one.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra there is a chapter on following the condition without changing the nature. It explains that a square box, round box, rectangular box, and so on seem to contain the space of such shapes but in fact, the nature of space is immaterial.

A square box has a square space. A round box has a round space and so on, but in fact space is neither round nor square. The hearing-nature, Buddha-nature, infinite life-nature, and infinite light-nature of Amitābha Buddhas always exists everywhere over time and space.

The Buddha seed is not only concealed from six bases, but it spreads to all dharma realms. This nature cause is available inside us; we only need to cultivate at the hearing-nature and the natures of other organs will appear. The hearing-nature pervades over all dharma realms, but because of the obstacles of bodies (like the square or round boxes), they do not appear as space or sky. The hearing-nature is our true essence, dharmakaya, and is a main cause to be a Buddha. At this moment, it is revealed here and now. Due to the obstacle of ignorance, we have not realized this nature yet. If we only rely on the ear-organ, we can obtain the wonderful

⁴⁵ Giới Hương, *The Cycle of Life in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, pp. 25–28.

nature of all realms. If someone recites the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva many blessings and merit are earned because praying to one bodhisattva means praying to all. The bodhisattvas have such merit and spiritual force that we receive many blessings from reciting their names.

If we can cultivate following the method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, we will use our dharma body that pervades over all realms. Now we understand it with our six forms of consciousness.

We have many affinities with Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva because Shakyamuni Buddha and Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva recommended him to us. We should read his name and cultivate his hearing method. All Buddhas and bodhisattvas have the same merit and blessing and praying to them, we get the same merit and virtue. We often pray to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva because we may have affinities with him from many lives.

1. The first incredible effortless virtue: I experienced the sublime hearing-nature without bonding the six sense-organs whose functions (seeing, hearing, smelling and so on) become one essence of the pureness, penetration, and enlightenment. Therefore, I can manifest many wonderful kayas and can recite countless mantras. I can appear with one, three, five, seven, nine, eleven heads, and so on, until 108, 1,000, 10,000, and 84,000 vajra heads; with two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen, or twenty, twenty-four, and so on, until 108, 1,000, 10,000, and 84,000 arms with mudras; and with two, three, four, nine up to 108, 1,000, 10,000, and 84,000 pure compassion eyes which are either merciful or seething, either samādhi or prajñā, to save living beings who can attain the great freedom.

2. The second incredible effortless virtue: For bodhisattvas and saints, hearing and thinking are not subject to sense-organs. Even without a body, they can hear, see, and think.

I can manifest many shapes and recite many mantras to bestow fearlessness for living beings. Therefore, countries as numerous as dust in ten directions called me the bestower of fearlessness.⁴⁶

The first incredible effortless virtue is the sublime hearing-nature. What is the sublime hearing-nature? From the organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin, and brain, we have the abilities of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and knowing. This means once our lives end, all organs stop working, but the knowing nature will lead us to the next life according to personal or community karmas. At that time, our body turns into earth, water, wind, and fire, whereas the knowing nature still exists in another form. The origin of this knowing nature is luminously wonderful, although we can be reborn as certain kinds of creatures—cats, butterflies, pigs, and humans. According to each type of karma, the ears of each species' karma have many forms, but the hearing-nature and knowing-nature are still luminous as ever. The knowing-nature is called “sublimation in sublimating.” The hearing-nature is also called “sublimation in sublimating.”

What is meant by the “knowing nature not being subjected to the six sense-organs”? We ordinary people can see through the eye-organ, hear through the ear-organ, smell through the nose-organ, taste through the tongue-organ, feel through the skin-organ, and know through the mental-organ. However, if we can realize and live with our Buddha-nature, we still see but without the eye-organ, hear without the ear-organ, and so on, because we dwell on our luminous nature. The hearing and seeing are freed from our karma to be the enlightenment of the hearing- and seeing-nature.

What is the meaning of “there are no distinctions among seeing, hearing, and knowing”? This means the original nature is pure and luminous, although we see without eyes, hear without

⁴⁶ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), pp. 184–185.

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

ears, smell without nose, taste without tongue, touch without body, and know without brain. The original nature melts into six organs; it is inseparable. Purity means right view and the ability to see the original nature of objects. We have six organs which follow their functions and bond at each karma. Once we get rid of karma, our essence nature is freed from the small box of six organs and functions. It becomes luminous with wonderful merit. As a result of living with the original nature of hearing, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva uses countless applications for the sake of others.

What the meaning of “either merciful or seething, either concentration or wisdom”? To a weak person, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is merciful and comforts them to overcome difficulties. To a stubborn person, he manifests firmness to help them understand the dharma. To someone with a bad temper, he manifests as a patient teacher to instruct them. To a person without understanding, he manifests a wise teacher to guide them. According to people’s needs, he manifests various qualities to teach dharma. He can recite many mantras to help them attain self-mastery.

The applications of many kayas and reciting mantras of the first and second incredible effortless virtues are the same. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva sees and hears with his original nature, which is without boundaries, without following the six organs and six objects, because his first time in the saint lineage, he abandoned the inherent duality of subject and object. He attained the wonderful application to save all living beings, not only in saṃsāra, but also in Pure Land and world as numerous as grains of sand in ten directions. His wonderful merit is united in his original nature. The original nature is sublime. Although all living beings have their own karma with different bodies such as devas, buffaloes, snakes, crabs, their original nature is the same. We possess our own karma which causes us to be reborn from animal to human or vice versa. This is different from bodhisattvas who no

longer possess rebirth karma and can manifest as anybody for the sake of others.

The second inconceivable effortless virtue is that hearing and understanding do not connect with six external objects, so Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva can appear as many kayas and mantras. The second virtue adds more explanation. We have the same enlightenment nature as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, which means the hearing-nature and the knowing-nature can be freed from six external objects. The ear-organ represents six organs which are freed from six external objects. At that time, we can see through ears, hear through eyes, smell through the nose, taste through the mind, and so forth. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is not engulfed by the six sense objects and faculties. He can see and hear without the presence of six sense-organs and objects, so that he is able to manifest many bodies and speak many mantras.

3. The third incredible effortless virtue: Since I have practiced the perfect penetration of the hearing-nature, the sense-organs are purified, so wherever I travel, I can cause living beings to transform their greed and renounce their bodies and material to beg my blessing.⁴⁷

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's six sense-organs are so pure that he can cause living beings to renounce their property to earn merit.

People often make offerings of their body and offer financial support to him. For example, some recite his name for three days continuously beginning on February 19 (his birthday), June 19 (his enlightenment), and September 19 (his ordination) of the lunar year. Pilgrims from Vietnam, USA, Australia, and so on travel to China and prostrate to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva at the Four Great Mountains. In Vietnam, many people travel from the north to

⁴⁷ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 185.

the south to participate in the Kuan Yin ceremony. In the USA, people also go to Texas, California, and Wisconsin to take part in the Kuan Yin ceremony. That is the meaning of offerings of the body, time, and financial support to earn bodhi, merit, and blessing.

4 The fourth incredible effortless virtue, I realized the Buddha's mind at the ultimate enlightenment, so I can make offerings of valuable treasures to the Tathāgatas in ten directions. If existent beings of the six paths wish to get a spouse, child, samādhi, long life, even nirvana, I can bestow.⁴⁸

The third and fourth incredible effortless virtues: As a result of cultivating perfect penetration of hearing and purifying the sense-organ, he can travel without encountering obstacles through all realms. He lays down all attachments, so living beings who see him renounce their property, and voluntarily seek blessing and insight. *Dharma-śūnyatā* means to be free from everything. *Destroying greed* means detachment. Once *prajñā* (wisdom) arises, his mightiness is unbelievably magnificent so that if everyone prays to him, his or her wishes will become true.

In brief, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva repeated that he attained enlightenment as a Buddha. His blessing and merit are so much that he can bestow what living beings need. If someone wishes to marry, he will be married. If someone wishes to have children, she will receive children. If someone wishes to cultivate bodhi and transcend the world, he will accomplish his wish. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva always responds to us whenever we wish. If we sincerely pray to him, he will come and help us

⁴⁸ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 185.

THE HONORABLE TITLE

The Buddha teaches the best method of perfect penetration. My method is from the ear-organ; I obtained a sublime samādhi in the saint lineage and accomplished enlightenment. This is the foremost method.

World-Honored One, Kuan Yin Buddha praised my best dharma door of hearing penetration. In the Dharma Assembly, he grants me an honorable title of Avalokiteśvara. My reflecting and hearing are perfect in the ten directions, so the name Avalokiteśvara is known over the world in ten directions.⁴⁹

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva reveals to the Buddha that he attained samādhi using the ear gateway. Thanks to the gateway of the ear, the Buddha-nature easily appears. Once we attain the Buddha-nature, our mind is pure, transcendent, and peaceful.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva concluded that the method of the dharma door of perfect penetration was the foremost. He himself has obtained the perfect hearing, so Kuan Yin Buddha grants him an honorable title of Avalokiteśvara. His name is known in all the worlds. Whenever encountering suffering or disaster, living beings usually pray to him to be saved. He is in ten directions, so he can hear and meet their needs.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER IV

By attaining the hearing-nature, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva can bestow fourteen kinds of fearlessness and four incredible effortless virtues to all existent beings. Many Buddhist sūtras illustrate this virtue. It is so unique that countless beings pray to him.

⁴⁹ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 186.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are fourteen kinds of fearlessness?
2. What are four incredible effortless virtues?
3. Which one among the fourteen kinds fearlessness can we have? How? Why?
4. Which one among four incredible effortless virtues can we have? How? Why?
5. Can each person attain this incredible, effortless capability? Which sūtra mentions this? How do the sūtras say we can attain this capability?



The Thousand Arm-Eye Bodhisattva Statue
at Bút Tháp Temple, Bắc Ninh
Photo: Võ Văn Tường

CHAPTER V

TWENTY-FIVE BODHISATTVAS REVEAL THEIR METHODS OF ATTAINING ENLIGHTENMENT

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva

a) A Penetrated Landscape

On the lion-seat base, five body parts (forehead, two elbows, and two knees) of the Buddha radiate precious light beams that reach the heads of countless Tathāgatas, bodhisattvas, and dharma princes, as many as dust in the ten directions. In return, five body parts of countless Tathāgatas illuminate and shine on the heads of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arahants in the dharma assembly. The light rays mingle with one another as if on a precious silken net. In the dharma assembly, all of the saints experience vajra samādhi. Heavenly showers of green, yellow, red, and white lotus flowers rain down. The space in ten directions is beautifully decorated with seven colors of seven jewels. The mountains, rivers, and earth in this

saha world disappear. Countless countries in ten directions merged into a universe filled with pleasant sensations from the performance of songs.

b) The Buddha required Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva to choose an appropriate method of attaining enlightenment. The Tathāgata said to Mañjuśrī, "Son of the dharma king, in the beginning period, these twenty-five bodhisattvas and arahants revealed their appropriate methods of attaining enlightenment. They confirmed that the result of their practice was to attain perfect penetration. There is no difference in these twenty-five methods—one is not better than the other.

Which method is easy for living beings who wish to practice the bodhisattva vehicle to attain supreme bodhi?"⁵⁰

Sakyamuni Buddha radiates light beams. In return, the Buddhas in ten directions also radiate light. Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arahants have the same intuitive nature. They emit these rays of light to let us know the wonderful function of the true nature.

The five parts of the body are the forehead, left knee, right knee, left elbow, and right elbow. The head is considered the basis for insight. The mind-nature is the nature of awareness. The Amitābha Sūtra confirms that “The wind moving, a bird singing, and a curtain swinging all are the sound of dharma.”⁵¹ Those who live with the nature of awareness live in Pure Land.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva chose the method of perfect penetration and twenty-five bodhisattvas in turn revealed their own way of attaining enlightenment. All of these sages were successful in their

⁵⁰ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 187.

⁵¹ Amitabha Sūtra, translated by J.C. Cleary,
<http://buddhaSutra.com/files/amidaSutra.htm>

method. Among the twenty-five methods, we who are able to learn, follow one. Depending on our qualifications and abilities, we find the practice easy or difficult. To Buddhas and bodhisattvas, it is neither easy nor difficult and neither high nor low.

In the Śūraṅgama Assembly on Grdhrakuta Mount in India, all bodhisattvas obtained the vajra wisdom. Each bodhisattva who realized his true nature attained the vajra samādhi and lived in Pure Land. Thanks to the Buddha's blessing, the bodhisattvas in the assembly not only believed what the Buddha said, but also, they felt what the Buddha described about the Buddha field, so at that time, India was as the Pure Land.

All sounds became the Buddha sounds, all figures became the Buddha forms on Grdhrakuta Mountain. All listeners attained vajra samādhi, and with concentrated minds listened to the dharma talks. The Buddha's voice was like the lion's roar. Whenever the Buddha gave lectures, all those in the animate realm and inanimate realm felt moved. Twenty-five sages obtained the realization of bodhi by using different methods. We cannot discriminate superior or inferior methods among them. They all had the same capability because when the five skandhas dispersed, all of them obtained true mind which is over the dharma realm, non-discrimination.

What does "non-discrimination" mean? Among the twenty-five sages, each cultivated a different way, but they all attained the same result—original wisdom. For example, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva cultivated the method of reciting the name of Buddha (the great seeing element is one among the seven elements or seven objects which seven bodhisattvas chose to practice). Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva transformed external objects to enter the saint lineage (the ear-organ).

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva is symbolized by *prajñā*. He uses his flexible insight to convert human beings according to their abilities. Based on the command and blessing from the Buddha, Mañjuśrī

Bodhisattva chose the appropriate method for bodhisattvas, arahants and all of us through his profound verses. The enlightened gathas pointed out our deep wrong views (*micchā-ditthi*) and praised the luminous and permanent nature inside us.

b) Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva read the verses. Based on the command and blessing from the Buddha, Mañjuśrī rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha, and respectfully read this verse:

**The enlightenment is ever wonderful,
the illusion is empty,
the enlightened ocean is peaceful and clear,
the stillness desires to explore the enlightened nature.
It generates the external object, the object causes ignorance
cloud covering the bodhi nature.⁵²**

The nature of enlightenment is tranquil and bright all over the world. It contains everything and does not discriminate between falseness and rightousness. The sea of enlightenment is unshakable and over the dharma realm. It is limitless life and limitless light; therefore, it is called wonderful. Depending on karma, one can be reborn as a worm, an ant, an elephant, a lion, a human or a deva, and so on. No matter what realm one takes rebirth in, no matter how illusory the worlds are, the wonderful nature does not change. It is always pure and transparent and its hearing- and seeing-nature exist. As a result of karma, the world of heaven, demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hells arise. Although the conditions of six realms will change, the Buddha essence in them is immutable. The Buddha mind is flexible according to the

⁵² Giói Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), pp. 187–188.

conditions, but it retains the wonder and beauty. For example, a tiny ant, a soft worm, a standing human all have a different kind of rebirth substance, but their mind-nature has ever been pure and unchanging.

The enlightened nature is ever awakened and mindful like a bright light. Not being aware of this brightness, illusory thoughts arise. As soon as awareness and the object appear, falseness arises. Once duality arises, the reflecting awareness becomes the illusory knowing and seeing. The awakened nature is originally wonderful and mindful, but our bright seeing becomes impure and illusory as a result of bonding with the personal karma. This is called the first basic ignorance and forms the world, humans, and karma.

The stillness wants to reflect the enlightened nature.

It generates the external object.

**Due to this first ignorance, the sky appears
in which imaginary worlds are formed.**

**The steady thinking causes countries to arise,
the sensual knowers became the creature fellows.⁵³**

The enlightened sea contains everything within it, but as soon as there is a single ignorant thought, continents arise. Our true nature pervades over the dharma realm, but because of ignorance, it is concealed. As a result of illusory thought, we see the sky, the world, earth, dharma, everything. As soon as we do not discriminate, we see only space. Once we distinguish forms, lands and thoughts arise. A single ignorant thought generates thousands of more false thoughts—they arise without stopping. From the non-dual original nature, the dual face of subjects and objects arise. Clinging to that, the lands, countries, streams, mountains, and so on are continuously formed. This is called “the steady thinking that establishes countries” and then world after world appears. As a

⁵³ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 188.

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result of discriminating between self and others, people can commit killing, stealing, lusting, lying, and then twelve kinds of creatures⁵⁴ are born in the net of *saṃsāra*.

The distorted thoughts constantly rise, fall, and change. Because the thought always changes depending on the karma of beings, fellow creatures attach to it as a self. As a result, twelve kinds of creature beings are continuously born and enter the cycle of birth and death.

Our true nature is pure and tranquil, but we see earth, water, wind, and fire. The true nature is constantly luminous, but we see our pagodas, cars, shops, roads, and everything. Basically, the nature of false thought is empty, so subject and object are empty. All forms of body, mind, and landscape are illusory as a dream, but our luminous nature is Tathāgatagarbha (the source of all phenomena).

In the Heart Sūtra, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva contemplated five skandhas (form, feeling/sensations, perception, volition, and consciousness) as empty. The Tathāgatagarbha is tranquil without form. Because of illusion, we think we see many forms—blooming flowers, flying birds, living beings, and so on. Everything appears in accordance with our false thoughts, but our true nature is always pure without change. It is at the dharma realm that we can awaken and realize the Buddha mind that pervades this world. We need only detach from objects to realize it. The duality of subjects and objects appears because we keep dreaming, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva depicted our nature with these words:

⁵⁴ Twelve kinds of species: egg, womb, moisture, transformation, material, immaterial, thought, without thought, neither material, neither immaterial, neither thought, neither without thought.

*The sky in the enlightened sea,
is as a bubble in the sea.*

*Based on the sky, sensual worlds
as many as dust particles appear.*

*When the bubble is broken, even the sky disappears,
how can three realms exist?⁵⁵*

The external object then obscures its radiant nature. Our nature pervades over the ten directions, three periods of time, timelessness and without space, and non-dual, but now it separates the awareness and what is awakened, which formed the space and world. As a result of ignorance, this awareness nature turns into our consciousnesses. The function of the awareness nature still works, but it leads to ignorance.

The sky in the enlightened ocean is as a single bubble on the surface of the sea. The bubble is too small to compare to the vast ocean. The ocean is like our Buddha mind which is too large to compare to the bubbles (of sky, three worlds, and our bodies).

The sky has no form while the desire realms have countless forms. If a single thought is transformed, there is neither sky nor the desire realm, form realm, or formless realm. At that time, the bubble bursts and the sky is still infinite. In the same way, whether a bubble pops or produces more bubbles on the ocean, the enlightened sea does not change. The Buddha compared a bubble with the sky, so we can imagine how great our real nature is. It is obvious that sky is vast, but our nature is greater and is over all dharma realms.

A bubble originally is nonexistent, then suddenly it appears and then disappears to return to its empty state. Just as when our eyes

⁵⁵ Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 189.

are weary and we see sky flowers in space, those images come from our eyes. If our eyes are well, there are no sky flowers.

Once we are mindful, nothing exists. Forms are false and the true nature is Tathāgata Store. The environment around us is our dream. What happens in our dream is illusory. This way points out the practice way of returning to our real origin. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva reflected on the five skandhas as empty and realized the source of all things is the Tathāgata Store.

Due to ignorance, we see the sky. Clinging to unawareness, we see the dark earth, water, fire, moon, sun, star, rivers, and mountains. The steady thinking is solid at the place where the great earth is established. The thinking is chaotic at the place where the great wind is formed. The temper is angry at the place where the great fire is formed. The flame burns soil to make water. If we are deep in ignorance, this causes earth and continents to form. However, in reality, our mind is not different from earth, water, wind, and fire.

Our intuitive nature pervades the dharma realm. We see space, humans, and the world. Owing to the obstacle of ignorance, we see the sky is vast, but the intuitive nature is greater than the sky. However, the Buddha said the space is extremely small while the intuitive nature is boundless. It is wrong if we imagine the size of the intuitive nature and the sky to be equal.

**Without duality at the nature source,
many methods are for the enlightenment.
The Buddha-nature pervades all the world,
Smooth or inverse methods are the means.
New practitioners enter samādhi,
quick or slow their capacities.⁵⁶**

⁵⁶ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 189.

These six sentences point out all methods of cultivation to attain the intuitive nature. The true nature is as one but there are many means to cultivate. Every day when we recite “Namo Amitābha,” we listen to each letter closely then the hearing-nature is revealed. We must practice staying away from obstacles, so we can return to our permanent nature. Tathāgatagarbha has no form but it exists. Through seeing, hearing, knowing, speaking, laughing, and so on, we can realize it. Although we cannot touch it, it exists everywhere, outside and inside our bodies and in all dharma realms. The Samādhi Śūraṅgama Sūtra emphasized that reading the name of Amitābha Buddha and using the method of hearing-nature are both the same. Once we understand the meaning of this hearing-nature, we can grasp the simple core of the Buddha’s teaching and apply it in our cultivation. How lucky we are! Whatever sūtras we study, we are able to find the meaning of “Namo,” and the beauty of the infinite light. Then we can penetrate the method of Pure Land or the Great Seeing of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva.

Sakyamuni Buddha and the Buddhas in ten directions emitted light rays and the listeners, bodhisattvas, and arahants in the assembly were all in one reality. Thus, they could see the brilliant light shining from the heads of the listeners. The halo of light from the Buddha’s intuitive nature arose and the five parts of his body were the awareness nature. This is the significance of the brilliant light and signifies that the Buddha will expound the supreme dharma in the Mahāyāna vehicle.

Bodhisattvas in the assembly obtained the Buddha’s insight and perfect penetration. Each chose one of the twenty-five objects (six sense faculties, six worldly objects, six consciousnesses, and seven elements) as a focus of practice. Those who obtained perfect penetration dwelled in the instinctive realm. Each bodhisattva presented a different perspective of penetration.

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We all have different abilities and some methods of practice will suit us and some won't. The bodhisattvas' capability was boundless, so they did not feel superior or inferior, or find different practices easy or difficult. If we are averse to a particular practice it is because we cannot comprehend the meaning. If we find a practice easy it is suitable. The methods or dharma doors are diverse.

The listeners in the Śūraṅgama assembly on Grdhakuta Mount were so blessed and had such merit that all attained saintship. As soon as the Buddha proclaimed this point, Ms. Mantagi also obtained arahantship and all sages in the assembly entered vajra samādhi.

The Buddha asked twenty-five sages about two main aspects:

1) The seven elements and eighteen realms or seven elements⁵⁷ and four departments,⁵⁸ summarize the constituents of our experience—everything from our body and mind. Six organs are our illusory body. Six objects are the illusory landscape. Six kinds of consciousness are the illusory thinking and seven elements. Which method did the bodhisattvas use to attain perfect penetration to be released from these illusory bases?

2) How did they cultivate and attain perfect penetration using the method they chose?

These are the questions on cause and effect. Once we cultivate a dharma practice, we select the appropriate method that accords with our ability. Through selecting a method to cultivate, we will know the twenty-five sages' means of enlightenment. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva chose the hearing door of perfect

⁵⁷ Seven elements, earth, water, fire, wind, space, perception, and consciousness.

⁵⁸ Four departments (five aggregates, skandhas, six sense-organs, twelve bases, eighteen realms) and seven elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space, perception, and consciousness).

penetration to enter the saint lineage. There are bodhisattvas who choose the means from the organs, external objects, the vision field, or the consciousness field and so on, to return to their bodhi nature.

Twenty-five sages taught each realm and each element to cultivate. They have been successful in their way of practice. The twenty-five methods are twenty-five dharma doors opening to the penetrated nature. It's as if someone enters a temple through the main door, back door, right or left door—whichever door he uses places him inside the temple. The eighteen realms and seven elements are the essential methods of practice. Because the sages attained perfect penetration, they saw that each form, each object, each element is all part of the true nature. Form is illusory, but the inner nature is the Tathāgatagarbha and pervades all dharma worlds.

The bodhisattvas explained their own methods. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva described in detail his method, which is suitable for beings in the saha world who often are subjected to sound. This is the main method in Śūraṅgama Sūtra. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva chose sound to be his object of contemplation. He listened to the worldly voice to recognize his wonderful hearing function and return to perfect hearing.

II. The Selection

Six Worldly Objects

Now we move to Part II, the way of selection—the explanation of how these twenty-five sages presented their methods of cultivation. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva rejected twenty-four methods and chose Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's hearing-nature method of practice, because the ear-organ can be a source of suffering for humans.

A.1. The Worldly Form

Form is established by illusory thought,

**it is too difficult to penetrate.
How is the perfection achieved
by the method of this worldly form?**⁵⁹

This method is to put away the six worldly objects. According to the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Venerable Upanishad chose this form as his means of cultivation. He rose from his seat, prostrated himself with his head at the feet of the Buddha and declared,

"Soon after the Buddha became enlightened, I came to pay homage to him. By contemplating my impure nature, I felt abominable and detached from worldly objects. I realized the real nature of all forms. The process from the dirty body to the bleached bones reduced to dust particles and final disappearance. Both the worldly form and the empty are experienced as non-existence. I reached the state of the outflows (*āsrava*). Tathāgata approved the Upanishad title for me. The form of the external world is transformed, while the real nature of form (*surupa*) is the sacred penetration. With the worldly form, I achieved arahantship. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, the worldly form is the best."⁶⁰

Venerable Upanishad used the worldly forms to practice the perfect penetration. He realized that no matter how beautiful the form, it is impure and illusory. However, the absolute nature is the wonderful form and sacred penetration of Tathāgatagarbha. He observed the body to be born from the impure karma of previous lives. Karma transfers to consciousness which causes it to enter the mother's womb. Therefore, it has five impure conditions:

⁵⁹ Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo giác), p. 189.

⁶⁰ Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Tâm Minh), p. 428.

1. *The birthplace is impure*: This body is not a lotus. It grows in blood and is created from the path of urine.

2. *The impure seeds*: The impure seeds come from the father's semen and the mother's blood.

3. *The impure body*: There are nine holes of impurity (two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth, anus, and genitals, and thirty-two parts of the body (head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, excrement, brain, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, snot, joint-fluid, and urine).

4. *The impure nature*: The impure nature comes from the lust karma. If we do not cultivate to change our craving karma, an ocean of water will fail to wash out the craving.

5. *The final stages of the impure body*: When a person passes away, there are nine steps of contemplating the deteriorating body:

Contemplating the swelling (after death, the body starts to swell up because the eight types of consciousness do not inhabit the body anymore).

Contemplating the green mottled flesh (it becomes discolored).

Contemplating the opening flesh (after it turns green, it will be unrecognizable with pieces and parts of bone visible).

Contemplating the blood and filth (when the skin opens, blood and dirty things in the body will flow out).

Contemplating pus and rot (the pus begins to ooze out as the body starts to rot).

Contemplating the body being eaten by worms (out of

the pus and rot, worms emerge to feast on the flesh).

Contemplating the body scattering (the flesh begins to fall off).

Contemplating the bare bones (when the flesh is gone, there are just the scattered bones).

Contemplating the body as it turns to ashes and dust particles and disappears—nothing left).

Venerable Upanishad contemplated that the body is impure. After death, it turns into dust particles and finally becomes empty. He experienced the truth that form is void, void is form. He was enlightened that the form nature is the absolute śūnyatā (void nature); śūnyatā is the absolute form. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, our worldly bodies and the bodies of twelve kinds of living beings are seen. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about “absolute form and śūnyatā,” imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, twelve kinds of living beings appear or disappear. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Venerable Upanishad accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles between the bodies. However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose to use this method because the worldly objects that are the solid substance is difficult for a new practitioner.

A.2. The Worldly Sound

**Sound originally based on words,
requires speech, phrasing, and grammar.
One cannot have all the others,**

how can the sound bring the perfect perfection?⁶¹

Venerable Kauṇḍinya (Koṇḍañña, Comprehending Knowledge) the first of five bhikkhu disciples of the Buddha, rose from his seat, paid salute at the feet of the Buddha and said, “Soon after the Buddha attained enlightenment in the Mrigadava and Kukkuṭa parks (now Isipatana and Sarnath), we met him. Thanks to his voice, we who understood his first teaching realized the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha raised questions to the group. When I replied, “I comprehended dharma,” the Tathāgata approved my awakening by granting me the title “Ajñjāta” (Comprehending Knowledge). Entering deeply into the wonderful nature, the sound is perfect penetration. By means of the Buddha’s wonderful voice, I attained arahantship. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, sound is the best.”⁶²

Bhikkhu Kauṇḍinya listened to the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha and attained enlightenment. He was one of the first arahant disciples. He declared that sound was his main method of practice. His way to enlightenment was to contemplate the illusory worldly sound. Finally, he experienced the real nature of sound as the sacred penetration or Tathāgatagarbha. He contemplated a vibrating sound wave as a game of movement and stillness, which empties without self. He also realized other worldly objects have the same functions and natures. He experienced the truth that form is void, void is form. He understood that sound nature is the absolute *śūnyatā* and *śūnyatā* is the absolute sound. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings’ karma, in response to their capacities, our worldly voice of sweet

⁶¹ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 190.

⁶² Giới Hương, trans., *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Tâm Minh), p. 426.

or bitter is heard. As a result of ignorance, people who do not know about “the absolute sound and śūnyatā,” imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the sound arises. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Bhikkhu Kauṇḍinya accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles between the sounds. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because the worldly sounds that are mixed with words, speech, phrasing and grammar is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate.

According to creature beings’ karma and in response to their capacities, our worldly bodies and the bodies of twelve kinds of living beings are seen. As a result of ignorance, people who do not know about “the absolute form and śūnyatā,” imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, twelve kinds of living beings appear or disappear. These mistakes arise from discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words.

It accords with living beings’ minds and their capacity to know; it can turn into sweet or bitter voice.

A.3. The Worldly Scent

**Scent is presented by touching the nose,
without touching, it is unknown.**

**The object of smell does not often present,
how is the perfect penetration achieved? ⁶³**

Fragrance-adorned Bodhisattva rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "The Tathāgata taught me to

⁶³ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 190.

reflect clearly on the worldly phenomena. After I left him, I meditated in a tranquil hall. Bhikkhus were burning sandal incense and the fragrance traveled through the air into my nostrils. I reflected on the incense smell. It was neither sandalwood nor emptiness, neither smoke nor fire, and had neither a set place nor destination. Therefore, my discrimination was so transformed that I developed the state of outflows. The Tathāgata approved my awakening by granting me an honorary title, “Fragrance adorned.” After the worldly smell was suddenly transformed, the wonderful fragrance became the sacred penetration. By the means of smell, I achieved arahantship. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, using the worldly smell is the best.”⁶⁴

Fragrance-adorned Bodhisattva took the fragrance as his object of focus to attain penetration. His practice was to contemplate the fragrance as emptiness. He understood that the true nature of smell is the wonderful fragrance of the sacred penetration or Tathāgatagarbha. If there are enough causes and conditions, the scent will come. He realized that the real nature of scent and all things is empty. The scent does not come from fire, wood, nostrils, and wind. It has no place to go and no destination. By this method, he experienced the truth that scent is void, void is scent.

He realized that the scent nature is the absolute *sūnyatā*; *sūnyatā* is the absolute scent. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings’ karma, in response to their capacities, bad or good scent is perceived. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about “the absolute scent and *sūnyatā*,” imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the scent arises. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the

⁶⁴ Giới Hương, trans., *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Tâm Minh), p. 429.

play of nonsense words. From then on, Fragrance-adorned Bodhisattva accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles between the scents. However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose it, because the worldly scent that does not often present, is hard for a new practitioner to penetrate.

A.4. The Worldly Flavor

**Without taste, the flavor is unknown,
the flavor is presented by touching the tongue.
The object of taste does not often present,
how is the perfect penetration achieved?**⁶⁵

In the assembly, two dharma princes, Bhaisajya-rajā (the Medicine King) and Bhaisajya-samudgata, (the Supreme Medicine) with five hundred brahma devas rose from their seats, paid respects at the feet of the Buddha, and stated that "Since beginningless time, we who were physicians tasted 108,000 times the flavors of herbs, stones, and mineral substances in the saha world. We were mindful of various flavors—bitter, sour, salt, bland, sweet, pungent, and so on. We were mindful whether their flavors were cool, hot, toxic, or nutritious. With guidance from the Tathāgatas, we experienced clearly that the flavor nature is neither present nor un-present, neither body-mind nor far away body-mind. We could recognize the exact nature of the worldly flavor, so we reached enlightenment. The Buddha approved and granted us the honorary titles of Bhaisajya-rajā and Bhaisajya-samudgata bodhisattvas. We played the roles of dharma princes in the assembly. By means of flavor, we achieved awakening and were promoted to bodhisattva positions. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, using the worldly flavor as an object is the best method."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 190.

⁶⁶ Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Tâm Minh), p. 431.

Bhaisajya-*raja* and Bhaisajya-*samudgata* Bodhisattvas were awakened through the door of the sense-object of flavor. They came to know that the nature of flavors is illusory and does not exist. They obtained the wonderful flavor of the sacred penetration, the source of all phenomena, the Tathāgatagarbha.

Both bodhisattvas tasted many herbs, wood, metals and stones to be cured of illness. Their tongues became so sensitive that they recognized exactly the various flavors of the bitter, sour, salty, bland, sweet, pungent. They knew which herbs are compatible or not and which medicines are cooling, warming, poisonous, or nutritious. When there are causes and conditions, flavors will be tasted on the tongue. When there aren't conditions or causes, there is a bland taste. Flavor comes from the tongue-organ. Without the tongue-organ, flavor cannot form. Bhaisajya-*raja* and Bhaisajya-*samudgata* Bodhisattvas understood the nature of flavor as well as the nature of things as emptiness. Whenever the causes and conditions combine, the flavor is existent. In contrast, if there are no causes and conditions, there is no flavor. However, it is neither empty nor present, neither body-mind nor far away body-mind. By experiencing the truth that flavor is void, void is flavor, he realizes that the flavor nature is the absolute *śūnyatā*, the *śūnyatā* is the absolute flavor. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, the flavor of herbs is tasted. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute flavor and *śūnyatā*," imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the taste appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that is nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Bhaisajya-*raja* and Bhaisajya-*samudgata* Bodhisattvas accomplished their method of the perfect penetration without obstacles between the flavors.

However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose it because the worldly flavor that does not often present, is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate.

A.5. The Worldly Touch

The feeling is presented by touching the objects,

Without touching, the skin sense is unknown.

The object of touch often appears or disappears,

How is the perfect penetration achieved?⁶⁷

Reverend Bhadrápala, with sixteen companions who were all great bodhisattvas, rose from their seats, paid salute at the feet of the Buddha and said, “After listening to dharma at Bhisma-garjita-ghosha-svara-raja Buddha, our group left home to renounce. When the monks were bathing, I also followed the rules to bathe. I was suddenly awakened to the nature of water that washed neither dirt nor body. Then I felt so tranquil that I realized the state of *sūnyatā*. Because my former habit of practice still remained, when I left home to follow the Buddha, I achieved the state of the outflows. The Buddha granted me an honorary title, Bhadrápala. By awakening to the wonder of object touching, I was ranked as a son of the Buddha. By the means of smell, I achieved arahantship. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, worldly touching is the best.”⁴⁵

Reverend Bhadrápala was awakened to the way through the sense object of touch. He recollected that at the time of Bhisma-garjita-ghosha-svara-raja (Mighty Sound) Buddha, he and sixteen

⁶⁷ Ibid., (Bào Giác), p. 191.

bodhisattvas obtained penetration through the object of touch.

In the Lotus Sūtra, there was a monk named Sadaparibhuta (Never Disparaging; the previous body of Sakyamuni Buddha). Whatever persons, whether monks, nuns, laymen or laywomen Never Disparaging Bodhisattva happened to meet, he would bow in reverence to all of them saying, “I respect and never dare to disparage you, because you are certain to attain Buddhahood.”

We often hear the word “koan,” a paradoxical anecdote or riddle used in Zen Buddhism to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning and to provoke enlightenment. This refers to intuitive and spontaneous enlightenment, but it belongs to an aspect of tranquility. For example, someone is awakened by seeing falling leaves.

Bodhisattvas do not use the koan, but they contemplated organs, objects, consciousness, elements (four departments and seven elements)⁶⁸ to realize the Tathāgatagabha. We can see this clearly through removing six knots from the dharma door of hearing-nature of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, or the means of twenty-four bodhisattvas. Never Disparaging Bodhisattva, a practitioner, revealed his insights on Buddha-nature. He was happy that whomever he sees, he reveals his Buddha-nature behavior to them. While everyone else was busy cultivating a sitting practice, he kept following others to bow in obeisance to them, instead of sitting cross-legged as an exemplary monk. Many people disliked and stayed away from him, but he still bowed respectfully to them. Some, out of anger, spoke harsh words and threw stones at him. He turned back to bow and said, “I respect and never dare to disparage you, because you are certain to attain Buddhahood.”

⁶⁸ Four departments (five aggregates (skandhas), six sense-organs, twelve bases, eighteen realms) and seven elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space, perception, and consciousness).

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In temples, some monks and nuns who teach the meaning of the Lotus Sūtra understood that everyone possesses the Buddha-nature. If someone has enough causes and conditions to listen to the dharma, he will become a Buddha soon. However, some people were not satisfied with the way of the Never Disparaging Bodhisattva, hence they shouted at him. They did not know their actions were leading them to the hells. They had cultivated since the time of Bhisma-garjita-ghosha-svara-raja (Mighty Sound) Buddha, their wisdom and mightiness were supreme, but because they disparaged and showed contempt to Never Disparaging Bodhisattva for his strange action, they stayed in the hells for 200 million kalpas.

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Reverend Bhadrápala said that since the time of the Bhisma-garjita-ghosha-svara-raja Buddha, he had cultivated diligently and realized that water does not wash away dust. The body originally has no dust. It means that bathing does not relate with the body and body does not relate with dust. Organs, objects, and consciousnesses are empty. The organ is the body. The object is the watering dust. The consciousness is the touching of water and skin. Three of them are unconnected. They cannot exist if separated.

One of three aspects is void and combining all three is also void. For a long time, Reverend Bhadrápala could not forget his past habit and experience of reflecting on water while bathing. At the time of Sakyamuni Buddha, he left home to be a monk, quickly attained the outflows and gradually reached arahantship. He recalled that at the time of the Mighty Sound Buddha, he bathed and now in the time of Sakyamuni Buddha, he also bathed. Since he left home to renounce under Sakyamuni Buddha, he attained the outflows state and became enlightened. He accomplished this by using as an object his tactile sense.

He experienced the truth that touching is void, void is touching. He

was enlightened that the touching nature is the absolute *śūnyatā*, and the *śūnyatā* is the absolute touching. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, their bodies are touched. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute touching and *śūnyatā*," imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, touching appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness, that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. Reverend Bhadrāpala accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles between the touching.

However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because the body touching does not often present and is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate.

A.6. The Mental Object

**Dharma is also named the inner object,
from the objects, the duality arises.**

**Subject and object do not penetrate to be one,
how is the perfect penetration achieved?⁶⁹**

Venerable Maha Kassapa (Kāśyapa, an extreme ascetic) and Bhikkhunī Bhadda Kapilani (Golden Light) rose from their seats, prostrated themselves at the feet of the Buddha, and said, "In ancient times, Chandrasuryapadiipa Buddha descended in this world. After he passed away, I had a lucky opportunity to light a lamp to offer in front of his relics, decorated his statue by covering it with gold powder. Since then, each time I have been reborn, my body was shining like gold. Bhikkhunī Bhadda Kapilani who formerly was my wife, also shared that offering to the Buddha with

⁶⁹ Giới Hương, trans., *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Bảo Giác), p. 191.

me. I reflected on six worldly objects that are changeable and engaged in *sūnyatā* to complete the tranquil extinction *samādhi*.

“Thus, my body and mind were able to pass through hundreds and thousands of aeons in a fingersnap. I contemplated all phenomena (dharma) as void and I reached arahantship. The World-Honored One declared that I was the foremost in austerity. When the wonderful dharma was awakened, I ended the cycle of transmigration.

“The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, the worldly dharma is the best.”⁷⁰

Venerable Maha Kassapa, the first patriarch, smiled at the Buddha who was holding up a lotus flower on Gijjakuta Mount. Then the Buddha handed his robe and bowl to Venerable Maha Kassapa as a dharma sign of passing along the position of master. He is one of Buddha’s ten great disciples. He was endowed with asceticism, cared little about his outer appearance, wore tattered clothes, and lacked sleep and food.

Venerable Maha Kassapa told Bhikkhunī Bhadda Kapilani, formerly his wife, to cultivate the dharma together with him. Their relationship of husband and wife was not based on emotional love. Rather, they married to cultivate together. There is a noble story about their life⁷¹ as follows:

When Maha Kassapa was young, unlike other children, he did not like to engage in craving. He preferred to live in solitude, often staying away from crowds and even avoiding his parents. To him, marriage was his obstacle and he used this to cultivate the way. He

⁷⁰ Ibid., (Tâm Minh), p. 431.

⁷¹ Bhikkhu Minh Tuệ, *Thập Đại Đệ Tử Phật, (The Great Disciples of the Buddha)*, HCM City Publishing, 1991, pp. 127–146.

asked his mother to find a beautiful girl like the golden goddess statue that he had cast. He thought this could not be happening because no one in this world was as beautiful as his statue.

However, his parents hoped to find such a woman. They brought the golden goddess statue to Rajagaha City. Across the Ganges River in Vaisali City, they informed all that there was a miraculous goddess statue and young women should come to pray and offer to this statue to fulfill their wishes.

There was a pretty woman named Subhara, who belonged to a brahma family in Ca La Ty Ca village. She rarely went out, but on the lantern festival, she went to worship the statue by her friends' invitation. She was so beautiful that her appearance was shining more than the statue. Because of this radiance her dharma name was Bhadda Kapilani (Golden Light). Maha Kassapa's parents asked her to become his wife. On her wedding day, she dressed in brocade, wore a pearl necklace, and looked like a goddess. Both the groom and the bride looked worried and sad. They did not say a word till dawn. When the first light was shining through their room, Maha Kassapa uttered first that he did not want to marry, he just wanted to cultivate the way. His wife also revealed that she had no desire for passion and wished to practice a religious life, but because her parents were tempted by his parents' property, she had agreed to this marriage arrangement.

After hearing such words, Maha Kassapa was relieved and said, "We could obey our parents but in accordance with our personal plan." They put two beds in a room. Twenty years later, when their parents passed away, Maha Kassapa left home first and promised to return to teach his wife after he met a wise religious teacher.

It is said that the day Maha Kassapa renounced the world coincided with the day that the Buddha attained enlightenment. However, there was no mass media to inform everyone of the

saint's enlightenment. So Maha Kassapa traveled everywhere to seek a master. Two years later, he met the Buddha and became his disciple. Only after eight days of renunciation, he attained realization. One day, the Buddha allowed his aunt Mahaprajapati and 500 princesses of the Sakya clan to be ordained in the Saṅgha. Thus, the first religious group of bhikkhunīs was formed. Venerable Maha Kassapa recalled his promise to his wife and intended to return home to let her know about the bhikkhunī Saṅgha. While meditating, he saw that his wife was an ascetic of another religion at the Ganges River. He disconnected from her for two years. She gave her property to her servants and the poor and wandered along both sides of the Ganges. She met and joined the Nirantha group, although she did not understand them.

Venerable Maha Kassapa and his bhikkhu brothers fetched her and participated in the company of bhikkhunīs. She was named Bhadda Kapilani. After she became a bhikkhunī, she devoted every effort to practicing Buddhism. According to the Saṅgha's rule, monks must go for alms so that donors can earn merit. In return, monks preach dharma to them. There is a story about her that when she went for alms, her surpassing beauty became the topic of gossip. Many men followed to tease her as she stopped to receive almsgivings. Venerable Maha Kassapa felt pity for her and shared his almsfood. However, this behavior also became the topic of gossip in the Bhikkhunī Order. They jeered that the couple had lived together for twenty years and they still were attracted to each other.

Venerable Maha Kassapa heard this without being disturbed. He encouraged her to cultivate more diligently than ever before because this time was a challenge for her. She thought that due to heavy female karma, she needed to cultivate more diligence. Without sleeping for a whole day and night, she repented her old karma and finally attained enlightenment. Overjoyed, she sang the

poem, “By cutting off the defilements completely, I attained pureness. What I needed to do I did.” She was assigned a chief place among those who attained the Divine Knowledge of Former Lives.

In the Śūraṅgama Assembly, by contemplating the nature of dharma as empty, Venerable Maha Kassapa attained the arahant fruit. The Buddha asked him about the foremost means of penetration. He replied, “Based on my enlightened experience, the worldly dharma is the best.”

While sleeping at night, we do not act, our five sense-organs of form, sound, taste, scent, and touch do not contact five external objects. What we acted out during the day or in the past, our brain automatically will write, save, and represent. It arises as the shadows or illusion in brain. Illusory thoughts rise constantly, such as when we recall our parents, our friends, and so on. These illusory thoughts are the shadows of objects in our brain. A table, a chair, a pen, and so on are the forms. Once we remember them, they are a shadow in our brain. These are called the mental objects.

Venerable Maha Kassapa took the mental object as his main practice. His method was to realize the substance of the mental object as illusion. To know its real nature is perfect penetration. By awakening to the illusory nature of the six objects, he detached and entered the state of samādhi. Five of the external objects are illusory; the abstract image of objects in the brain—how is this real? He used this power of contemplation to attain the extinction samādhi.

Six organs contact six objects. The eye-organ contacts forms, the ear-organ contacts sound, the nose-organ contacts scent, the tongue-organ contacts taste, the body-organ contacts touch, and the brain-organ contacts mental-objects. Six sense objects are the form, sound, taste, scent, touch, and dharma. Now Venerable Maha

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Kassapa returned to the inner reflection and realized the truth that “The mental-object does not differ from śūnyatā; śūnyatā does not differ from the mental-object. The mental-object is śūnyatā; śūnyatā is the mental-object.”

We cannot realize that the body of six-organs and six objects are changing and illusory. All the activities of eating, drinking, breathing, experiencing atmosphere, sunlight, and so on are empty. By eating rice, breathing air, and drinking water, we help the blood to circulate, so our body is maintained. But without breathing, eating, and so on, the body cannot maintain itself. Depending on these conditions, the body appears or disappears. We temporarily call them “our bodies” or “other bodies.” In the real nature, there are no humans, no live-die, unenlightenment-enlightenment, and so on.

We learned this theory already. Next, we will learn how to practice it daily. It is important to know that once the false sights disappear, our nature is full of Pure Land. Each thing is a form and there are various things in our lives. “A” differs from “B.” “B” is not same as “C.” Rivers, pools, houses, and so on are different. We are living according to ignorance, so many forms arise. Once we attain enlightenment, there is no notion in the nature. We realize the principle of “Six objects are not different from śūnyatā; śūnyatā is not different from six objects.” Śūnyatā belongs to nature. The six objects are theory that we can see. This is divided according to our karma mind. Bodhisattvas obtain the samādhi of penetration; they do not discriminate at all. We should contemplate things every day to cultivate. The Buddha used his transcendental powers to help the twenty-five bodhisattvas enter perfect penetration. These twenty-five bodhisattvas obtained enlightenment because they realized the absolute nature of six objects, while we are engaged in false thinking. Although we are subjected by various worldly forms, our nature of limitless light and limitless life is over dharma

realm. The Ultimate Bliss Sūtra calls śūnyatā limitless light and measureless living duration nature, while the Śūraṅgama Sūtra named it the perfection penetration in ten directions.

The Lotus Sūtra called the wonderful dharma the nature of the mental object. The mental object is the figure, but its nature is Tathāgatagarbha. Like other bodhisattvas, Venerable Maha Kassapa took one of six objects as his main cause to be enlightened. He realized that the objects are illusory, but their absolute nature is the perfect Tathāgata. He used the power of reflection to enter the samādhi of extinction and bodhi base. Venerable Maha Kassapa contemplated that the six worldly objects change and decay.

By realizing śūnyatā to enter the samādhi of extinction, he realized that if there are causes and conditions, we will discriminate among humans, things, time, and space. Without discriminating, there is nothing. He was freed from attachment and obtained enlightenment. He recognized correctly the nature of dharma, so he understood the truth that “śūnyatā is the mental object; the mental object is śūnyatā.” According to creature beings’ karma, in response to their capacities, the images of worldly objects appear. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about “the absolute mental object and śūnyatā,” imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the mental object appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Venerable Maha Kassapa accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles between the mental objects.

However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because it was difficult for beings to cultivate this way. Beings cannot discriminate the dharma and objects. Thus, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva omitted this method.

B. FIVE ORGANS

B.1. The eye-organ

**The eye-organ has the vision,
it can see in front but not behind.
If it is lacking a part of four sights
how is the perfect penetration achieved?⁷²**

Venerable Aniruddha,⁷³ was one of the Buddha's ten great disciples. He was the royal son of Sukkhodan and brother to Mahanama; he was the Buddha's cousin. After King Suddhodhana passed away, Mahanama became a king. All the young princes like Siddhartha, Aniruddha, Ānanda, and Rāhula had left the kingdom to become homeless monks.

Like other children, Prince Aniruddha was innocent. One day, he asked Prince Bhaddhiyam and Prince Kappina, "Where does rice come from?"

Kappina answered, "Rice comes from the rice water prepared by the maids."

Bhaddhiyam refused this idea by saying that "Rice comes from a cooker. I see the maids take rice from it."

Aniruddha was convinced that "Rice come from golden bowls because each time I eat, the maids take rice from the golden bowls."⁷⁴

Even in childhood, Aniruddha's merit and virtue were outstanding. For example, once when he was playing games with his friends, he lost money. He asked his mother for a cake to make up the loss to his friends. His mother said, "Cake is ended." He did not

⁷² Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 191.

⁷³ Bhikkhu Minh Tuệ, Thập Đại Đệ Tử Phật (*The Great Disciples of the Buddha*), HCM City Publishing, 1991, pp. 127–146.

⁷⁴ Ibid., (Thập Đại Đệ Tử Phật), p.135.

understand the meaning of “ended,” so he kept asking for it. His mother teased him by giving him an empty box. Surprisingly, the box was full of cakes. After that, his mother knew he had a sacred source from blessing and merit. His transcendent blessing was surpassed day by day.

After enlightenment, the Buddha returned to visit King Suddhodhana and converted many noble people in the kingdom. Many princes were converted, such as Nanda, who intended to become a king in future and Rāhula.

Aniruddha talked to his brother Mahanama about leaving home. Mahanama replied, “You take care of our old parents, I will go with the Buddha and be his disciple.” Aniruddha disagreed.

“Brother, you should not go. You must govern our country. You are so intelligent. Let me be ordained. My attitude is suitable for ascetic life. I dislike noisy places and desire disgusts me.”

Aniruddha persuaded his brother but his other relatives did not agree. He decided to stop eating in protest and his father advised, “If you want to leave home, please ask Prince Baddhiyam. If he is willing to live a homeless life, you go with him.” His father knew that Baddhiyam would never give up the royal life to be a monk. As he guessed, Baddhiyam refused to renounce, saying that “Both of us are so young, we should enjoy our life for some years. Later on, after seven years, we can leave home to be ordained.”

Baddhiyam reduced the time but Anuriddha urged him to go with him, explaining the usefulness of being ordained. Baddhiyam promised he would go either one year or a month, or seven days. Hearing this, Aniruddha returned to his home in a good mood. Seven days passed, many handsome young princes such as Ānanda, Devadatta, Kimbila, Bhagu, Baddhiyam, Nanda, and Aniruddha were ordained under the mastership of the Buddha. The Buddha requested that they do meditation to contemplate the illusory royal life before being ordained officially.

After overcoming many challenges, Aniruddha was finally ordained. He cultivated diligently but unfortunately, he often dozed off while listening to the dharma. One day, the Buddha saw him and reprimanded:

Foolish people are fond of sleeping,
as snails rolls in their shells,
and oversleep for a thousand years,
without hearing the Buddha's name.⁷⁵

Venerable Aniruddha was shocked and regretted his actions. He promised never to sleep and truly dedicated himself to cultivating the dharma for whole days and nights. After a few days, his eyes began to be weary. The Buddha advised him that “Everyone needs food to live. Ears need sound to live. Nose needs fragrance to live. Tongue needs taste to live. Body needs touch to live and eyes need rest to live. If you do not sleep, your eyes are deficient in what they need.”

Although Venerable Aniruddha was moved by the Buddha's advice, he did not give up his vow and finally, he became blind. After becoming blind, he could not sew his own robes anymore. The Buddha personally went to his lodging to sew his robes with Ānanda's assistance. This story explains that although the Buddha was a wise religious teacher, he still helped his disciples in person. This is a great example for all.

Although Venerable Aniruddha became blind, he was very insightful. The Buddha taught him to practice the “Illuminating Vajra Samādhi.” Soon after, he obtained the power of the divine eye and he often expounded the Cahina Sutta in the three-month retreat of the Saṅgha. With the divine eye, he could see all realms

⁷⁵ Ibid., (Thập Đại Đệ Tử Phật), p.136.

from Pure Land to the hells.

We wondered why the Buddha advised Aniruddha not to go on a strike. He did not listen to the Buddha's words and he followed his vow of not sleeping and as a result, he could not see anything. Actually, the reason Aniruddha was blind came from his last life. This was a last effect of his karma before attaining arahantship.

The Buddha understood this karma well, as in a past life he was a wise optical physician. A blind old woman came to ask him to treat her eyes and promised she would serve him her whole life. He agreed and gave her good medicine and eventually her sight returned. Later, she wanted to break her promise and accused falsely that she could not do what she promised, because her eyes were dimmer than before.

As a wise optical physician, he knew that the woman was lying. He responded by saying, "I will now give a better medicine to you so that you will recover your sight as soon as possible."

However, after taking the new medicine, she became blind forever. Because of this offense, after death, that physician went into hell. He underwent the terrible suffering in hell, with evil ghosts and animals. After he finished paying for the offense, he was reborn in the human realm. He was a monk who was deficient in the eye-organ. Before blindness, he was fond of sleeping all the time. The Buddha rebuked him and he was too ashamed to sleep. Finally, he lost his vision in both eyes. The last karma retribution led him to blindness.

He was scolded that his sleeping behavior was like shells rolling in sleep at the bottom of the sea for a thousand years. The Buddha taught him that he must detach from outside appearances and penetrate his inner mind through his seeing-nature. Following this insightful guidance, he obtained the Vajra Samādhi of Delightful

Seeing to illumine everywhere. He was the first disciple to possess the divine heavenly eye.

It is Venerable Aniruddha who delivered the sermon of Cahina on the occasion of a three-month summer retreat. He could not see anything and returned to his inner nature to attain enlightenment. He did not use his flesh eye-organ or karma vision anymore, but with his heavenly vision, he could observe up to ten directions. He was living with his real seeing-nature (the perception) and the bodhi foundation. We should reflect and develop our latent penetrating capability.

To Venerable Aniruddha, the eye-organ easily penetrated the perfection, more than other methods. He was a great arahant (towards bodhisattvahood), not a simple arahant (one who stays in personal nirvana). In the Cathina (Pāli: Kathina) Sutta, he said he concealed his transcendental power like hiding a treasure under leaves. He was living in blindness and no one knew him to be a saint.

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Venerable Aniruddha rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha, and said, "When I became a renunciate, I used to sleep while the Buddha was preaching. The Tathāgata told me that my behavior was as 'a snail rolling inside a shell.' I cried bitterly and blamed myself. I decided to go without sleep for seven nights, hence I became completely blind. The World-Honored One taught me the 'illuminating vajra samādhi.' Not with my flesh eyes, but with my inner seeing, I can see through ten directions as clearly as if I were looking at a piece of fruit in my hand. The Tathāgata approved me to attain arahantship."

Venerable Aniruddha experienced the absolute nature of seeing. He understood that the vision nature is the absolute śūnyatā; the śūnyatā is the absolute vision. This is pure and pervades over the

dharma world, neither subject-object, nor appearance-disappearance.

According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, black and white are seen. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about “absolute form and *sūnyatā*” imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, vision appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Venerable Aniruddha accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles using the eye-organ.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, however, did not choose this method because the eye-organ cannot see behind and is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva chose the ear-organ which is presented in Chapter II. In Chapter VI, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva will select and praise the dharma door of the hearing for perfect penetration. Chapter V only discusses five organs (with the exception of the ear-organ).

B.2. The Nose-organ

Nose is for breath in and out,

there is no function in the middle.

Non-existence at the gap,

how is the perfect penetration achieved?⁷⁶

Venerable Kshudrapanthaka did not have a good memory. Many arahants tried to teach him a four-sentence verse, but he failed to remember it. If he learned the first word, he could not remember the second one. Why did he have a poor memory? In his previous

⁷⁶ Giới Hương, trans., *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Bảo Giác), p. 191.

life, he was a famous Tritipaka master. He took pride in his knowledge, but if he did not like someone, he would not answer their questions. He had stingy karma for sharing his knowledge with others. He underwent suffering in many rebirths until the Buddha's time; he was his disciple but still had a poor memory. The Buddha asked many arahants to teach him, but all of them could not be patient.

His Buddhist brother said to him, "If you failed to learn the Buddhist scriptures, why don't you go home to avoid disturbing to your teachers." He agreed to do so and began packing to return the lay life while the Buddha preached the Law. The Buddha asked him where he was going. He answered that his brother asked him to go home, not to stay at the vihāra where he was disturbing others. The Buddha said that he could instruct Venerable Kshudrapanthaka how to learn a verse. Then the Buddha taught him to pay attention to the exhalation and inhalation to control his body. Once his body adjusted to balance, his mind would be mindful. If the body is managed well, the mind is peaceful.

By the means of the nose organ, Venerable Kshudrapanthaka cut off greed, hatred, and delusion and attained arahantship.

Yunmen Patriarch often advises us that if we understand the external world easily, it is because we are familiar with the secular. We feel it is difficult to turn back to the greater way to practice for enlightenment, so we must change our habits.

Discipline for a Novice (Luật Sa-di) tells a story about a novice meditating near a lake with many beautiful flowers. He enjoys the fragrance of the flowers so much that a deva in the lake appears and reminds him to "Please be mindful to detach from the fragrance of flowers." If one does not follow the object, one becomes a sage. The dharma protectors help beings focus on meditation.

Likewise, if we do not restrain from the eye-organ and ear-organ, we cannot realize an unattached mind. As soon as we grasp worldly objects, feelings of like or dislike arise. The patriarchs call these a stain in the mind. The greater way is to focus on the nose-object. This is difficult to understand.

What does it mean to open the door to see Bodhidharma? When we open the door, we can see Bodhidharma—a twentieth patriarch in India. He went to China to hand down Zen, which was also called the Buddha-nature. This method shows people how to see the Buddha-nature. At the six organs we experience the Buddha-nature, which means we can see Bodhidharma (Buddha mind) at the doors of six organs—consciousness, earth, water, wind, fire, and so on, as our own body, which is dark. Once we detach from these things, there will be bright insight.

As soon as we let false thoughts go, our nature will appear. Seeing and experiencing the Buddha-nature is bright. Once the eye-organ or nose-organ contacts shape or smell, if we do not follow at once, this Buddha-nature will appear. We need to be aware that when six organs contact the six sense objects, we need to reflect, restrain, and be mindful. Let seeing just be seeing, hearing just be hearing, knowing just be knowing; we do not grasp and distinguish. It does not mean that we close our organs.

Opening the door means to open our organs, but we stay mindful. That is our real nature. This is a method which Bodhidharma taught in China. Venerable Kshudrapanthaka contemplated the nose to experience the illusory scents, objects, and consciousness which are cheating us every day. Knowing how to smell is to realize the smelling-nature, which is the transcendental way. Such an unwise person like Venerable Kshudrapanthaka also attained arahantship while those who are intelligent with good memories have not attained the First Saint Fruition.

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In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Venerable Ksudrapanthaka rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said "I could not chant or read because I have no memory capacity. When I first met the Buddha, I listened to the dharma. Then I left home and became a monk. For the duration of a hundred days, I attempted to learn by heart a verse, but I failed. If I could store the first word, I would drop the second word. In contrast, when I remembered the second word, I forgot the first one. Out of compassion, the Buddha guided me to live in mindfulness to balance my breathing. Then, I reflected on the exhalation and inhalation at the nose to control my body. I realized the appearance, disappearance, change, and extinction in every second. Ever since then, my mind became able to penetrate without obstacle and transmigration. All defilements were transformed. By the means of the nose-organ, I achieved arahantship. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, I found the breath at the nose-organ to be the best."⁷⁷

Venerable Ksudrapanthaka, who used his inhalation and exhalation, obtained perfect penetration. He contemplated the rise and fall of breath to experience its real nature and cut off the cycle of birth and death. He was enlightened that the nature of smell is the absolute śūnyatā; śūnyatā is the absolute smell. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, bad or good scents are smelled. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute smell and śūnyatā" imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, scents appear or disappear. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness, which are nothing except the play of nonsense

⁷⁷ Ibid., (Tâm Minh), p. 439.

words. From then on, Venerable Ksudrapanthaka accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles between the scents.

However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method of practice because the nose-organ is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate.

B.3. The tongue-organ

**Taste does not present as bland,
with flavor, the taste exists.**

The taste changes by the worldly savor.

How is the perfect penetration achieved?⁷⁸

The fourth organ is the tongue. There is a story about a disciple named Sam Son. One day, while the monks chose good vegetables, their master went by, held a vegetable, and said, “This is easy to eat.” Sam Son replied, “It is not the only vegetable—there are also other most delicious flavors.”

The master replied, “But by tasting it, we will know this delicious flavor.” This story is only two simple sentences, but deep with meaning and has been handed down for many generations. The teacher taught that we are using the six sense-faculties of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and brain and its nature is the Buddha-nature. The tongue-organ is the door of Zen. The sense of the tongue nature is always presence or fullness without lack or hunger. Sam Son learned this lesson and understood his Buddha-nature. Sam Son reminded his master, “It is not the only vegetable. There are also other most delicious flavors.” Buddha-nature or tasting-nature is the nature of awareness, which is penetration.

⁷⁸ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 191.

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Whether we taste or not, whether we eat or not, we are always full.

Once we penetrate the hearing-nature, the form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness are diminished. Those who cultivate the tongue method do not grasp flavors of sour, fatty, salty, and penetrate their tasting-nature over the dharma realm. They will never be hungry. The limitless light is ever the limitless life. Thirst is constant limitless light; it is limitless life. The Buddha-nature is incomparable and exists all the time. However, as the disciple said correctly, “We must taste to know the flavor.” Sam Son, the disciple, could easily drop into the “voidness” of nirvana. To avoid this extreme extinction, the master reminded him of the middle way of tasting which means he still tastes the worldly flavors but detaches from them to realize his real taste nature.

The pungent, bitter, and sweet are illusory flavors. However, when the taste is bland, we still have the knowing sense at the tongue, “flavorless.” Therefore, our nature of taste is often present and independent which the Buddha called Tathāgatagarbha (the source of all phenomena). We are the slave of our tongue, so we kill animals to serve our tongue, but in fact, our real nature is independent and present all the time. It is the absolute *sūnyatā* or the unsurpassed truth, but if it follows the external conditions, various tastes arise which we call the world truth. Shape is void. Once it has enough causes and conditions, it manifests. It manifests as thousands of forms such as butterflies, worms, crabs, fishes, mountains, rivers, earth, objects, body, mind, and suffering beings. Such various forms appear in our mind. Our Buddha mind is *sūnyatā*, but now it has many disasters and suffering. We must see and comprehend this to save it. That is why the master of Sam Son advised, “You must taste all flavors.” It is the middle way and avoids the “nothing” way of the extreme extinction.

These substances are illusory as sky flowers. Because of weary eyes, we sometimes see flowers in space. The Buddha taught us

the method to treat our weary eyes by avoiding staring into space. Then there will be no sky flowers of the body-mind-landscape any more. In the wheel of life, if we want to stop, we must stop creating karma.

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Venerable Gavāṃpati from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "In a previous kalpa, I had the mouth/speech karma to amuse everyone with my comments, so in many lives I have been born with a mouth chewing the cud like a cow. The Tathāgata taught me "One Pure Flavor of Mind" to help me transform the discrimination to enter samādhi. I realized that the delight is neither the inside body nor the outside substance. Then, I come over to the worldly inflows (*srava*). I was liberated from the inside body and mind, as well as the outer universe, freed from the three worlds of existence, like a bird escaping from its cage. Thus, the impurities and defilements were transformed and my dharma-eye now is pure and perfect, and I attained arahantship. The Tathāgata approved my enlightened position of the outflows (*āsrava*). By the means of tongue-organ, I achieved arahantship. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, letting the flavor go away by returning to the real nature at the tongue-organ is the best."⁷⁹

Venerable Gavāṃpati used the tongue-organ as the main cause to penetrate the perfection by experiencing that the nature of flavor is neither in the inside body nor in the outside external substance. He understood that the flavor nature is the absolute *sūnyatā* and the *sūnyatā* is the absolute flavor. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, savory or bland flavors are tasted. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute flavor and *sūnyatā*" imagine that due to conditions or without conditions,

⁷⁹ Ibid., (Tâm Minh), p. 439.

twelve kinds of living beings appear or disappear. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness, which are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Venerable Gavāmpati accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles between the flavors. He was liberated from inflows from the inside body and mind as well as the outer universe, freed from the three worlds of existence like a bird escaping from its cage. Thus, he transformed the impurities and defilements and his dharma-eye now pure and perfect, he attained arahantship. The Tathāgata approved his enlightened position of the outflows.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because the tongue-organ is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate.

B.4. The Body-organ

**Touch is revealed with the skin's object,
the body sense is limited.**

**If the touch nature is not experienced,
how is the perfect penetration achieved?⁸⁰**

In regard to the eyes, if our eyes are closed, we cannot see a thing. Therefore, the eyes have not penetrated. In regard to the nose, tongue, and body, if we do not have the touch objects, then the feeling or the sense does not arise. So, they have not penetrated. If we perceive cool, warm, or hot feelings we know this well. The intuitive nature does not depend on separation and reunion, but thanks to separation and reunion, the feelings appear. The intuitive nature exists, but we do not realize. When organs contact objects, we know the presence of the intuitive nature. We thought that our nature is inside our body, then thanks to this body, the sense

⁸⁰ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 192.

appears. Because we have a system of body nerves, we can have the feeling of coolness or warmth.

Relying on the body and its objects, feelings arise. Knowing is the nature, while the function of the up and down hand is illusory. The nature, which is real, is Tathāgatagarbha and is boundless like an ocean, while the body-mind-landscape is as a bubble on the surface of the ocean.

Due to winds, waves arise. Owing to waves, bubbles arise. The body-mind-landscape rises and falls continuously. Tathāgatagarbha is like the nature of the ocean following the conditions to appear as bubbles, but its nature does not change. The substance of bubbles is water. Water takes the form of bubbles, but its nature is the water. According to existent beings' karma, Tathāgatagarbha turns to houses, mountains, rivers, and so on. The unreal bubbles arise, but their nature is real. Mind is our knowing-nature. Knowing-nature is Tathāgatagarbha. The body is made from earth, water, fire, and wind, which are dull as ignorance, but our knowing-nature is the awakeness.

It we are awakened without ignorance, then we return to our absolute nature of Tathāgatagarbha. A vast ocean with white waves is analogous to the original nature, while bubbles are like our body and the external world. The big moving waves are like our false thoughts that control us every moment. We forget such an infinite nature and foolishly we take the waves of consciousness as our nature. We are not peaceful because we live with waves and winds. Saints live with Tathāgatagarbha; thus, they are peaceful and virtuous. In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Reverend Pilindavatsa rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "I first followed the Saṅgha to often listen to the Tathāgata who spoke about the unhappy worldly life. One day, I begged for alms in city and while I was thinking dharma, I stepped on a noxious prickle that pierced my foot. This caused my whole

body to feel pain. I was mindful to experience the terrible pain, and the pure mind where there was neither pain nor the knowing of pain. I reflected, "How can my body have both kinds of feeling?" After a short contemplation on this, suddenly my body and mind seemed to be in the state of *śūnyatā*. Three weeks passed and I achieved the stage of the outflows and attained arahantship. The Buddha approved my realization of the outflows. By means of the skin-organ, I achieved arahantship. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, the body is the best."⁸¹

Venerable Pilindavatsa took his body-organ to cultivate the perfect penetration. When the poisonous thorn pricked his foot, he experienced physical pain and the knowing of the pain. The knowing of pain is Buddha-nature. The nerves informed him there was an invader, a poisonous thorn that causes pain. Because of self-craving, the seven forms of consciousness protect the body by informing us of the pain. We have pain because we love our body. We do not realize the luminous Buddha-nature as our true body, and we wrongly view four elements of earth, water, wind, and fire as our body. Therefore, the seven forms of consciousness must protect it by seeing a poisonous thorn as an enemy.

Pain or itching comes from the nerves. Due to the body, there is pain or itching. Pain is the illusion. Why do we feel the pain? We know we all have pain because we have Tathāgatagarbha.

The Buddha taught Four Noble Truths (*catvāry āryasatyāni, cattāri ariya-saccāni*): suffering (*dukkha*), the origin of suffering (*samudaya*), the ceasing of suffering (*nidroda*), and the path leading to the ceasing of suffering (*magga*). *Dukkha* comes from *samudaya*. *Magga* is the way of cutting out *dukkha* and attaining *nidroda*. We must know and experience that we possess

⁸¹ Ibid., (Tâm Minh), p. 399.

Tathāgatagarbha, which is not stained by the mud of defilement. We have a vow “to convert measureless creature beings.” We must live in the mundane world to convert beings to penetrate this Buddha-nature. It also means to choose the body as a method to achieve enlightenment.

Knowing the sense of the body comes from two faces of separation and reunion. For example, wind touches the body to cause feelings of coolness. An old thing decays, a new thing arises. Wind comes and goes, touching and not touching. All gives us the sense of cool, warm, smoothness, roughness. For example, we raise our hands up to separate from the table and we feel nothing. We put our hands down to touch the table, and we feel warm. Two objects of combination and separation cause the movement and sense at the body. Warmth and coolness are combined from material (body) and spiritual (mind). Mind is the knowing. Knowing coolness or warmth is the knowing of the body. The consciousness discriminates among the states of like-dislike, sad-happy, pleasant-unpleasant, while the nature of consciousness is unchanging.

The Buddha said the body does not come from causations. It is void because it comes from both faces of separation and reunion. Eyes have both faces of light and darkness. Ears have movement and stillness. Nose has clearance and obstruction. Tongue has contact and separation. Body has touch and separation. Consciousness has two faces of remembering or forgetting. Hands touch a table and lead to the feeling of coolness. It means the combination is revealed. However, the knowing of the senses is revealed permanently, even with touch or without touch.

Reverend Pilindavatsa took the body-organ as his main cause to be enlightened and to give up the self. Knowing pain means the body-consciousness is revealed. Because we attach to this body of earth, water, wind, and fire as our ego, if an outside thing attacks our body, right away we find a way to protect it. By the warning of the

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nerves, the feeling of pain arises. The pain means the body-consciousness embraces the ego. In order to give up the ego grasping, we must contemplate this illusory body coming from earth, water, wind, and fire that are not ours. Only the Buddha-nature is real.

Reverend Pilindavatsa did not attach and focus on his flesh self. The body-consciousness did not control him anymore, so he could be mindful to his awakened nature.

Reverend Pilindavatsa took the body-organ as his main cause to be enlightened. By reflecting on the knowing of pain, he realized his true nature. He recognized that the feeling of pain came from conditions. Contemplating this method for a long time, he attained perfect penetration of the body. He understood that the touch nature is the absolute *sūnyatā*; *sūnyatā* is the absolute touch. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world.

According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, the knowing of pain and the pain are felt. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute touch and *sūnyatā*," imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the knowing of pain appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Reverend Pilindavatsa accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles between the body and the pain. He was liberated from inflows (*srava*), from the body and mind, as well as the outer universe, freed from the three worlds of existence like a bird escaping from its cage. Thus, he transformed the impurities and defilements and his dharma-eye now was pure and perfect, so he attained arahantship. The Tathāgata approved his enlightenment to the outflows.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method, because the skin

touching is limited and difficult for new practitioner to penetrate. Reverend Pilindavatsa accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles. By means of skin-organ, he achieved arahantship. The Buddha asked him about the foremost means of penetration. He replied, “Based on my enlightened experience, the body-organ is the best.”

B.5. The Mental-organ

The brain-organ is revealed with the thinking.

Without thinking, it does not exist,

it is attached to the mental objects,

how is the perfect penetration achieved?⁸²

Venerable Subhūti, who was one of the Buddha’s ten great disciples, was chief in realizing śūnyatā and is a subject in the Diamond Sūtra. His family was very rich. On the day he was born, all the treasures in his house suddenly disappeared. According to the custom in India, this was a fortune. The fortune teller guessed that his birth was a symbol of being full of treasures and named him Good Presence. Some days later, the treasures all reappeared. His śūnyatā energy was so strong that when he was born, all properties disappeared suddenly. Subhuti’s śūnyatā samādhi was so mighty that it affected external circumstances and all the people in his family.

Similarly, when Venerable Sāriputta’s mother conceived him, she suddenly had extraordinary wisdom. People believed that she was influenced by the smart baby in her womb. She could debate philosophical theories with all the scholars in India at that time.

Venerable Subhūti’s power was so strong that everyone around him saw the emptiness. It was wonderful that they could attain the

⁸² Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 192.

nature of emptiness. Even when Subhūti was young,⁸³ he was not fond of money; he always gave it to the poor. As an intelligent boy, he realized that the nature of things was empty. As soon as he met the Buddha, he wanted to be ordained right away.

He often took pity for the poor and despite his parents' objections, he did not stop giving money to those living in poverty. After being ordained as the Buddha's disciple, he was begging food every morning. He did not have the heart to stop by the low-roof houses of the poor. He wanted to go for alms at homes of the rich, no matter how far away they were because he could not bear to beg for alms from the poor. Many people did not understand such a strange habit. According to the rule in the Saṅgha Order, monks go orderly and equally to beg food from house to house, whether poor or rich, so that they would create an affinity with them. However, Venerable Subhūti, who often separated from the group, went alone to beg for alms, and sometimes did not beg any food. When he was questioned about the reason, he only went for alms round from the rich and not the poor, he replied, "For the sake of the poor or the rich, monks beg for alms. However, if the poor were too poor to offer alms, we would unintentionally make them sad."

Unlike Venerable Subhūti, Venerable Maha Kassapa had a habit of begging for alms only from the poor and not from the rich. He felt that the poor were in that situation because of bad karma. By asking for alms from them, he was giving them an opportunity to cultivate the good karma of donation and escape from poverty.

However, the Buddha was discouraged by both of these extreme preferences for alms. The Buddha taught that because there is discrimination, many disasters and unfairness happen in this world.

⁸³ Bhikkhu Minh Tuệ, *Thập Đại Đệ Tử Phật (The Great Disciples of the Buddha)*, (<http://www.tangthuphathoc.com/nvpg/08.htm>).

So, the egalitarianism and harmony of poor and rich must be followed. The purpose of mendicancy is impartiality. Monks should call on their donors in succession, regardless of whether they are poor or rich. By experiencing the nature of emptiness, Venerable Subhūti mended his begging ways, and he did not choose only the rich to ask for alms anymore.

In the Saṅgha, Venerable Subhūti penetrated the emptiness of things. He often talked about the doctrine of emptiness and the proper appearances of a noble monk. It is said that once when he was sewing his robe, he used his transcendental power to know that the Buddha was coming back from far away. He thought to himself, “The Buddha is the enlightened one, he realized non-self and non-dharma, and attained the tranquil dharmakāya. The Buddha often explained that due to non-self, non-dharma, non-living beings, non-living duration, the dharma-nature pervades all over the world, over time and space. The Buddha’s dharmakāya is everywhere. So, if I went to receive him, he would rebuke me as not being a real disciple. In the Prajñā Dharma Assembly, the Buddha always taught, ‘If someone uses the form to see me, uses the sound to seek me, he will practice a deviant way and cannot see the Tathāgata.’”

After reflecting on these words, Venerable Subhūti continued sewing as if nothing happened, while the monks and laity welcomed the Buddha back. One of them, Bhikkhunī Uppalavanna, who was chief among nuns with supernatural power, used her transcendental power to accommodate the Buddha first. She paid homage to the Buddha and said, “World-Honored One! Due to my miraculous power, I am the first person to know you were coming back and I also welcomed you first.”

Seeing her happiness, the Buddha mercifully replied, “Did you meet me first?”

She looked around, saw no one and said, “When I came here, I saw no one. Then who else is the first one?” After her words, she saw Venerable Maha Kassapa and the Bhikkhu Order arriving. When the Saṅgha gathered, the Buddha declared, “Monks, I would like to thank all of you for receiving me. However, Venerable Subhūti came first to meet me, and now he is penetrating the emptiness of dharma on Gruhakutta Mount. Those who realize the emptiness of dharma are the first ones to accommodate me.”

After hearing the awakened word from the Buddha, the Saṅgha, including Bhikkhunī Uppalavanna, experienced the śūnyatā of dharma. All conditioned phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, dews, and lighting flashes. The nature of dharma, which is non-self, non-dharma, non-living beings, and non-living duration, pervades over the world. Venerable Subhūti penetrated this nature and was the first one to receive the Buddha. He is worthy to be the chief of śūnyatā in the Saṅgha. Venerable Subhūti is the person to spread the doctrine of emptiness śūnyatā.

One day, there were 1,250 monks gathering in the Prajñā Dharma Assembly, and the Buddha told Subhūti to declare this doctrine, “Subhūti, you were enlightened with the doctrine of emptiness in front of the assembly. Please, you proclaim it.”

After hearing this, the assembly did not know if Venerable Subhūti would proclaim the śūnyatā by himself or if he would rely on the Buddha’s blessing to declare it. Knowing this, Subhūti said, “Brothers, in order to show my respect to the Buddha, I had to obey his request that I rely on the Buddha’s blessing to present it. As we know, phenomena are from dependent origination, so they are void. However, the absolute nature of dharma is boundless, the wonderful śūnyatā. In Prajñā Dharma Assembly, the Buddha confirmed, “Form is the śūnyatā; voidness is form. Form does not differ from voidness; voidness does not differ from form. Feelings, perception, action, and consciousness are also the same.”

The phenomena are illusory, not real. Countless things are neither appearing nor disappearing, are neither impure nor pure, neither rising nor falling, neither clean nor dirty. Therefore, there are not six organs, six objects, six forms of consciousness, six entrances, six realms, twelve places, eighteen realms, non-ignorance, non-ending of ignorance. Because of being false, there are not birth, aging, sickness and death, suffering, causes of suffering, cessation or path to the end of suffering, even no wisdom and no attainment. The Buddha emphasized that mind is not mind, but is mind, and is inherent without past, present, or future mind. Phenomena are empty and non-self. It is called non-self because the self is illusory too. Detachment from phenomena leads to the Middle Way and arahantship.

In the Saṅgha, Venerable Subhūti was the only one to reach the highest state of śūnyatā, so he is worthy to be the foremost in śūnyatā. In regard to the life of Venerable Subhūti, there are two aspects for us to notice, his generosity and his śūnyatā insight. Both are related to each other. Thanks to experiencing the nature of all phenomena, he was unattached and attained non-self, so he could donate all his property to others. The detachment and giving are the symbol of the doctrine of emptiness, which Venerable Subhūti realized. He became the foremost in śūnyatā in the saint lineage.

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Venerable Subhūti rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "For many lives, my mind has been so pure that I could remember my previous births as countless as grains of sand in the Ganges River. When I was a fetus in my mother's womb, I could recognize all phenomena and even the greatness of ten directions as the absolute voidness. I also could guide all living beings in how to awaken to their śūnyatā. Thanks to the Tathāgata, I experienced enlightenment as the absolute śūnyatā. By the means of the brain-

organ, when the absolute śūnyatā was luminous and perfect, I attained arahantship and the Tathāgata's precious śūnyatā. I achieved the Buddha knowledge and the Buddha approved me to attain the outflows. I was regarded as the foremost of śūnyatā in the Saṅgha. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, at the brain-organ, where the shape turns to shapeless, where both subject and object of voidness are empty is the best.”⁸⁴

The sixth organ can discriminate the object without seeing, because when we sit in darkness, we see nothing and our mind still acts and remembers everything; there is often movement. When we recall a rose, we forget a tulip. The mind often travels everywhere while we study or are performing some task. In the brain-organ arises the false thoughts and it commits offenses more easily than other organs, so it is impure.

This does not mean that we should close our organs in a room, far away from the world, without seeing and hearing. The Buddha taught that such a state is a subtle attachment to the mental objects.

Some sages were attaining the four stages of the material *jhāna*,⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Giói Huong, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Tâm Minh), p. 444.

⁸⁵ Four stages of the material *jhāna*:

First *jhāna*: The five hindrances have completely disappeared and intense, unified bliss remains. The ability to form unwholesome intentions ceases. The remaining qualities are directed thought, evaluation, rapture, pleasure, unification of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention.

Second *jhāna*: All mental movement utterly ceases. There is only bliss. The ability to form wholesome intentions ceases as well. The remaining qualities are internal assurance, rapture, pleasure, unification of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention.

four stages of immaterial jhāna,⁸⁶ the stage of neither thought nor non-thought, but they had not transformed yet. They had the subtle self-attachment to accomplishing arahantship, because they still cherished the subtle consciousness of the samādhi state as their real mind. The sixth-consciousness arises from imagining the shapes of six worldly objects when our organs contact. We often take the sixth-consciousness or this false thought as our mind, which means we take the enemy as our child. Therefore, we must be in the cycle of rebirth. What we call our mind means we imagine the lovely sound we heard, the best scent we smelled, the delicious food we ate, the soft pillow we touched to be our mind. We think this and that which we consider as our mind. The Buddha many times pointed out this is only the imagining of illusory figures of the six sense objects.

The worldly objects that are the six sense objects and five

Third jhāna: One-half of bliss disappears. The remaining qualities are equanimity, pleasure, unification of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention.

Fourth jhāna: The other half of bliss disappears, leading to a state with neither pleasure nor pain, which the Buddha said is actually a subtle form of happiness (more sublime than *pīti* and *sukha*). The breath is said to cease temporarily in this state. The remaining qualities are a feeling of equanimity, neither pleasure nor pain, an unconcern due to serenity of awareness, unification of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention. Traditionally, the fourth jhāna is seen as the beginning of attaining psychic powers (*abhijñā*).

⁸⁶ Four stages of immaterial jhāna: The immaterial heavenly realm (detaching from their bodies and desire (*arūpāvacara-bhūmi*),

1. The state of infinite space, (*ākāsānañcāyatana-bhūmi*).
2. The state of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana-bhūmi*).
3. The state of nothingness (*ākīñcaññāyatana-bhūmi*).
4. The state of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination (*nevasañ-ñānāsaññāyatana-bhūmi*).

skandhas are emptiness. The worldly objects are illusory. Now we imagine shapes of the worldly objects that means to double the illusions. Therefore, the consciousness which is the dependent mind appears from conditions and turns to the feelings of like or dislike to cause suffering. If there are not six sense objects, the consciousness does not arise. It is unreal as an enemy, which we ignorantly consider our child. Due to this, we who are also movable and dependent, forget our ever-tranquil and permanent mind. We are moved by feelings and constantly reborn.

Because we take the movement and dependence of the sixth consciousness as our mind, we move around in the cycle of birth and death. Good deeds are the best, so we think to follow this by doing charity or some other generous act. However, the Buddha taught not to grasp it as something solid. Suddenly the good thought arises, and we chase after it. The bad thoughts arise, and we run after them. Because we keep running, our mind is shaken, so we must master it.

We often follow with delight what is good, but we must be aware and mindful of what we are doing. If we are not mindful then we will also follow with delight what is bad, because our mind is shaken by the outside conditions— bad or good. Even the good things shake our mind. That means our mind, which is one-pointed, avoids chasing and moving after worldly objects. We need to control with insight and not follow objects blindly.

Turning back to the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, after admiring thirty-two of the excellent characteristics and eighty of the subordinate characteristics of the golden Buddhakaya, Venerable Ānanda became his disciple. He was moved to be a monastic by the good deeds of the Buddha. This is a good motive. However, when he met Ms. Maganti, he was attracted to her sexual beauty. This is the low motive. His habit of moving up and down (lack of mindfulness) dominated him. Practicing dhyana means to keep the

mind awakened without moving.

Ānanda reflected on the sixth consciousness or the movable mind as illusory, while our Buddha mind is real. We need to be mindful to realize the reality or falseness of phenomena. Although the Buddha preached this doctrine his whole life, we cannot realize the nature of dharma and we still live with the false thoughts. We know and understand the Buddha teachings, but we do not practice and contemplate it every day. We still run to our false thoughts every day.

We should learn this Śūraṅgama Sūtra and think deeply about the merit and virtue of the Buddha, twenty-five sages in general, and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in detail. Do not read briefly and carelessly, and still return the same old way to live with the sixth consciousness. If we cannot understand and train our mind, it is really regrettable.

By following the conditioned mind, the sixth consciousness causes the suffering-pleasure, love-hate which we regard as ourselves. We receive the false thoughts as ours as if we consider the enemy to be our children. Because we regard suffering as ourselves, we will be angry if someone accuses us of something. We will insult him in return and we will get bad karma and much other following karma. From that, we continue to move in the cycle of rebirth.

Venerable Subhūti entered the state of the absolute śūnyatā of the Tathāgata, which is as vast as the ocean. His knowledge and insight were identical with the Buddha; he attained the position of the outflows. In the liberation of the nature of emptiness, he was unsurpassed. The Buddha asked him about the foremost means of penetration. Based on his enlightened experience, at the mental-organ, the form turns to the unformed. Both subject and object of form disappear. All phenomena are śūnyatā which is the best dharma door to practice. The Buddha approved Venerable Subhūti

as the foremost in attaining śūnyatā in the Saṅgha because he realized the śūnyatā penetrated perfectly over the mundane dharma and transcendent dharma.

Venerable Subhūti took the emptiness of dharma as the main cause to be enlightened. He experienced the nature of śūnyatā. He was enlightened that the knowing nature is the absolute śūnyatā; śūnyatā is the absolute knowing. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, the brain-organ is known. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute mental-organ and śūnyatā" imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, our brain-organ appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words.

From then on, Venerable Subhūti accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles between his brain-organ. He was liberated from the inflows (srava) from the inner body and mind as well as the outer universe, freed from the three worlds of existence, like a bird escaping from its cage. Thus, he transformed the impurities and defilements and his dharma-eye now was pure and perfect and he attained arahantship. The Tathāgata approved his enlightened position of outflows. However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because the brain-organ is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate.

C. SIX CONSCIOUSNESSES

C.1. The Eye-consciousness

From the organ and object,

the eye-consciousness is revealed.

Finally, there is not a fixed self-figure.

If the consciousness does not have a fixed shape,

how is perfect penetration achieved? ⁸⁷

Sāriputta⁸⁸ was born at Magadha in southern India. His father was Vangatan, a famous person in the brahma association. When Sāriputta was in his mother's womb, his mother was so intelligent that she debated with her young brother, the scholar Kaushtila and always defeated him. His uncle then knew that his sister was carrying a wise child who would have questions for him in the future. Kaushtila left home to seek a master. He studied hard night and day and did not have time to cut his nails. Thus, he was called the long-nailed brāhmaṇa. After Sāriputta was ordained under the Buddha, the long-nailed brahman also ordained.

At the age of eight, Sāriputta was able to understand and explain all books. At a conference in which everyone could debate together, the eight-year-old Sāriputta was seated on a chair. Princes, ministers, and scholars did not take him seriously. However, later they paid attention and were impressed by his eloquent speech. They so admired his wisdom that they awarded him a village.

At the age of twenty, he left his house to search for the truth. He studied with many religious teachers, but he was not satisfied with their knowledge. He and his closest friend, Mogallana, thought that no one could qualify to be their teacher.

a) *Story of the Renunciation of Sāriputta and Mogallana*: Sāriputta and Mogallana (Maudgalyāyana, Mahāmaudgalyāyana) were same age with similar qualifications. Both of them, who searched for the truth, had the same noble ideal. They went everywhere to study

⁸⁷ Giới Hương, trans., *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Bảo Giác), p. 193.

⁸⁸ Bhikkhu Minh Tuệ, *Thập Đại Đệ Tử Phật* (*The Great Disciples of the Buddha*), East West Printing, 1999, pp. 140.

with many famous and wise religious teachers.

One day, Sāriputta met three brothers of Maha Kassapa. Their manner was very tranquil, solid, and mindful. Sāriputta asked at once, “Where do you come from? What are your names? Who is your teacher? What does he teach?” One of them replied, “Our teacher, Sakyamuni Buddha from the Sakya clan, taught us the truth of the universe but we could not remember it all. However, the core of his teaching is as follows:

All things arise according to causes and conditions.
All things fall according to origination and dependence.
Phenomena are impermanent,
often arising and ceasing,
neither arising nor ceasing.
The tranquil extinction is blissful.”⁸⁹

Sāriputta was really touched by these awakened words and the Buddha and his verse was a sunny light bright in his mind that caused all doubts about human life and the universe to disappear. Sāriputta felt friendly towards Maha Kassapa and his brothers, as if they had been close friends for many lives. Sāriputta narrated the story to Mogallana. This Buddhist verse could not be understood by mundane people. Sāriputta and Mogallana, who searched for truth, had deep wisdom and cultivation, and realized the meaning of the verse easily. Both of them were so moved to hear the verse that they cried. The meaning of the verse was profound as a golden key for discovering a valuable treasure. After being monks, Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mogallana became the Buddha’s excellent disciples as a result of their talent and virtue.

⁸⁹ Bhikkhu Minh Tuệ, *Thập Đại Đệ Tử Phật (The Great Disciples of the Buddha)*, East West Printing, 1999, pp. 141.

b) *The story of Anathapinkida seeing his palaces in the Tusita Heaven with Venerable Sariputta's eyes:*

Venerable Sāriputta converted over 200,000 disciples to take refuge under the Buddha. He was appointed as a supervisor for the construction of Jetavana Vihāra. This was a park for Prince Jeta. Anathapinkida, a wealthy man, purchased it for the prince and paved the roads with gold. Wherever the gold covered, that land belonged to Anathapinkida, who offered it to the Buddha. The prince also offered the trees in the garden to the Buddha.

According to Venerable Sariputta's design, there were sixteen dharma halls for ceremonies, sixteen small halls, bathrooms, storerooms, and so on. One day, before the vihāra was complete, Venerable Sāriputta said to Anathapinkida, "Brother, what is in the sky?"

Anathapinkida replied, "I see nothing."

Sāriputta replied, "Brother, with the naked eye, you cannot see it. Based on my power of the divine eye, you will see it."

Ananthapinkida answered happily, "Yes, I see, there are many palaces of six desired heavens realms."

Sāriputta, "Yes, brother, because you offered land and vihāra to the Buddha your palace is in heaven now."

Ananthapinkida, "There are many palaces there. How could I know which one is best?"

Sāriputta, "Tusita heaven is the best place for existent beings live for long time, as they cultivate the way diligently."

Ananthapinkida, "I will go there."

As soon as Ananthapinkida chose it, the other heavens disappeared.

c) *The story of Venerable Sāriputta donating his eyes:*

Venerable Sāriputta was also famous for a story about giving his eyes to an old woman. He attained divine vision thanks to this past virtue. One day, Sāriputta saw a young man crying sadly on the street, saying, “My mother is suffering from an incurable disease. A physician said that in order to cure her disease, an eyeball of a sage is needed to decoct medicinal herbs. But where can I find a monk’s eyeball?” Hearing that, Sāriputta thought he would give an eyeball to the poor woman. He asked the man to take out his eyeball. The man refused to do and asked Sāriputta to do it by himself. In spite of the pain, Sāriputta took out his left eyeball and gave it to the young man. However, the man exclaimed, “The physician said that the right eyeball can cure my mother.” Sāriputta was shocked to hear that, but he only blamed himself for not asking before taking out his eyeball. Determined to help the young man, he bravely took out his right eyeball.

d) *Venerable Sāriputta reflecting on the body as earth:*

Many monks in the Saṅgha were afraid of Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mogallana due to their mightiness and strictness. Some did not fear the Buddha because he was honest and compassionate like a gentle mother. For example, Davadatta often bullied the Buddha (the Buddha used to say Davadatta was like a mad dog). Many times, he made noise while the Buddha preached dharma. Ānanda, the young brother of Devadatta, complained, “Without Sāriputta and Mogollana here at the vihāra, Devadatta keeps making noise.”

Sāriputta asked monks who betrayed the Buddha and followed Davadatta, “Brothers, for what purpose do you become a monk? Is it to cut off the cycle of rebirth and death or is it to increase your material goods?” They replied, “To put an end to saṃsāra.”

Sariputta said, “Please do not let your original goal be moved because of riches in Devadatta’s wing that have been offered to you. Be awakened!”

When he said this, there were light rays emitting from his body. A group of monks kneeled down, regretted their offenses, and asked Venerable Sāriputta to come back to the vihāra. Venerable Sāriputta had great contributions to harmony in the Order.

e) A story of Venerable Sāriputta yielding his place to other monks:

Sāriputta was a modest and honest monk. One day, when he came to his dwelling, he saw a group of six corrupt monks occupying his place. He went to sleep at the foot of a tree. Next morning, he was sick and the Buddha asked the reason. He said that he slept outside and made concession of his place to the group of six corrupt monks.

In the early morning, the Buddha asked the Saṅgha, “Who was worthy to receive the best seats, beds, food, as well as drink?” The monks answered eagerly, “That is a monk coming from the Brahma clan who is never tired of preaching the dharma. This kind of person is worthy to receive the best seat and bed, as well as food and drink.”

The Buddha continued, “On Snow Mountain, the birds, fishes, and monkeys lived together, but their strength and minds were different. They lived according to their pride without respect for each other. After a long time, they realized their misbehavior, so they corrected themselves and respected one another. After death, they were reborn into the good realms. Similarly, monks, you should respect the elders. You will be praised in the present, reborn in the good realms. There is no hate, discrimination, and hierarchy in my Saṅgha. You should respect, serve, and make offerings to

the elders. The elders are worthy to receive the best seats, beds, food, and drink.” Everyone understood why the Buddha said they should respect and serve Venerable Sāriputta and the the elders. Venerable Sāriputta was grateful to the Buddha.

Venerable Sāriputta is famous for forgiveness. There was a monk who was jealous of him. This monk told the Buddha that Sāriputta insulted him. The Buddha asked Sāriputta for the reason. Sāriputta said, “I have been following the Buddha for many years. Now, I am about reaching eighty years of age and I remember that I have never take another’s life, never told a lie, never was talkative about my gains or losses. Today is the last day of three-month retreat. Every day I repent, meditate, chant and am mindful as calm water. How could I despise anyone?”

“World-Honored One, the earth can endure humiliation or dirty things like feces, urine, and blood without complaint. My mind, like the earth, is willing to endure humiliation.

“The pure water can cleanse everything, no matter how dirty, old, or broken it is. My mind is tranquil without the waves of hate or love like peaceful water. Lord Buddha! When the broom is used to sweep up the dust, it never chooses between good and bad. Similarly, my mind does not discriminate between like or dislike.

“By being awakened, I will never look down on other monks. If I am really in the wrong, I will repent to that monk.”

Everyone was deeply moved by the eighty-year-old monk’s words. That young monk was so ashamed that he knelt down to utter from his heart, “The elder does not insult me. I am jealous of him instead of learning from him. Please forgive me.”

Sāriputta said, “How miraculous the Buddha dharma is! To err is human. But it is a virtue to correct an error when one becomes aware of it. I accept your repentance.”

f) A story about ghosts trying to harm Sāriputta as he entered samādhi:

One day, as Sāriputta was in meditation, there were two ghosts, a good one and an evil one, coming to harm him. The bad Mara wanted to punch his head. The good Mara advised, “Please don’t punch him because he is the Buddha’s wisdom disciple. If you kill him, you will go to hell.”

The former said, “Are you afraid of him? The monk is delicate and vulnerable. I will punch him on his head.”

The other ghost said, “I respect him. He is modest and delicate and his virtue is too great to receive harm. If you beat him, he might get a brief headache, but you will get a headache for many ages.”

The first ghost listened to what the good ghost advised; he gave a big punch on the head of Venerable Sāriputta. However, Venerable Sāriputta felt a slight touch as if a leaf had fallen on his head. When he opened his eyes, he saw Mara, whose body was covered with blood, fall into hell.

When he had come to the vihāra, the Buddha asked about his health. He answered he felt a bit of pain on his head. The Buddha revealed, “Sāriputta, when you are in meditation, the powerful Mara cannot harm you. You know his power can break Sumeru Mountain into pieces, while you feel only a little pain because your samādhi source is indestructive.” Sāriputta often entered samādhi, therefore the outer power cannot harm him.

f) Venerable Sāriputta begged to enter nirvana before the Buddha:

One day, when Sāriputta heard the Buddha would enter nirvana, he asked him for permission to enter first for two reasons:

1. “For many eons, Venerable Sāriputta made a great vow to be

born in the Buddha's time and his vow was fulfilled in this life. However, the Buddha declared that he would enter nirvana in three months. It is like a big tree about to fall down; the large branches will fall down first. It is like a big mountain being destroyed, the large rocks will fall first. I would like to enter nirvana before the Buddha." The Buddha agreed to this.

2. Venerable Sāriputta asked the Buddha's permission to return to his town in order to convert his hundred-year-old mother before he entered nirvana. This is a perfect example.

The story was told that Sāriputta came from a Brahma clan, but he became the Buddha's disciple. After sixty years, he went home to convert his mother to take refuge with the Buddha. When he reached home, suddenly he became sick and he told his attendant, who then prevented his mother from visiting him in his room. Due to the great love of his mother, she was worried about his illness. In the middle of the night, she saw many deities visiting him—there were a lot of bright light rays.

Surprisingly, she asked him and he smiled and said, "They are the Four Heavenly Kings."

She asked, "Are you better than the Four Heavenly Kings?"

He replied, "You know they are called Dharma Guardians who protected the Buddha when he was born."

She asked, "Then after that who visited you at the second watch? Their lights were brighter than the previous ones."

He replied, "They are the kings of the Tusita Heaven and some devas from the Tavatimsa Heaven and Yama Heaven."

She asked, "Are you better than the king of the Tusita Heaven?"

He replied, "You know, the Lord of Tusita Heaven controlled

thirty-three heavenly realms but to Buddha, the king of Tusita plays the role of his attendant. Once when the Buddha paid a visit his mother (Queen Maya) in the Tavatimsa Heaven, the king of the Tusita Heaven brought the Buddha's robe and bowl to the Earth."

She asked, "Then the last one who paid a visit to you with the brightest light shining all around our house?"

He replied, "That is Brahma King who is your ideal master."

She uttered in surprise, "Oh my, you are better than my admirable master."

He continued, "On the Buddha's birthday, Brahma King greeted the Buddha with the shining light nets. On the occasion of the Buddha's enlightenment, he appealed to the Buddha to preach the dharma, not to enter nirvana." She was so surprised because her son's blessing and virtue were boundless. She thought the Buddha, who is her son's master, must possess great blessing and virtue, more than him. So, from her heart trust arose in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. At that time, Venerable Sāriputta preached a sermon to her so that she attained the dharma eye.

This describes the life and great virtue of Venerable Sariputta. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra Dharma Assembly, Venerable Sāriputta rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "For countless lives, as many as grains of sand in the Ganges River, whenever I was born, my perspective was pure and penetrated the worldly and supramundane realms without obstacles. One day, on the road I met two brothers. One of them was Kashyapa, who read the dependent-origination doctrine. After listening to it, I realized the boundless mind. I left home to be ordained under the mastership of the Buddha. My perception was perfect and penetrated. I who attained the virtue of fearlessness to be an arahant, qualified as the Buddha's oldest son, born from the

Buddha's mouth, and transformed from dharma. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, the vision-nature from eye-consciousness that is more luminous than other knowing and seeing is the best.”⁹⁰

Venerable Sāriputta took the eye-consciousness as his main cause to be enlightened. When the eyes see shapes, eye-consciousness will arise to discriminate which is the root of the birth and death cycle. The discrimination of eye-consciousness came from the Buddha-nature that is over our body, the ocean, earth, heaven, and all dharma realms, just like electricity is everywhere, but it manifests in a light bulb. Likewise, due to karma, our Buddha-nature appears in our body of earth, water, wind, and fire.

Electricity is like the Buddha-nature. Electricity makes a bulb bright and makes a radio have sound. The radio and bulb are short term and will end like our body. Electricity exists forever and is invisible. The Buddha-nature is in our body, which causes the bodhi-mind to be called “the eighth consciousness” or “the bright conscious mind.” The bodhi mind is like electricity. If a light bulb breaks, electricity still exists. If our bodies are dead, the Buddha-nature still exists. Electricity is the origin; its function is brightness. The bodhi-nature is our basic original knowing and seeing. Eye-consciousness is the function of karma, while bodhi nature is the original nature. Such an analogy is clear to support us to realize our Buddha-nature. The Buddha-nature has no shape. It is the instinctive state we attain ourselves. Learning is understanding. Understanding is to recite the name of the Buddhas to be mindful. The Buddha-nature is revealed at our hearing-nature, seeing-nature, knowing-nature, and so on. It is united with

⁹⁰ Giói Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Tâm Minh), pp. 445–446.

us. Believing this firmly, we should recite the Buddha's name to turn to our Buddha-nature. We are seeing with the eye-organ and eye-consciousness. Is the eye-nature the same as the eye-consciousness? Are they two or one? We know how to speak. When the sounds come, the ear-consciousness will discriminate. Are they two or one? In fact, both of them come from the Buddha-nature.

The Buddha-nature is the nature of how to speak. A light bulb is the Buddha-nature but if we touch it, we will get an electric shock. There is electricity at the bulb, we turn it on, and the function of electricity is revealed. Knowing how to speak and listen is the function of the Buddha-nature. The eye-consciousness is illusory. Thanks to the eye-organ and sunlight, the eye-consciousness discriminates among everything. If the eye-consciousness is unreal without a self, how could we attain penetration?

Venerable Sāriputta selected the eye-consciousness to obtain the perfect penetration. Eye-consciousness arises from the eye-organ contacting with forms. Without the causes and conditions, the eye-consciousness disappears without its self. He experienced exactly the truth of the eye-consciousness. So, he understood that the eye-consciousness nature is the absolute *śūnyatā*; *śūnyatā* is the absolute eye-consciousness. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, eye-consciousness arises. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute eye-consciousness and *śūnyatā*," imagine that due to the conditions or without conditions, the eye-consciousness appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Venerable Sāriputta accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles with the eye-consciousness. He was liberated from the inflows (*srava*) from the inside body

and mind as well as the outer universe, freed from the three worlds of existence like a bird escaping its cage.

However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose the eye-consciousness because Venerable Sāriputta was an insightful person; it was easy for him while it is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate.

C.2. The ear-consciousness

**The hearing mind penetrates in ten directions,
due to the great vow for spreading.**

New practitioners cannot reach it.

How is the perfect penetration achieved?⁹¹

The above verse explains the method of cultivation of Samantabhadra (Universal Honest) Bodhisattva, who used the ear-consciousness to hear all sounds in the ten directions and made his ten great vows for the sake of all beings. Ten great vows are:

Revering all Buddhas
Praising the Tathāgata
Offering everywhere
Repenting the karma
Rejoicing in the good deeds of others
Petitioning the spread of the Dharma Wheel
Pleading Buddha to remain in the world
Persistent in pursuing the Path
Being flexible to help all sentient beings
Sharing merit to all beings

⁹¹ Ibid., (Báo Giác) pp. 192–193.

Ear-consciousness relates to the ear faculty and sounds. Are the ear faculty, sounds, and the ear-consciousness the same? The three are related to one another because when this arises, that appears. The up or down movement of the hand is called the function or the consciousness, (while the hand is the nature or the root). Can the movement of the up and down hand separate from the hand? It is never separated. Likewise, six sense-organs, six sense objects, and six consciousnesses, which are mutual, are the frame of our life.

Hearing and seeing belong to the Buddha-nature (the seeing subject) while sound is the form (the object). Detaching from sounds means detaching the ear-consciousness. We often follow sounds and create karma. Being insulted by others, we usually retaliate. So, the hatred increases. Once we do not follow sounds, there is no hatred. We practice hearing all sounds without attachment and contemplate that we luckily have hearing-nature while inanimate things have nothing. Most Venerable Nhất Hạnh taught:

Sound can travel thousands of miles
create mutual understanding and love.
May words be as beautiful as gems
as lovely as the flower brocade.
Dharmakāya is bright in the morning light.
Sitting in peace, I smile.
Be mindful in a new day.
The sun of wisdom shines everywhere.
*Namo Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva*⁹²

By practicing it gradually, we do not grasp the ear-consciousness,

⁹² Lạy đức Bồ Tát Quán Thế Âm, February 14, 2019.
<https://langmai.org/tang-kinh-cac/loi-quan-nguyen/quan-nguyen-bon-vi-bo-tat-lon/>

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

which means the form skandha was transformed. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva said, “A state of movement and stillness obviously does not arise.”

The organ receives the movement or stillness. Once there is no organ, there is no movement or stillness. Without movement and stillness, there is no ear-consciousness. We can open the first three knots (since we have six knots tied at the six organs; we practice step by step to untie these knots). The ear-consciousness and organ disappear and the non-self will be attained. Practicing this method gradually, we will attain the state of non-thought which means the tranquil extinction or Uncreated-Dharma Patience (Anutpattika-Dharmakshanti). We have a brain that has the capacity to hear, remember, save, and preserve. When we hear a voice, we can receive and keep it in our memory, as well as make distinctions about it.

Sometimes, we hear sounds but we do not pay attention because we are engaging in something else, so at that time, sounds come and go away without remaining in memory. If we do not recognize a sound, we will not save it in our memory. For example, when we pass by a garden, if we do not notice it, our consciousness does not catch it and save the sight. As soon as we see the forms, hear the sounds, we notice, which will be saved in our store consciousness or Tathāgatagarbha. Everybody, even the tiny insects, has the Tathāgatagarbha that is over the dharma realm. Therefore, even if we give blessings upon a tiny shell, it can still hear and feel our prayer.

Because of our own karma, we see the human world of vehicles, rivers, mountains, people, markets, and so on, whereas bodhisattvas see only one nature of the real form. The Tathāgata store (Tathāgatagarbha) is the last destination before returning to the absolute emptiness.

When we are sleeping, we open a record of reciting the Buddha's name. Our consciousness also does not work due to our rest, but the sounds will be saved automatically in our *alaiya vijñāna* (the eighth consciousness). It means that it is affected a little, even when our brain is at rest. The hearing-nature still works while we sleep or are unconscious. We cannot imagine this visualization capacity. There is a sound but there is no knowing of it; or with sleeping, sometimes we do not hear the sound of a drum when we are sleeping, but still the brain has the subtle function to record it in our consciousness. These are the wonderfully subtle functions of hearing, which is the reason why Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva chose the hearing-nature of perfect penetration.

The question was asked, "What beneficence is there when we open a recitation of Amitābha Buddha's name for the deceased when we do not chant using our voice?" The ear-organ of a dead person does no work, but his mind may still wander, understand, and feel everything. Thus, when we say something, the deceased can know clearly because his mind contacts to our mind, but he cannot take action like us. Where is the hearing-nature? Be mindful when we are sitting to return our hearing-nature! Consciousness appears as soon as we hear and read the sentence, "Namo Amitābha Buddha." If we make a distinction between the sound of "Namo Amitābha Buddha" and the terrible complaint of Ms. A or Ms. B, it requires the ear-consciousness. It is the consciousness (*vijñāna*) that plays the role of discerning the various kinds of sounds. The ear-consciousness goes at once with the sound. Knowing to hear is the Buddha-nature (the hearing subject). The sound is the form (the object). If we practice this gradually, we will return to the perfect penetration of hearing-nature.

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Venerable Samantabhadra (Universal Honest Bodhisattva) rose from his seat, paid homagee

at the feet of the Buddha and said, "I have been the son of the dharma king and served countless Tathāgatas, as many as grains of sand in the Ganges River. All the Buddhas in the ten directions taught their bodhisattva disciples to cultivate the ten virtues of Venerable Samantabhadra's deeds that are called by my name. Tathāgata, I often used the ability of my mind to understand all knowledge and views of existent beings. If, in a country far from countless worlds, there is a living being who practices Samantabhadra deeds, I who ride a six-tusked elephant, manifest myself in a hundred thousand of *kayas* (bodies) to approach him. If he cannot see me due to his bad karma, I will secretly place my hand on his head to console, protect, and support him to be successful. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, using the hearing-nature from the mind without discrimination is the best."⁹³

This paragraph says that the Universal Honest Bodhisattva took ear-consciousness as the main cause to attain penetration. The ear-consciousness comes from the ear-organ and sounds. If there is no organ and no object, ear-consciousness cannot arise. It has no form. Due to creating the hearing-nature from the mind without discrimination, he understood that the ear-consciousness nature is the absolute *śūnyatā* (void nature); *śūnyatā* is the absolute ear-consciousness. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, ear-consciousness is known. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute ear-consciousness and *śūnyatā*," imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the ear-consciousness appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Venerable Samantabhadra accomplished his method

⁹³ Śūraṅgama Sūtra, translated into Vietnamese by Tâm Minh; translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, HCM City Publishing, 1999, p. 448.

of perfect penetration without obstacles between the ear-consciousness. Then he transformed the worldly defilements and was liberated from the inflows. He was liberated from the inflows, from the internal body and mind as well as the outer universe, freed from the three worlds of existence like a bird escaping from its cage. Because of his ten great vows, he, who could hear all sounds in the ten directions, rode a six-tusked white elephant, and touched the living beings' heads to help them accomplish enlightenment. However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because ear-consciousness that is changeable, is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate.

C.3. The nose-consciousness

**Meditating on a white spot at the tip of the nose,
is only an expedience to concentrate.**

**Means to control the mind by fixing it for the moment,
the temporary object became an illusory abode.**

How is the perfect penetration achieved?⁹⁴

Venerable Ānanda rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha, and said, "When I renounced lay life to follow the Buddha, received the full ordination, I failed to concentrate my mind, thus I could not attain the state the outflows. The World-Honored One taught me and Kaussthila to focus the mind on the breath at the tip of the nose. After I started this mindfulness, in twenty-one days, I saw that the inhalation and exhalation at my nostrils as smoke. I experienced the inner body and mind penetrate all the worlds which became pure *sūnyatā*, like a gemstone. The smoke gradually became invisible and my breath became white until my mind reached the state of the outflows.

⁹⁴ Giới Hương, trans., *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Bảo Giác), p 193.

At that time, the inhalation and exhalation were bright as halos illuminating in ten directions, and then I attained arahantship. The World-Honored One approved my attaining enlightenment by the means of the nose-consciousness. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, I focused the breath on the nose, kept the stillness, as well as the luminous, and transformed all the rebirths. This is the best.”⁹⁵

When the nose-organ contacts the worldly fragrance, the nose-consciousness arises. Fragrances constantly appear and disappear; the nose-consciousness does the same. It does not often present; how can it penetrate perfectly? It is temporary illusory feelings.

Venerable Ānanda understood the Buddha’s teachings, but his mind was not stable enough to attain enlightenment. The Buddha taught him to contemplate the breath at the tip of his nose so that he could control his mind to attain the way. The smoke gradually disappeared. The breath turned white until he cut off all defilements and was enlightened. Then his inhalation and exhalation turned to the light shining in the ten directions and he attained the perfect penetration.

Venerable Ananda took the nose-consciousness as the main method of achieving the goal of penetration. The nose-consciousness is the combination of the nose-organ and smells. The nose-consciousness does not arise without the nose-organ and scents. The nose-consciousness, which comes from conditions does not have form. As a result of creating the nose-nature from the mind without discrimination, he understood that the nose-consciousness nature is the absolute śūnyatā (void nature); śūnyatā is the absolute nose-consciousness. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world, neither appearing nor non-appearing. According

⁹⁵ Ibid., (Tâm Minh) p. 449.

to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, our worldly bodies and the bodies of twelve kinds of living beings are seen. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute nose-consciousness and *sūnyatā*," imagine that due to the conditions or without conditions, twelve kinds of living beings appear or disappear. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Venerable Ānanda accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles between the nose-consciousness. Then, he overcame the worldly defilements. He was liberated from the inflows from the interior body and mind, as well as the outer universe, freed from the three worlds of existence, entered the dharma realms where *sūnyatā* was pure as a gemstone.

However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because the nose-consciousness does not often present and is hard for a new practitioner to penetrate.

C.4. The tongue-consciousness

Dharma is skillfully preached by using words.

First the practitioner is awakened.

Words are the worldly objects.

How is the perfect penetration achieved?⁹⁶

Venerable Purna, who was one of the Buddha's ten great disciples, is famous as being chief among dharma teachers. He was brave and patient, and volunteered to preach the Buddha's teaching everywhere, especially in lawless countries. In the Saṅgha, he kept the third-highest position after Sāriputta and Mogollana.

⁹⁶ Ibid., (Bảo Giác) p. 193.

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

In India, Venerable Purna's family was rich and famous.⁹⁷ His parents loved him very much. He had a round face, compassionate eyes, and a brave and good heart. Like other children, his name was chosen based on his mother's name. In Sankrit, the full form of *Purna* is *Purnamaitrayaniputra*, while in Chinese, it is Mancizi, which means a child of Lady Manci. Purnamaitreyaniputra means a person has strong characteristics and great compassion. After he became a monk, he was successful in preaching the Buddha's teachings.

Besides compassion, he had the gift of giving public sermons. He knew how to lecture according to the qualifications of the audience. He could explain the Buddha's ideas in various ways, so that people could understand the meaning of his teachings. In the country of Kosala, he advised those who lived in solitude to leave their peaceful places and go spread dharma for the sake of many. In the Saṅgha, he also used skillful words to advise monks to avoid the wrong things. In the second council on Grdhrakuta Mountain in Vesali, with focus on the Vinaya, Venerable Maha Kassapa reminded monks to keep strictly the eight points on food, such as storing food, boiling water, cooking food, taking food alone, bringing food from outside, eating fruits, eating plants from the lake, and to avoid eating meat and fish.

Venerable Purna, belonging to the group of liberal monks, disagreed on the eight things which Venerable Maha Kassapa proposed. His preeminent characteristic among the Order was that he was the dharma preacher who volunteered to teach Buddhism to cruel people in remote places. Therefore, he was known as the foremost dharma preacher.

Due to his compassion, strong mind, persuasive skills and teaching

⁹⁷ Bhikkhu Minh Tuệ, Tôn Giả Xá Lợi Phất, (Thập Đại Đệ Tử Phật, *The Great Disciples of the Buddha*), HCM City Publishing, 1991
(<http://www.tanghuphathoc.com/nvpg/09.htm>)

merits, the Buddha praised and predicted that he would be a Buddha named Dharmaprabhasa (the Bright Dharma Tathāgata) in this saha world.

In his preaching career, Venerable Purna did not care about compliments or reverence. If there was an opportunity to preach, he earnestly spread dharma regardless of the dangers, setbacks, and remote areas. According to the Buddha's words, after each annual retreat, monks have to go to many areas to propagate dharma. There was no one teaching dharma in the country of Sudana. This area was underdeveloped, and people were cruel and uncivilized. The Buddha was worried about the monks' lives; hence he omitted this area. However, Venerable Purna volunteered to preach dharma in Sudana. The Buddha asked him, "Are you not scared of the dangerous inhabitants?"

He said to the Buddha modestly, "World-Honored One! Monks must have the will to seek bodhi to save beings. Difficulty is a challenge to us. People in Sudana need to be shown the light of Buddha dharma to dispel the shadow of ignorance. No matter how tough the work, how dangerous to my life, I want to preach dharma in Sudana. Please allow me."

The Buddha asked, "If you come to Sudana where people are cruel and may insult you, what will you do?"

Purna answered, "Blessed One, I am happy because they will only scold me. They will not use a stick to hurt my body."

The Buddha continued, "If they attack you with punches, stones, and sticks, what will you do?"

Purna replied, "Blessed One, I am happy because they will only expel me. They will not injure me with knives."

Buddha continued, "If they do injure you with knives, stones, and

sticks, what will you do?”

Purna replied, “Blessed One, I am happy because they will not kill me.”

Buddha continued, “If they do kill you, what will you do?”

Purna replied, “Blessed One, I must thank them for letting me enter nirvana early. I am ready to die for the sake of preaching the Law.”

The Buddha was overjoyed at his wonderful words. He praised him, saying, “Purnamaitreyaniputra, you are worthy to be my great disciple. Your brave patience in preaching dharma is excellent.”

In front of the assembly, the Buddha said, “Bhikkhus! Purna is a brave dharma preacher in the career of education. He is worthy of praise in many ways. A dharma teacher needs to have these ten virtues:

1. Understand dharma
2. Speak fluently
3. Fearlessness in front the public
4. Debating smoothly
5. Skillful expedience
6. According to the qualities of people and environment, give the proper dharma
7. Dignity
8. Diligent progress
9. Strong body and mind
10. Having power in success

“Bhikkhus! Venerable Purna has all of these virtues; I am not worried about him anymore. I feel confident to let him go to Sudana for his preaching career.” As the Buddha predicted, Venerable Purna was safe and obtained a successful outcome.

Within a year, he converted over five hundred to be the Buddha's disciples and built fifty Buddhist vihāras. Venerable Purna was worthy to be the foremost dharma preacher because he achieved four virtues of a bodhisattva as follows:

1. To hear dharma, he is introspective and listens listen to them without judging.
2. He does not need to chase after the hearing and enjoy the leisure because the defilements easily arise then. He does not need to be a scholar, because the desire easily arises from that. In contrast, contemplating the false substance of things cuts off desire and reflecting on dependent origination ⁹⁸ transforms ignorance.
3. Meditating on five skandhas, twelve entrances, eighteen realms,

⁹⁸ Twelve cause-conditions (*pratītyasamutpāda*, *paṭiccasamuppāda*):

1. *Avijja* (ignorance or lack of wisdom, which is the root of all evils. Obscuration as to self of persons and self of phenomena.
2. *Sankhara*: karma formations, compositional action, wholesome or unwholesome thoughts, speech, and bodily deeds.
3. *Vinnana*: consciousness, normally six consciousnesses but is taken as eight in the Yogacara School.
4. *Nama-rupa*: Name and form, corporeality and mentality, mental and physical existence. Four mental aggregates and one physical body.
5. *Ayatana*: Six bases, six sense-organs/spheres, eyes, ears, nose, tongue, touch, and mental faculty.
6. *Phassa*: sense impression, contact and mental factors and the period in which the objects, sense power/organ and consciousness come together, causing one to distinguish an object as pleasurable, painful, or neutral.
7. *Vedana*: feeling, sensation, posited as a mental factor that experiences pleasure, pain, and neutral feeling. Pleasure leads to a strong desire for more while pain generates an avoidance desire.
8. *Tanha*: craving, attachment, a mental factor that increases desire but without any satisfaction.
9. *Upadana*: clinging, grasping, a stronger degree of desire. Four basic varieties: desired objects, views of self, bad system of ethics and conduct; and other wrong views.
10. *Bhava*: process of becoming, existence, a period lasting from the time of fully potentialized karma up to the beginning of the next lifetime.
11. *Jati*: rebirth
12. *Jara-marana*: aging and death, decay, and death.

twelve causes and conditions (*pratītyasamutpāda*, *paṭiccasamuppāda*) from which bodhisattvas can attain the intuitive wisdom as well as the fruitless insight can end the discrimination and have enough capacity to convert living beings.

4. Initially, practicing serving others and upholding precepts diligently, bodhisattvas determinedly attain the bodhi nature.

After three months, when the Buddha passed away, Venerable Maha Kassapa assembled monks on Gruhakuta Mount to collect and organize the Buddha's teachings. When the council was about to finish, Venerable Maha Kassapa asked Venerable Purna for some other ideas or to add some necessary things. Venerable Purna said to Venerable Maha Kassapa, "I agree with you on all things except the eight points on food."

After the council finished, Venerable Purna continued going everywhere and preaching the dharma so that everyone could be affected the Buddha's light to lead a peaceful life.

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Venerable Purnamaitrayaniputra rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "For many lives (kalpas), I who had been an excellent preacher on the doctrine of dukkha and śūnyatā, penetrated absolute reality, as well as the countless secret Tathāgata's dharmas, used skillfulness to guide living beings, and attain the wonderful fearlessness. The World-Honored One realized that I possessed talent with public speaking, so he taught me how to use the dharma sound to spread Buddhism. In the Buddha's presence, I helped him turn the dharma wheel. By means of the tongue-consciousness, I achieved arahantship. The Buddha approved my being the foremost at skillful speaking on expounding the dharma. Then he asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, using the dharma sound to transform heretics and the end of rebirth cycle

is the best.”⁹⁹

In brief, Venerable Purna took his tongue-consciousness as the main cause to be enlightened. He always thought and spoke dharma in a mindful state, so he accumulated the supreme seeds leading to perfect penetration. He understood that the tongue-consciousness nature is the absolute *sūnyatā*; *sūnyatā* is the absolute tongue-consciousness. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, tongue-consciousness is known. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about “the absolute tongue-consciousness and *sūnyatā*” imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, tongue-consciousness appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Venerable Purna accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles between the tongue-consciousness. Then, he overcame the worldly defilements. He was liberated from the inflows (*srava*), from the inside body and mind, as well as the outer universe, freed from the three worlds of existence like a bird escaping from its cage. The Tathāgata approved his enlightened position of outflows. However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because the tongue-consciousness that often connects the words, speech, and sentences, is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate. It is difficult for them to cultivate this way. Thus, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not select this method.

⁹⁹ Giới Hương, trans., *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Tâm Minh), p. 451.

C.5. The body-consciousness

Keeping the precepts only controls the body.

Without body, what is there to control?

The body-consciousness is illusory without pervading all.

How is the perfect penetration achieved?¹⁰⁰

In the Buddha's time, there were two people named Upāli in the Saṅgha. One was a monk whose duty was to collect feces, while the other was a barber. This story pertains to the latter. This monk strictly kept his dignity as the monastic discipline required. He took the body-consciousness as the main cause to penetrate the perfection. Venerable Upāli was one of the Buddha's ten great disciples. He kept the precepts so strictly that Buddha promoted him as the keeper of the rules. He was preeminent among those who knew the disciplinary rules by heart.

Upāli¹⁰¹ was born into the lowest class (*sudras*). He had no right to receive an education. People belonging to the lowest class could only work at manual labor, such as keeping horses, clearing feces, working in the fields, and so on. His body was thin and fragile, so his parents trained him to be a barber. Soon he became a professional barber.

Someone helped to arrange for Upāli to get a job as a barber for the princes in Kapilvastu Palace. Because of his honesty and kindness, all of the princes, Prince Bhaddiya, Prince Aniruddha, and Prince Kapphina liked to keep him in the palace with them as a special barber. When the Buddha returned to his hometown, Kapilvastu, Upāli was recommended to do the haircut for the Buddha. Upāli was so nervous that he brought his mother along. During the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 193.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Tôn Giả Xá Lợi Phất,

<http://www.tangthuphathoc.com/nvpg/10.htm>

haircut, Upāli's mother asked the Buddha, "How is Upāli's skill?" The Buddha replied, "His body is too crooked." Upāli immediately straightened his body and attained the first level of samādhi. After a while, Upāli's mother asked again, and the Buddha replied, "Now the body is too straight." Upāli relieved his tension and attained the second level of samādhi. After a while, Upāli's mother asked again, and the Buddha replied, "The inhalation is too brisk." Upāli concentrated his breath regularly and attained the third level of samadhi. After a while, his mother asked again and the Buddha replied, "The exhalation is too brisk." Upāli now paid attention to his skills as a barber, but there was no thought. The Buddha knew Upāli had achieved the fourth level of samādhi. After the haircut was finished, Upāli was delighted because he had an opportunity to approach and serve the Buddha. We can learn here that Upāli was very attentive in his work. He was strict with himself, could listen to Buddha's ideas with an open mind, and corrected the body's manner and breath at once. Hence, he was preeminent among those people who kept the rules.

While the Buddha remained in the palace, many people were enlightened after listening to his teachings. Many princes left their palaces to be ordained by the Buddha. Besides Princes Mahabhadhiya and Mahamana, who renounced some time ago, there were also Devadatta and Ānanda (the son of King Suklodanaraja), Aniruddha (the son of King Amrtodana), Bhagu (the son of King Dronodana) and Rāhula (the son of King Suddhondana). When the Buddha had accepted the service, Prince Bhadhiya called his barber, Upāli, to help the Buddha. Upāli had been serving Prince Bhadhiya for a long time and later he also worked for other princes. Upāli shed tears while seeing to princes who happily had their hair shaved to be renunciates. Upāli felt pity for himself because he could not be ordained like the princes. Seeing this, Venerable Sāriputta advised, "Upāli! You know there is no social class in the Buddha's Saṅgha, so why do you drop

tears? The Buddha never discriminates between rich and poor, ignorant or clever. Whoever wants to renounce to get out of *samsāra*, the Buddha will guide the way for him. The Buddha's boundless compassion is as the breath of all beings, the heart of *dharma*, and a vast ocean which can contain all things, endure all dirty things from all rivers and streams. The Buddha's mercy is like a space which does not refuse anything. It covers the phenomena, the universe, as well as all animate or inanimate beings. Those who want to enter the Buddha's *Saṅgha* must be honest and keep the precepts seriously. You are honest, modest, and patient. Come with me, the Buddha will be glad to ordain you."

The Buddha accepted Upāli and said, "Upāli! Before you cut my hair, you showed your monastic attitude. You have a good nature and concentrated on your work. You attained four states of *samadhi*, so this period is the right time for your ordination. The reason I left my palace and became a monk was because I wanted to find fairness in society. Therefore, my Buddhism upholds equality for all. Anyone who cultivates diligently and upholds the precepts will be enlightened, regardless of skin color or position. After seven days, the ordination ceremonies will be held. Seven days is the time for their practice. Let them meditate and inwardly contemplate to forget their noble status."

Upāli was ordained before all princes which expressed the equality in the *Saṅgha*. On the day Prince Bhaddiya was ordained, the Buddha asked him to prostrate to Upāli because Upāli was his elder. The Buddha wanted to eliminate the lowest class (*sudras*) and highest classes (*kshatriyas*),¹⁰² and transform the arrogance

¹⁰² The four classes in ancient India:

1. The Brahmins (priestly people)
2. The Kshatriyas (also called Rajanyas, who were rulers, administrators, and warriors)

(*atimāna*) and self-esteem (*mātna*) of the former royal princes.

For the first time, Upāli, from the lowest class in society, was to be Buddha's disciple and live in harmony with other classes in his Saṅgha. This event was written in the history of Buddhists. Upāli was respected because he kept the precepts strictly and never transgressed. As a careful person, he was afraid of making mistakes; he often asked the Buddha many things concerning the precepts that were written in the Vinaya Pitaka. There are some stories about events in his cultivation process:

a) An inmate cannot join a Saṅgha:

According to the custom of the Kshatriyas, the Sakya clan often marries within their clan. There was a girl named Liccavi belonging to Sakya clan. Her husband passed away while she was still young. After some time, she wanted to marry another man who did not belong to Sakya clan. Her brother-in-law disagreed with it because he wanted to marry her. In order to take revenge for her refusing his proposal, he put a narcotic in her food. After taking the meal, she was heavily drugged and he tied and beat her cruelly. He brought her to the court and said to the judge, "She is my wife and she had relations with another man from an outside clan. Please punish her." She was subject to execution, but she escaped from the prison. She ran to a nunnery in Vesali to be ordained. The king in Kapilavatthu was informed about the inmate running away somewhere in Vesali. She was hunted, but no one could find her. Later on, King Pasenadi knew that she was in the Bhikkhunī Order in Vesali and informed the king in Kapilavatthu. The news that a female prisoner was in the Bhikkhunī's Order in Vesali spread everywhere. Ever since then, the two countries of Vesali and Kapilavatthu have hated each other.

3. The Vaishyas (artisans, merchants, tradesmen, and farmers)

4. Shudras (laboring classes)

Hearing this story, Upāli asked the Buddha, “World-Honored One! One who violated the law, how could she be ordained?”

The Buddha replied, “Upāli, those who commit offenses are not allowed to enter the Order. Some people in the community misunderstood the Buddha, thinking that he did not feel pity for her and did not protect her. To explain this, the Buddha assembled the monks to teach that “the Saṅgha has to strive for purity. One who violates the precepts must be removed from the assembly, much more so one who has violated the law. Let her be punished. The Saṅgha needs to be respected.”

b) A bhikkhu or bhikkhunī is not allowed to be a matchmaker:

There was person who asked a monk to act as a matchmaker between a man and woman. Venerable Upāli did not know how to solve this matter. He asked the Buddha, “Can a bhikkhu or bhikkhunī become a matchmaker?”

The Buddha relied, “If a bhikkhu or bhikkhunī acts as a go-between a man and a woman, or two people of the same gender, he commits a Saṅgha Restoration Offense.”

Upāli asked, “World-Honored One! How should monks or nuns behave in regard to the various aspects of ordinary marriage?”

The Buddha replied, “You can make a ceremony or pray for them in front of the Triple Gems.”

c) A bhikkhu or bhikkhunī must care for a sick person:

Another story was that Upāli saw a sick person lying in a dirty place. While going to preach the dharma, the monks saw a patient lying on the pavement, but they left him alone. The Buddha had not taught them how to treat a sick patient. Another time, there was a sick monk in the Order, but no one took care of him. He thought to himself that no one cared about him, and he would not keep the precepts anymore. Being moved by this, Venerable Upāli came to the Buddha and asked, “World-Honored One! What is the proper way to take care of a brother when he is sick?”

The Buddha replied, “Upāli, when a brother falls ill, you must transfer him to a big room, and require people in turn day and night to take care of him, serve him, clean his room, arrange flowers, and burn incense, and so on. If other monks come to visit the patient, the attendant must treat them well. If the patient is unable to answer visitors, the disciples must answer them on his behalf. If a lay Buddhist comes to visit, you ask him to sit behind or at the feet of the patient. If they make offerings to him, he must bless them by receiving it. If the patient wants to relieve the natural call, the visitors must leave the room. A person must stand at the doorway to receive the visitors. This is the way to look after a brother. You should do the same to ill younger brothers, but do not bring them to a main room. If a patient has no brothers or teachers, the Buddhist brothers must attend to him day and night. If the patient does not have food and medicine, the monks must supply him. If the monks do not have these, they must sell the patient's possessions to exchange for food and medicine. If the patient is unwilling to sell his things, they must inform the elders. The elders must persuade him and try to go on almsround and share food with the patient. The elders must pick good nutritious food from their daily alms to supply the patient. If they are unable to get good food from their daily diet, they must go begging and provide him the good food. If the patient dies, monks should divide his personal things properly or offer them to the Triple Gems.”

Due to his great compassion, Venerable Upāli often took care of sick monks since they were alone, had no relatives, and needed care. The Buddha also emphasized that caring for patients is foremost among the kinds of merit.

d) Disruption or harmony in the Saṅgha:

As the foremost in keeping precepts, Venerable Upāli always noted the proper rules and disciplines, especially relating to disruption or harmony in the Saṅgha. The Saṅgha is a harmonious assembly, everyone lives and cultivates together. If there is disharmony, it is a big disaster. Living in a community, the virtue of harmony is necessary to fulfill the Buddha's work. In a small family, if a husband fights with his wife, they cannot live happily. In a big group, if everyone mutually respects each other, they can live in harmony. Hence, in the Order, as monks gather, the master will ask, "Is there harmony in the community?" If there is any disharmony or disagreement, the meeting will not take place."

One day, in Sravasti, Upāli asked the Buddha, "World- Honored One, what is the disruption of hamony among the Order?"

The Buddha replied, "Upāli! If there is anyone in the Saṅgha critizing or slandering other monks so that they cause misunderstanding or hate, it is called disruption of the Saṅgha harmony. If a lay Buddhist discriminates in offerings, uses words or action that cause division and chaos between monks, thid is called destroying the concord of the Order. If the government interrupts the assembly by criticizing or expelling monks, this is also called disruption of the harmony of the Order. Those who disrupt the concord or harmony of the assembly, after death, they will fall into hell."

Upāli asked, "World-Honored One! What is harmony of the Saṅgha?"

The Buddha replied, "Upāli! Those who prostrate, make offerings,

and praise the merits of monks properly. This is called harmony of the Saṅgha.”

Upāli asked, “What is the merit for people contributing to the harmony of the Saṅgha?”

The Buddha replied, “Those who create harmony in the Saṅgha will get much merit and blessing for many lives.”

Venerable Upāli was a modest monk who was comprehensive in regard to the rules and precepts formulated by the Buddha. He knew the rules clearly, but because he wanted to maintain the harmony of the Saṅgha, he asked the Buddha such questions so that monks would remember. Besides upholding and discussing rules and precepts with the Buddha, Venerable Upāli also judged, arranged the confessions, and explained in detail the rules for monks who broke the precepts. In the Bhikkhunī Order, women were often shy, and they did not dare ask the Buddha anything. So, they often asked Venerable Upāli for advice when they had disagreements about the precepts. Venerable Upāli had enough seniority to decide anything relating to the rules.

After the Buddha passed away, the first council was held in Sattapanni Cave at Vebhara Mount. There were 1,250 arahants who participated. Most Venerable Maha Kassapa was the head of the council. Venerable Ānanda recited the sūtras, while Venerable Mahakatyayana recited the dharma, and Venerable Upāli recited the precepts of the Order eighty times. Since then, the practice of reading the Vinaya Pitaka eighty times was begun. According to the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, Venerable Upāli was not the only one reciting the rules of the Order, but also represented the Buddha to control the Order and became the first patriarch. However, according to the Mahāyāna tradition, Venerable Maha Kassapa was the first patriarch. According to Therāvada tradition, those who want to be enlightened must uphold the precepts.

Venerable Upāli, who was foremost in keeping the precepts, was worthy of being the first patriarch. In the Mahāyāna tradition, those who want to be enlightened must realize from mind to mind, without expression in words, transmission beyond verbal teachings. Venerable Maha Kassapa experienced this profound meaning when the Buddha held up a lotus flower on Gruhakuta Mount. Venerable Maha Kassapa was not only the leader of the council for collecting the scriptures, but also the first patriarch in the Mahāyāna tradition.

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Venerable Upāli rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "I personally followed the Buddha to renounce from the kingdom. I saw how he bore the severe ascetic practices in six years, how he converted Mara, heretics, and liberated worldly craving and impure inflows from his mind. Thanks to the Buddha's guidance on discipline, I can purely keep up to three thousand rules regarding manners, eighty thousand of subtle conducts, the precept nature, and prevention. As my body and mind were so tranquil, I attained arahantship. The Tathāgata sealed my mind for my seriously keeping the precepts and body observation. By the means of body-consciousness, I achieved arahantship. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, by keeping the precepts regarding the body, the body was dignified; by observing the precepts regarding mind, the mind was able to penetrate, and both body, as well as mind, were perfect penetration. This is the best."¹⁰³

Venerable Upāli took his body-consciousness as the main cause to attain penetration. Because he upheld the precepts seriously, three thousand demeanors, eighty thousand subtle virtues, and the precept nature were pure. His mind and body were so tranquil that

¹⁰³ Giói Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Tâm Minh), pp. 452–453.

he attained arahantship. In the Saṅgha, he was the foremost disciple in keeping precepts. The Tathāgata approved of his mind for his strict observance of discipline and controlling of the body. He kept the precepts of body; the body was dignified and he observed the precepts of mind. Both body and mind were perfect penetration.

He understood that the body-consciousness nature is the absolute śūnyatā; śūnyatā is the absolute body-consciousness. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, the body-consciousness is known. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute body-consciousness and śūnyatā," imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the body-consciousness appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Venerable Upāli accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles between the bodies. Then he overcame the worldly defilements. He was liberated from inflows, from the inside body and mind as well as the outer universe, freed from the three worlds of existence like a bird escaping from its cage. By transforming the impurities and defilements, his dharma-eye now was pure and perfect and he attained arahantship. The Tathāgata approved him to achieve the outflows. However, beginners who do not know how to restrain the body without detachment find it difficult to uproot the defilements. Thus, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not select this method.

**C.6. The mental-consciousness,
superpowers come by practicing in previous lives,
does it relate with the mental-consciousness?
It cannot present without the external object shadow,
how is perfect penetration achieved?¹⁰⁴**

The Buddha preached the dharma for forty-five years. Besides Venerable Ānanda, who was his attendant, two chief disciples, Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Moggallanā (also called Manda Galyayana, Maudgalyāyana, and Mahāmaudgalyāyana)¹⁰⁵ were also his assistants. Sāriputta and Moggallanā were close friends. At the beginning, searching for the truth, they were disciples of the Sanyaya Sect, but later when they realized the doctrine of dependent origination, they became the Buddha's disciples. Venerable Sāriputta was the foremost in wisdom and head of the Saṅgha. Venerable Moggallanā had the ability to transform the defiled inflows. After seven days of renunciation, Venerable Moggallanā ended the inflows, gained supernatural powers, and stood in the second highest position in the Saṅgha.

a) The renunciation and superpower of Venerable Moggallanā:

Venerable Moggallanā was born in northern India, Maggadha. His father's name was Kausthila and his mother's name was Moggali. Venerable Moggallanā had a square face and long ears and had a positive attitude. He was an optimist, mighty, and righteous. Although he followed the Sanyaya Sect, one of six heretical masters, he, along with Sāriputta, established their own school. In a short time, each had one hundred disciples. As soon as they heard about the principle of causes-conditions, they found the Buddha

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 193.

¹⁰⁵ Tôn Giả Mục Kiền Liên, February 14, 2019.<http://www.tangthuphathoc.com/nvpg/03.htm>

and became his disciples. Venerable Sāriputta was the Buddha's right hand and Venerable Moggallanā was the Buddha's left hand. While other disciples were cultivating in the vihāra, Venerable Sāriputta and Moggallanā often went everywhere to preach dharma on behalf of the Buddha. Venerable Moggallanā never tired of preaching dharma. Based on his supernatural powers, he never compromised with the heretics.

In the Saṅgha, he was the master of supernatural powers. He often used his powers in all situations as skillful means to convert living beings. He thought that people would believe him if they saw him use his supernatural powers. The basic method of cultivation is not supernatural powers; supernatural powers could not help people escape their karma. It is possible that supernatural powers could control beings, but it might not be the right way to convert peoples' hearts. Although the Buddha blamed Moggallanā for taking advantage of his supernatural powers, Moggallanā did not listen.

When the people of Virudhaka surrounded the kingdom of Kapilavatthu, Venerable Moggallanā could use his supernatural powers to protect the Sakya royal clan, but based on karma, everyone in the palace was on fire and he failed to save his mother's life. He could not escape his old karma too and passed away on the road due to the evil revenge of heretics. He was reborn to preach dharma in Kalasila.

Some people use miraculous power to do unrighteous things. For example, Devadatta always desired to have the Buddha let him control the Saṅgha. The Buddha knew his wrong ambition and did not teach him the spiritual powers. The significance of spiritual powers is to help people see the nature of all things or phenomena through time and space, but the Buddha did not regard it as important as suggested by the following story:

One day, a brahman demonstrated his power on a riverbank and the crowd clapped. The brahman was more interested in performing when he saw the Buddha come close.

The Buddha asked, “How long have you cultivated this superior power?”

The Brahman answered, “I cultivated this for about thirty years and when I attained these powers, I could fly over a river without a raft.”

The Buddha said, “It costs half of your life to go across a river. It is so expensive. I spend only a cent to give the boatman and I can cross it.”

b) The story of Venerable Moggallanā converting an old woman:

Another day, when Venerable Moggallanā Moggallanā went to beg alms, he stopped at the bakery of an old woman. He was standing some time to wait for her donation, but she did nothing. He continued patiently waiting for her. Seeing this, she asked him to leave the bakery.

“Why do you keep standing here in the early morning? Don’t you know that I have not sold any cakes all morning, so please go away.”

He insisted, “Please give me a cake or some rice.”

The old woman, “I am poor, I have nothing. Don’t you see my low-roofed house? I do not bake cakes yet. Don’t be like a child.”

He continued, “If you do not give me a cake, I will cause your house to collapse by means of magic.”

The old woman, “Do you know the means of magic? Why don’t you die by means of magic? If you can do it, I will offer you some

cakes.”

Then he used his superior power to shake his body three times and died. Although she was scared, she thought, “Luckily the corpse cannot eat anything, so I do not him a need to give cake. But now I must bury you. How much suffering this is causing me!”

Suddenly, Venerable Moggallanā stood up and replied, “I am still alive. Please give me cakes.”

The old woman replied, “I told you I am poor. Please leave this place. Let me sell cakes.”

He said to her, “Now I will cause a big rock to collapse your house.”

When she heard this, she was angry and so scared of him that she chose a small cake to hand him. But all of the cakes were big and she thought if she gave it to him, she would not have profits. She tried to pick out a small cake but none was small enough. Strangely, all small cakes stuck together. She was so angry that she brought a pot in front of him and said, “Here, you should eat up. All cakes stuck together!” He happily recognized that her good seeds appeared gradually, so he took a cake and left.

c) Venerable Moggallanā converting Uppalavanna:

On one occasion, Venerable Moggallanā went through a nice garden and saw a beautiful middle-aged lady. She was happy to greet him and invited him to enter the garden to chat. He knew that this was not good. He refused, “You should not seduce me. Your appearance is beautiful but, your inside is like a thread. Although you are sad, you should not use your beauty to kill time. I advise that you should not play with fire because it will soon burn you. The more you indulge in sexual pleasure, the more impure your mind. In mud, the more you shake, the deeper you get stuck. You

create bad karma easily, but you have a good mind. Please do good things. You still have a good future ahead.”

Hearing what Venerable Moggallanā said, she cried out, “Sir, I knew it, but I had no way. I used sexual desire to forget my painful past.”

Venerable Moggallanā advised her calmly, “Normally, what you try to forget, you remember more. The more you remember, the more you hurt. The more you hurt, the more hatred there is. The more hatred, the crazier you are. There are two kinds of strong persons: one who has no mistakes and one who makes mistakes but knows how to repent. Dirty clothes can be washed by water. An impure mind can be purified by Buddha dharma. If you repent your offenses, you will become a role model.”

She answered, “But I committed many offenses, how could I wash them out? Taking advantage of my beauty and property, I harmed many of the lustful men. I broke up many families. Everyone cursed me so much that I almost died. If I talk about everything in my life, you will hate me much more.”

He replied, “Thanks to the Buddha dharma, I understand you, so please go ahead.”

She continued, “I was the daughter of a wealthy merchant from Savatthi. My name is Uppalavanna. When I was sixteen, I was married and my husband’s father passed away. My husband’s mother, who was still beautiful, seduced my husband. They had an incestuous relationship. I was disappointed and suggested a divorce. I left a baby girl at home, wandered everywhere like a madwoman. After that, I married a young businessman. I worked as a housewife, and he often did his business outside. When he had abundant money, he returned home, brought a young and beautiful girl from his business, and sent her to his friend’s house. He often

made excuses to go over to his friend's house.

Everyone talked about my husband. I was jealous and decided to find out who broke up my family's happiness. When I saw her, I knew that she was the daughter of my ex-husband. What karma! My husband's mother seduced my husband and my daughter, and I had the same husband. What do I call her? Who can endure these circumstances? When I woke, I could not bear it anymore. Again, I left my home. I searched for illusory happiness through being sexual with men. This is my life. Can you save me from this suffering?"

After hearing what Uppalavanna said, Venerable Moggallanā explained to her about the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination, cause-effect, karma. When he saw that she understood, he brought her to the Buddha to be ordained. She made a sincere repentance, cultivated diligently, and in a short time attained arahantship.

d) Venerable Moggallanā's filial piety:

In the Saṅgha, Venerable Moggallanā was noted not only for his great supernatural powers, but also for his filial piety as the Ullambana Sūtra illustrated.

One day, he remembered his dead mother. He used his superpower to see where his mother was living. He saw his mother suffering in hell. She was very thin, weak, and hungry. He handed a bowl of rice to her. She was glad to hold it with her left hand covering a bowl and using her right hand take rice. But suddenly the rice turned into charcoal, and she could not eat. Venerable Moggallanā used many means but failed to help, so he cried sadly.

When he went to ask the Buddha to advise him, the Buddha said gently, "Venerable Moggallanā! When your mother was alive, she slandered the three Triple Gems. She did not believe in cause and

effect. She was so stingy that she never gave anything to anyone; she even never gave an ant a grain of rice. That is why she is receiving such retribution. Although you have supernatural power, you are not able to change her karma.

However, you can wait until the fifteenth day of the seventh month. Every year on the last day of summer retreat, all monks who have completed the three-month retreat earn lots of merit, as well as blessings. They can pray for your mother to be released from hell.”

As the Buddha taught on the fifteenth day of the lunar seventh month every year, Venerable Moggallanā made offerings to all holy monks who united their efforts, minds, merits, and virtues, and prayed for his mother and other people in the realms of suffering. Ever since then, the Ullambana Sūtra festival was born. “Ullambana” means “hanging down” or “to be in suspense” and expresses the extreme misery in purgatory.

e) Venerable Moggallanā paid the last karma before passing away:

In the Buddha’s time, Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Moggallanā were the Buddha’s most powerful assistants. Heretics and leaders from other religions were frightened of them. Venerable Sāriputta used his exceptional insight, while Venerable Moggallanā used his miraculous spirit to conquer and convert the heretics. Thus, many other religious people hated them and found opportunities to try and assassinate them.

One day, while Venerable Moggallanā went to beg alms with Reverend Mazu, the heretics saw them passing at the foot of a hill. They surrounded Venerable Moggallanā and beat him to death. According to other sources, the death of Venerable Moggallanā was as follows: On Isigili Mount, the heretics awaited the chance

to assassinate him, and pushed some heavy rocks down the hill to crush Venerable Moggallanā.

Another document stated that while Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Moggallanā were on a mission of propagating the dharma, many disciples of other sects interrupted them and argued. They asked Sariputta, “Do we have the fruit of *śramaṇa* ?” Sāriputta knew their intentions and replied, “There is no *śramaṇa* in your Nirgrantha Sect. There is the fruit of *śramaṇa* in the Sakya Saṅgha. If there were an arahant still infected by desire, the foolish would not exist in the world. They did not understand his words and thought they were being praised, so they let him go.

They turned back to ask Venerable Moggallanā the same question. He answered trenchantly, “There is no arahantship in your Nirgrantha Sect.”

They thought he was patronizing them, so they beat him badly and knocked him down until he fainted. The heretics left his body alone because they thought he died. Venerable Sāriputta came back to find his friend saw Moggallanā on the ground unconscious. He used his robe to bring Moggallanā back to the vihāra.

The monks asked, “Venerable Moggallanā, you have your physical and mental superior power, why didn’t you use it?”

Moggallanā replied, “It was the sudden attack. I could not use the supernatural powers because I want to pay my last karma.”

Then he entered nirvana. Although there are some different versions of this incident, all of them have in common the belief that he died due to the heretics. The news on Venerable Maha Moggallanā’s passing away at the hands of assassins spread like wildfire. King Ajatasattu ordered his men to investigate and arrest the culprits. The assassins were caught and burned to death. After burying Venerable Moggallanā, Sāriputta asked Reverend Manzu

to bring the relics of Moggallanā to the Buddha.

The Buddha assembled the monks, “Monks, looking at Venerable Moggallanā’s relics, when you have a body, you have your own karma. The body is impermanent. Birth and death are the facts of karma, you should not be afraid of it. After leaving the body, you should keep the pure mind without anger or revenge. Among various kinds of karma, the death moment is the most important. Venerable Moggallanā died for preaching the dharma. His death is commendable indeed. The soldier who bravely sacrifices for his cause is worthy of being an heroic soldier. We have to put his relics on the stupa and worship them.”

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Venerable Maha Maudgalyayana rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha, and said, "One day on the road when I was begging for alms, I met three brothers of Maha Kassapa, Uruvilva, Gaya, and Nadi who explained the deep doctrine of dependent origination that was taught by the Tathāgata. My mind was suddenly awakened and became able to penetrate this teaching. Then the Tathāgata handed me a monk's robe to wear, and my hair, as well as beard, fell out spontaneously. I, who created the superpower to travel in the ten directions without interference, was promoted as the unsurpassed and reached arahantship. My magic power was pure, flexible, bright, perfect, and fearless was praised by the World-Honored One and all Tathāgatas in ten directions. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, I turned the mental-consciousness to the tranquillity, to brightly enlighten as muddy water becomes pure after being still for a time. So, the mental-consciousness is the

best.”¹⁰⁶

Venerable Moggallānā took the mental-consciousness as the main cause to be enlightened. Since he had meditated for many lives, as soon he heard the doctrine of causality from Maha Kassapa, his brother in this life, he understood at once. He realized that everything was illusory and entered the penetration. He could travel everywhere by using his transcendental power which was pure, flexible, bright, perfect, and fearless, praised by the Buddha and all Tathāgatas in ten directions. He understood that the mental-consciousness nature is the absolute śūnyatā; śūnyatā is the absolute mental-consciousness. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings’ karma, in response to their capacities, mental-consciousness is known. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about “the absolute mental-consciousness and śūnyatā,” imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the mental-consciousness appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Venerable Moggallānā accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles between the mental-consciousness.

However, a new practitioner finds it difficult to penetrate mental-consciousness because the mental consciousness often attaches to thinking, clings dependently to the external world, cannot stand by itself, and becomes useless if it is alone. Its function is limited by the appearance of conditions. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose the mental-consciousness.

¹⁰⁶The Samādhi Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Kinh Lăng Nghiêm), translated into Vietnamese by Tâm Minh; translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, HCM City, pp. 445–446.

D) Seven Elements

D.1. The Earth

Let us reflect on the nature of the earth.

It is obstruction without penetration.

Belonging to the worldly it lacks spirituality.

How is the perfect penetration achieved?¹⁰⁷

Venerable Dharanimdhara (the Earth Preserver) rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and revealed, "I remember many eons ago, the Universal Light Buddha descended into the world. I was a bhikkhu who used to stay at the riverbank or in the impassable rough areas with no roads. I built bridges and drains, carried sand or soil to improve the road. I worked hard at it for a long period as measureless Buddhas appeared in the world.

As Vishvabhu Buddha descended into the world, there was a food shortage. When I carried people, I charged only a coin regardless of how far or near their destination. If an ox cart became stuck in a mud swamp, I used my strength to push its wheels out. One day, the king invited that Buddha for a feast. The road was uneven, so I smoothed it out for him. Vishvabhu Tathāgata gently put his hand on my head and uttered, "If your mind is balanced, the earth over the world will be flat." I realized the meaning in such a deep way that I experienced the molecules of my body and the world as the same. These molecules did not touch one another. I achieved the Uncreated-Dharma Patience (Anutpattika-Dharmakshanti), as well as arahantship. I turned my mind to Mahāyāna and dwelled in the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 194.

bodhisattva stage. When I heard the Tathāgatas explain the Buddha's view as a wonderful lotus, I was the first listener to be enlightened in the Saṅgha. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, I reflected on both the earth in the body and the world that are the same and originally from the Tathāgatagarbha. Based on dependent origination, all phenomena are illusory. Once the earth disappeared, the insight was perfect, and I gained the supreme bodhi. So, the earth method is the best."¹⁰⁸

Venerable Dharanimdhara (the Earth Preserver) remembered that many eons ago, since the time of Universal Light Buddha descending into this world, countless Buddhas appeared. He has been a monk who often repaired roads, covered potholes, and built bridges for people without taking money.

On one occasion, Dharanimdhara Bodhisattva heard that the Vishvabhu Buddha was going to walk to the palace for a feast. He who improved the bad roads waited for the Buddha to pass. The Buddha gently placed his hand on the head of Dharanimdhara Bodhisattva, then said, "If your mind is balanced, the earth all over the world will be flat." Upon hearing this, he understood its philosophy right away. If there is a peaceful mind, war will not happen. If there is no peaceful mind, war and many obstacles will surround us. If the mind is calm, the surroundings will be peaceful even if there is a destructive storm.

Dharanimdhara Bodhisattva took the earth as the main cause to be enlightened. He realized that his body and the world come from the earth. All discriminations were ended. He achieved the Uncreated-Dharma Patience, as well as arahantship, turned his mind to Mahāyāna, and stayed in the bodhisattva stage. He understood that the earth nature is the absolute *sūnyatā*; *sūnyatā* is the absolute

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., (Tâm Minh) pp. 457–459.

earth. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, the earth is seen. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute earth and śūnyatā," imagine that due to the conditions or without conditions, the earth appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Dharanimdhara Bodhisattva accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles between the earth. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because the worldly earth, which is often a solid obstruction, follows the object to appear or disappear, and is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate.

D.2. The Water

Let us reflect the nature of water.

**The wordly thought is untrue,
the absolute truth is not from the reflection.
How is the perfect penetration achieved?¹⁰⁹**

Candraprabha Bodhisattva rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "I remember that for countless previous kalpas, as many as grains of sand in the Ganges, Varuna Buddha descended into the world, and taught bodhisattvas to reflect on the water element to attain samādhi. This method means to meditate on the water in the body without obstruction. It is the same with all watery elements, such as snot, saliva, secretion, blood, urine, and excrement. The water in the body is the same as that of the fragrant oceans in the Pure Lands of Buddhas beyond our world. When I succeeded in this reflection, I realized that the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 194.

water in the body is the same as that of the fragrant oceans in the Pure Lands of Buddhas beyond our world.

When I was a bhikkhu practicing meditation, from a window a disciple who glanced into the room saw only a room full of water. He innocently picked up a small piece of tile, threw it into the water with a splash, cast a brief look and left. Later when I finished the meditation, I felt a heart attack, as if Venerable Sāriputta was punched by an evil demon. I thought, “Since I attained arahantship, I was freed from the factors associated with sickness. Why today do I suddenly feel like I am having a heart attack? Did I go astray?”

At that time, my disciple returned, explained that he saw the room full of water and threw a tile in it. I ordered him, “Next time, you will again see water in my room. Please open the door and enter to take the piece of tile out.” He agreed and did as I asked. Next time as I withdrew from dhyāna, my pain had disappeared. Later, I met measureless Buddhas and up to the time I met Sagaravaradhara-buddhi-vikridita-bhijna Buddha, under whose instruction I achieved samādhi to experience the water in body and the fragrant oceans in ten directions as the absolute śūnyatā, without duality, without difference. Since that time, I was called Kumarabhuta (Same Truth) and attended the Bodhisattva Assemblies. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, reflecting on the universal influence of the water to attain the Uncreated-Dharma Patience and fulfill the bodhi way is the best.”¹¹⁰

Candraprabha Bodhisattva took the contemplation of water as the main cause to be enlightened. His samādhi was so powerful that it affected others. This case is the same as the stories of Venerable

¹¹⁰ Ibid., (Tâm Minh), p. 457.

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

Subhūti and Venerable Sāriputta. When Venerable Subhūti was born, all treasures in his family home disappeared suddenly. The effect of Sāriputta's wisdom was so powerful that it turned his mother from a simple housewife to a philosopher with extraordinary wisdom. Reflecting on the water of Candraprabha Bodhisattva was so powerful that all phenomena turned to water. While he was meditating, his disciple looked through a window and saw only water, without seeing his master. This samādhi is unbelievable. It surpassed ordinary thought and description. Ordinary people like us could not understand his supreme cultivation. The disciple saw only water in his master's room based on his master's samādhi energy. Candraprabha Bodhisattva reflected that all phenomena, including his body, are nothing but water. The room and the master's body became the water. Candraprabha Bodhisattva was experiencing the state of having no body. How transcendent he was! By contemplating the water, Candraprabha Bodhisattva attained perfect penetration. He experienced his body and the world, which were made from water, united as one. He understood that the water nature is the absolute śūnyatā; śūnyatā is the absolute water. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, the water is seen. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute water and śūnyatā," imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the water appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words.

From then on, Candraprabha Bodhisattva accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles between the water. However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because a new practitioner, who easily attaches to the worldly objects, finds it difficult to realize the non-dual quality of the water in the body and the water in the world.

D.3. The Fire

Let us reflect on the fire element.

If our mind still fears fire, this is not liberation.

**Saints penetrate the fire element without fear,
realize the non-dual nature; body and fire are one.**

A beginner finds this difficult to practice.

How is the perfect penetration achieved?¹¹¹

In front of the Tathāgata, Venerable Usschusma joined his two hands, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha, and said, "I remember a long time ago in a previous kalpa, I was full of lust. At the time, Usschusma Buddha (Śūnyatā King Buddha) descended in the world, taught lustful persons to reflect that lust is hot as fire, and guided me on how to reflect on the warm and cold feeling in my body and four limbs. Thanks to that, my inner mind became tranquilly enlightened and my lust turned into the samādhi fire. All the Buddhas called me "the Fire Head" because I used strong samādhi fire to attain arahantship. I developed great vows to become a warrior who stays beside the enlightened ones, protects them, and punishes Mara and heretics. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, I reflected on the warm and cool feelings in my body to be the universal influence without hindrance. The inflows vanished, so the valuable fire arose to step up to the unsurpassed bodhi."¹¹²

Desire is the root of ignorance. We first should contemplate that our body is illusory and empty and avoid attachment. We take food

¹¹¹ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 194.

¹¹² Ibid., (Tâm Minh), p. 464.

and drink to nourish our body. We grasp the earth, water, wind, and fire (from drink and food) to be our body. This is the bond of karma and ignorance. The body exists because of old karma. Due to ignorance, we are tricked so much that we do not realize the real nature of body and we do not go search for truth.

We do not know who we are. We foolishly grasp the earth, water, wind, and fire to be our body. This is heavy ignorance. Craving our body is foolish. Craving another's body (marriage) is also blind. The Buddha exclaimed how ignorant we are! We are born from the seed of desire in this saha world. People continuously have babies to continue their lineage. The Buddha declared that nothing can compare with ignorance of the Desire Ocean.

The patriarch also emphasized that luckily there is only one kind of sexual desire in the world. If there were a second kind, or a third kind of lust, we would find it impossible to cultivate. Those who get entangled in craving (trishna) and desire (*sarāgam*) can never attain enlightenment. This desire is the most difficult to overcome.

In the Samādhi Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha said that not only must the body not commit sexual intercourse, but also the mind should be prohibited from thinking of it. Thinking about it, the cultivator cannot escape saṃsāra. This is like a worm that loves to wind cocoon silk around itself to create a prison. If carnality is not wiped out, the practice of dhyāna is like cooking sand to make rice. Even if we cultivate for hundreds of thousands of eons, it is useless. It will still be only hot sand. Ignorance and enlightenment are like darkness and brightness, and never exist at same time. The Buddha taught that if someone wanted to cultivate the hearing method of perfect penetration or even another method, he must cut off desire and the root of ignorance.

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Venerable Usschusma took fire as his main cause to be enlightened, and to transform his

lustful fire. He contemplated the warmth throughout his entire body until it became unobstructed and united with the fire. Then he entered the samādhi fire to attain arahantship. Ignorance vanished gradually, and the wisdom of insight appeared. Thanks to this, his inner mind was tranquil and enlightened; his lustful mind became the samādhi fire. The Buddhas summoned him with name, “Fire Head.”

We have not reached this level, but we know that fire comes from transcendental powers. We remember that when the Buddha passed away, the fire burning in him was also the samādhi fire that came from his insight mightiness, not from the ordinary fire. All of the monks were unable to start a fire until Most Venerable Maha Kassapa came back to prostrate to the Buddha’s body. His body automatically emitted the samādhi flame to start the fire. Ordinary people like us cannot understand this wonder. Candraprabha Bodhisattva contemplated water, while Usschusma Bodhisattva reflected on the fire. These lessons are the exemplary truths that we have never heard before. Luckily, we learn them now.

In brief, Usschasma Bodhisattva took the fire as his main cause to be enlightened. He transformed his desire to be the fire of insight and contemplated the warmth at the mind and body to understand the universal non-dual nature. As the inflows ended, the precious fire was born, and he reached the supreme bodhi. He understood that the fire nature is the absolute śūnyatā; śūnyatā is the absolute fire. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings’ karma, in response to their capacities, the fire is seen. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about “the absolute fire and śūnyatā,” imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the fire appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Usschasma Bodhisattva

accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles between the fires. He made the great vow that whenever the Buddhas get enlightened, he will become a warrior and stay beside them, protect them, and punish Mara and heretics. A new practitioner might find it difficult to reflect on fire in the body that is the same nature as the fire of all phenomena. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not select this method.

D.4. The Wind

Let us reflect on the wind.

Movement and stillness are a dualism.

It is the opposite of unsurpassed enlightenment.

How can wind serve to achieve perfection?¹¹³

Vaidurya (Crystal Light) Bodhisattva rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "I remember the countless previous kalpas, as many as grains of sand in the Ganges, the Measureless Sound Buddha descended into the world, pointed out to bodhisattvas the profoundly bright enlightenment, and reflected on the world and all creatures' bodies that were created by the wind and illusory thoughts.

At the time, I meditated on the space settling down, the time shifting, the body moving, and the mind appearing-disappearing continuously. These were all fundamentally the same movement. Then I experienced that these movements were neither in a particular place, nor did they go to any destination. Countless creature beings in ten directions came from the same wind of illusory thought. Hence, all of the existent beings in the great chiliocosm were all unreal After meeting that Buddha, I soon attained Uncreated-Dharma Patience. As my mind awakened, I

¹¹³ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 194–195.

could see the land of the Moveless Buddha in the east where I played the role of dharma Prince. I served all the Buddhas in the ten directions, so my body and mind emitted light beams to illuminate all realms without obstruction.

The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, I chose as my object the wind, with no source and no destination. I realized the bodhi mind, entered samādhi that is matched with one profound, wonderful mind and was taught by the Buddhas in ten directions. So, this wind object is the best.”¹¹⁴

Vaidurya Bodhisattva took the wind, with no source and no destination without the place to rely on as his main cause to penetrate the perfection. He contemplated his mind and body, which came from the illusory wind. Due to this illusory appearance, there was not a real thing to present. The wind had neither a source nor a destination. The world and creature beings’ bodies came from the wind of the illusory thought, like the frenzy of noisy mosquitoes in a trap. The mosquitoes’ shapes were illusory but their nature is bodhi nature. Vaidurya Bodhisattva understood that the wind nature is the absolute *śūnyatā*; *śūnyatā* is the absolute wind. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings’ karma, in response to their capacities, the wind is felt. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about “the absolute wind and *śūnyatā*” imagine that due to the conditions or without conditions, the wind appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Vaidurya Bodhisattva accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles in the wind. After he met the Buddha, he soon

¹¹⁴ Ibid. (Tâm Minh), p. 466.

attained Uncreated-Dharma Patience, realized the bodhi mind, entered samādhi, and united with the one wonderful mind that was taught by the Buddhas in ten directions. At that time, he could see the land of the Moveless Buddha in the east where he played the role as a dharma prince. He served all the Buddhas in the ten directions, so his body and mind emitted light beams to illuminate all realms without hindrances.

New practitioners find it difficult to transform the duality between motion and stillness. It is neither constant nor one that is opposite of penetration. The substantial nature of the wind is produced by the conflict and touching between motion and stillness. So, it is not easy to enter the perfect penetration. Thus, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not select the wind.

D.5. The Space

Let us reflect on the space element.

First it is dull without animation.

Unenlightenment means to differ from bodhi.

How is the perfect penetration achieved?¹¹⁵

Akashagarbha (Space Store) Bodhisattva rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "The Tathāgata and I realized our boundless bodies at the Dīpaṃkara (Samādhi Light) Buddha. At that time, my hands held four large valuable pearls to illuminate countless Buddha lands in ten directions, as many as molecules that filled the space. My mind became like a great mirror of insight and emitted ten kinds of sacred precious haloes to illuminate all worlds, up to the boundaries of space in ten directions. My mind entered the great mirror insight, intermingled freely in my own body that became as same as the space. My body

¹¹⁵ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), pp. 194–195.

could skillfully enter countless countries. This supreme energy came from my awakening to reflect on the four elements that had no place to rely on. They originated from the rising and falling illusory thoughts. I experienced the non-duality of space and the Buddha lands. By realizing the sameness, I attained the Uncreated-Dharma Patience. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my enlightened experience, I reflected on the boundless space to enter samādhi and attained the wonderful perfect power. Thus, space is the best.”¹¹⁶

Owing to false karma, our nature is divided into six organs. The environment is also divided into six worldly objects. Six sense-organs correspond with six worldly objects. The Buddha taught that due to ignorance, we see space; due to dullness, we formed the shapes. The shapes mixed with the false thoughts to create earth, water, fire, and wind or the living beings’ bodies. In fact, there is nothing in space.

Akashagarbha Bodhisattva contemplated the four elements of earth, water, wind, and fire that came from nothing. Because of false thoughts, we see four elements appear and disappear constantly. There is non-duality of the space and body. The Buddha lands are the same as the space. At that time, he achieved Uncreated-Dharma Patience. He used the space as his main cause to be enlightened. As we know, all is illusory. From the beginning, we foolishly wanted to explore the brightness of the enlightened mind. Since then, the duality seemed to divide in two, the seeing part (the subject of six organs) and what was seen (six worldly objects). We are in the state of awareness from the state of ignorance. Thank to studying Buddha dharma, we are turning back from ignorance to enlightenment.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., (Tâm Minh), p. 466.

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

Akashagarbha Bodhisattva contemplated his body and the world to be the same nature as space. Due to ignorance, we divided body and the world into two, but in fact, they are the same nature as the earth, water, wind, and fire. He realized that four elements and space are Tathāgatagarbha. The material and mental are the same essence. Hence, once the worldly objects disappear, we return to the real nature that pervades the dharma world. The dharma realm came from our mind. Earth, water, wind, and fire that are inside and outside the body, came from the mind. Once the mind is calm, the body and environment are pure and peaceful. If the mind is impure, the body and environment are impure. The Pure Land came from the mind. Akashagarbha Bodhisattva realized the wonderful bodhi nature of the Buddha in ten directions. Sakyamuni Buddha and Akashagarbha Bodhisattva have cultivated and enlightened the boundless bodies since the time of Dīpaṅkara (Samādhi Light) Buddha. The boundless bodies are the dharma kāya (body), also within these four elements. He and Sakyamuni Buddha attained the same level.

At that time, Akashagarbha Bodhisattva's hands held four large precious pearls that shone on the Buddha lands, as countless as the molecules of dust in ten directions. In his mind, there appeared a great mirror of insight that emitted ten kinds of subtle wonderful lights. It illuminated the ten directions to the farthest bounds of space and entered his body. He realized that his body was the same as space without boundaries. He skillfully went to many countries to perform the Buddha works and reached the great flexible capacity. His mind and body could illuminate countless Buddha lands.

From Akashagarbha Bodhisattva's experience of earth, water, wind, and fire as being unreal, changing constantly, he realized its nature as the space to enter samādhi and attain a wonderful bright power. However, new practitioners who reflect on the space as

inanimate find it difficult to unite the subject and object of reflection. Thus, they could not penetrate the space. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose the space.

In conclusion, Akashagarbha Bodhisattva took boundless space as the main cause to penetrate the perfection. He reflected that all phenomena come from false thought. He understood that space nature is the absolute śūnyatā; śūnyatā is the absolute space form. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings' karma, in response to their capacities, space is seen. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about "the absolute space and śūnyatā," imagine that due to the conditions or without conditions, the space appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Akashagarbha Bodhisattva accomplished his method of the perfect penetration without obstacles between space. However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this method because space is dull as an inanimate object and is difficult for a new practitioner to penetrate.

D.6. The Consciousness

Let us reflect on the consciousness element.

It changes and is impermanent.

The false thought often discriminates.

How is the perfect penetration achieved?¹¹⁷

The consciousness element is the cultivation method of Maitreya (Laughing Bodhisattva). In Sanskrit, he is called Maitreya, while in China it is Kindness One, the one bestowing kindness or laughter. Maitreya Bodhisattva cultivated kindness while Avalokiteśvara

¹¹⁷ Ibid., (Bảo Giác) p. 195.

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

Bodhisattva cultivated compassion. Perhaps people have seen an image of a fat monk laughing—this is Maitreya Bodhisattva. In some scenes, there are six naughty young novices surrounding him. One novice touches his eyes while another teases his ears, tongue, nose, and so on. Actually, these six children are a symbol of six worldly objects. Whether sad, happy, in a good or bad situation, he always smiles and is free of ignorance.

Because he was intent on getting a good reputation, he liked to speak to people in high positions or those who were rich, so Kandrakadipa (Sun Moon Light) Buddha taught him to cultivate the consciousness-only samādhi. The “consciousness-only” means that all body, world, and mind originate in our consciousness. Basically, six objects belong to the external, but their origination comes from the six sense-organs, nowhere else. Take the sound of a bell—why do we say it comes from the mind? Our mind turns to the sights and contacts them. We never see the nature of things, we only attach to the shadows that exist according to eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind.

Why does it say that consciousness turns to a bell? The bell was reflected on the pupil of the human. It is the shadow of the bell and we called it “a bell.” Dogs and cats do not call it a bell. If the eyes are blind, without pupils, we cannot see the bell. If there are no lights, we cannot see the bell. Thanks to a lot of conditions, we see an image of the bell. It is unreal. The eyes are a combination of flesh, vein, bone, water, pus. Without these parts, the eye-consciousness does not form. Thanks to mass media, today we know and understand in detail many things about parts of the body and the world. In the Buddha’s time, the tools and instruments were poor, but the ancient people knew the dharma and many awakened. For example, they would go to the corpse forest to contemplate the thirty-two parts of the body. Our life is built from these parts. Contemplating the body and the process of the nine

steps of decomposition helps us to be freed from attachment to our body. Today there are many means of mass media to help us understand what our body is made from. However, even when we see clearly each part inside our body, we do not awaken as the ancient people.

The image of the bell that we see comes from discrimination in the brain or the eye-consciousness. We do not see the real bell. The sunlight this afternoon or the lamplight accords with the nerves in the brain. There is no light from the nerves. If there is light, the nerves receive and recognize the light and image of the bell. In Vietnamese it is called “*chuông*,” while Americans call it “a bell.” Thus, the eye-consciousness relies on the shadow and names it the bell. The image of the bell exists thanks to many causes and conditions. Maitreya Bodhisattva reflected with insight that from the consciousness, phenomena arise.

We who touch the bell, feel the coolness of it. Our hands contact the bell and the feeling appears. This all comes from nerves. Let’s take another example: Once we ring the bell, do we hear the sound of the bell or are we hearing something inside the ears? The ear nerves combine with the vibration of air to help us recognize the sound of the bell. The sound of the bell comes from the nerves.

Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching are the knowing of nerves. It does not mean that we contact directly the sound or phenomena. (This is called a “koan,” a key of awareness). Our nerves are called the mind or consciousness. If Miss A. hears the sound of bell, she likes it. However, another person favors the peaceful atmosphere; he dislikes the noise.

According to the karma, he or she understands the sound in their own ways. For example, the Arabic king has a golden palace, pearl tables, silver cars, and so on. It is luxurious as people see it. But if we put some hens and buffalos in an Arabic country, are they

precious? These animals have nothing, they do not feel luxurious. Luxurious or not depends on the nerves of the species. This means that Maitreya Bodhisattva realized all phenomena that come from the consciousness-only (*vijñāna, viññāṇa vada*) are empty.

When we hear a sweet voice, we know that it comes from our ear-consciousness. We smell scents and we know that the scent comes from our nose-consciousness, tastes comes from our tongue-consciousness. Other people praise us, we feel happy. We should know that happiness comes from the mental-consciousness. When Maitreya Bodhisattva was mindful of these things, gradually he stopped attaching to the objects, because he realized that all objects come from the consciousness-only. He understood this nature and he was free from being annoyed by his six novices' naughtiness. He contemplated this consciousness. Then he no longer went to houses of the wealthy. He used the consciousness-only samādhi method of countless Buddhas. He followed and learned from the Buddhas to detach from the phenomena. For example, while he served the Buddha, some hated him, while some liked him. He knew these phenomena come from the consciousness that comes from his nerves.

He was freed from praise and criticism and served the Buddha without obstacles. He continued cultivating until the Dīpaṅkara (Burning Lamp) Buddha appeared. He attained the unsurpassed wonderfully perfect samādhi of the consciousness-only. He saw all Buddha lands, pure or impure, existent or non-existent things that all appeared from his own consciousness. He returned to his perfect penetrated nature. The eighth consciousness turned into the pure white consciousness or the great mirror insight. Dependent on his consciousness-only, he knew the ten directions to be pure or impure. He experienced that seeing comes from the eye-consciousness, whose nature is the Tathāgatagarbha (the source of all phenomena).

He accomplished the great mirror insight, his and all beings' Buddha-nature. He did not discriminate among listeners in the hall anymore, but he saw all Buddhas who were sitting there. In the hall he did not discriminate among ordinary people, but Buddhas. Thus, the Buddha appeared in his consciousness. Due to this, he would become a Buddha who will be Sakyamuni Buddha's successor with the name Future-Descending Maitreya Buddha of the Dragon Flower Association.

To reply to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva's questions, Maitreya Bodhisattva said he used the consciousness-only as the main cause to penetrate the perfection. He attained the Buddha-nature by realizing all phenomena in the ten directions came from consciousness. He obtained the perfect penetration that pervaded all over dharma realm.

We often hold an inclination to discriminate, giving names to areas, such as Wisconsin, California, Texas, and so on. We cling to our knowledge, easily disagree with someone who disagrees. We usually think that labels or names are real, but they are only notions. Because we discriminate, there turns out to be a variety of things like sour or sweet, good or bad, success or failure. We hold our knowledge on all things according to our human karma (twelve species have twelve karmas) and we failed to realize the truth or the real nature of all phenomenon (without karma). It means that we see things as they are without the coloring of karmas.

In order to cultivate effectively, we must stop making the wrong discriminations and should practice seeing the true nature of all things that comes from many causes and conditions. For example, by discriminating, we call one person Ms. A. and another person Ms. B. But both are wrong because all of the components of the bodies come from earth, water, wind, and fire. The bodies appear from many causes and conditions. Cars, houses, gardens, tables, are also constituted by earth, water, wind, fire. All labels or names

are temporary. If we want to end the wrong discriminations, we must see the truth that all phenomena come from four elements.

What are four elements? They are the earth, water, wind, and fire which are constituted by our ignorance. We must stop this ignorance. We must awaken to the true nature of the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire. This is the enlightened nature or the perfect true nature that pervades over the dharma realm. The method of the consciousness-only is to transform from wrong understanding to be the perfect true nature. The wrong understanding is illusory, controlled in accordance with karma. Due to dependent origination, the phenomena appear temporarily. By contemplating causes and conditions, we practice gradually detaching from all things. Then we will understand the nature of the world, the perfect truth of the consciousness-only. Each patriarch formed his own means of perfect penetration. Twenty-five bodhisattvas established twenty-five methods. Maitreya Bodhisattva formed the Vijñāna Sect, the patriarch of the *Consciousness-Only Treatise of Thirty Verses*.

According to Asian Buddhist tradition, the ceremony of Maitreya Bodhisattva is often organized on the first day of the New Year. People believe that “the first moment on earth” in the New Year is important. It means their fortunate or unfortunate future depends on who the first person is to put his foot on their doorstep. The symbol of Maitreya Bodhisattva is the four immeasurables (*appamañña*, *apramāṇa*), love (*mettā*, *maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*, *upekṣā*). The practice of mind is our daily career. We need to follow Maitreya Bodhisattva to prepare for our first moment of the year by maintaining our fresh face of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. The root of bodhi mind or the root of birth and death is from our mind. The reason why we always stay in the net of saṃsāra is that we attach to the six sense-organs, chase after the six

worldly objects, and create illusory thoughts. We greedily run after the inflowing objects and hate when we encounter opposite views. Inflowing or opposite objects that cause lust, hatred, and delusion to appear push us in the continuous cycle of birth and death. Three poisons are evil demons. Six sense-organs are six enemies. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha said these six sense-organs are the matchmaking for three poisons and cause beings to forget their awareness nature. The symbol of Maitreya Bodhisattva putting his hands into his pockets represents eliminating selfness, conceit, and ignorance. This is the fruit of awakening. He reflected with insight that six organs are illusory, six objects are illusory, and six consciousnesses are false thought.

We should regulate six sense-organs, keep the three karmas pure, detach from objects at every moment, develop the bodhi mind, and transform the six enemy organs to be six transcendental powers. Once our mental-consciousness turns to the wonderful contemplating insight or the wonderful eye-dharma, five consciousnesses will turn to the perfect wisdom fort. Maitreya Bodhisattva is the patriarch of the *Consciousness-Only Treatise of Thirty Verses* because he succeeded in his method.

What is the great perfect mirror wisdom? When we are unenlightened, the eighth consciousness is called the alaiya. When Maitreya Bodhisattva attained enlightenment, the eighth consciousness turned to the great mirror wisdom that exists everywhere over the dharma world. It means Maitreya Bodhisattva appears everywhere. He manifests as an ant, a table, a house, and so on.

Maitreya Bodhisattva's mind was like a great mirror of insight that illuminated in ten directions. He is in our flesh now and he is over the dharma realm at the same time. He attained the great perfect wisdom—he became a Buddha. He confirmed that countless worlds, as many as molecules of dust, entered his body and his

body entered ten directions because he took the dharma realms as his body, which constitutes all things. This world was his body; his body was the Buddha-nature. The forms of everything in ten directions are the same illusion.

According to our own karma, the world appears and disappears, but its nature is Tathāgatagarbha. That we learn in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra. It is called the dharma world turning back to the Tathāgatagarbha. The Vaidurya (Crystal Light) Bodhisattva who contemplated the wind element saw that living beings in the ten directions are like mosquitoes in a trap, noisily humming. Why do they hum? Because they are competing—loss-gain, like-dislike, rich-poor. He saw the illusory appearances of mosquitoes, but their nature is perfect penetration as well. Soon Vaidurya Bodhisattva attained Uncreated-Dharma Patience. He had patience with the knowledge that all phenomena are originally unborn.

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Maitreya Bodhisattva rose from his seat, paid homage at the feet of the Buddha and said, "I remember that countless lives ago, Kandrakadipa (the Sun Moon) Buddha descended into the world, and I followed him to renounce the lay life. However, I was fond of worldly fame and interacting with the noble rich class and people of high position. Then the Tathāgata taught me how to practice the consciousness-only to enter samādhi. For many kalpas, I have used this samādhi to serve countless Buddhas, so the craving of worldly fame was completely transformed. When Dīpaṃkara (Burning Lamp) Buddha descended into the world, I attained the unsurpassed perfect consciousness samādhi and experienced that all Tathāgata lands, from the pure-impure, existent-non-existent states arose from the consciousness. World-Honored One, because I realized that on the base of the consciousness-only, measureless Tathāgatas appeared. Now, the Buddha appointed me to be his successor. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my

enlightened experience, I reflected that the ten directions from the consciousness-only appeared without wrong understanding or dependent nature; I attained Uncreated-Dharma Patience. Thus, the consciousness-only is the best.”¹¹⁸

In brief, Maitreya Bodhisattva took the consciousness element to achieve penetration. He realized that all things arise from discrimination and exist apart from the consciousness. They are neither one nor different, either rising or falling. He understood that consciousness nature is the absolute *sūnyatā*; *sūnyatā* is the absolute consciousness. This is pure and pervades over the dharma world. According to creature beings’ karma, in response to their capacities, the consciousness is known. Due to ignorance, people who do not know about “the absolute consciousness and *sūnyatā*” imagine that due to conditions or without conditions, the consciousness appears or disappears. These mistakes arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the sixth consciousness that are nothing except the play of nonsense words. From then on, Maitreya Bodhisattva accomplished his method of perfect penetration without obstacles between the consciousnesses. However, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose the consciousness (*viññāna*, *viññāṇa*) because it constantly changes and discriminates. New practitioners find it difficult to penetrate the perfection.

D.7. Perception of the Seeing-Nature

**All phenomena are impermanent,
thoughts follow the cycle of rising-falling.**

The cause-effect is different.

How is the perfect penetration achieved?¹¹⁹

Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattvas and fifty-two bodhisattvas who practiced the same method, rose from their seats, paid homage at

¹¹⁸ Ibid., (Tâm Minh), p. 466.

¹¹⁹ Giới Hương, trans., *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Bảo Giác), p. 195.

the feet of the Buddha and said, “I remember that for countless previous lives, Amitābha Buddha descended into the world. In those lives, twelve Tathāgatas, in an unbroken lineage, became the enlightened ones. The last one was the Surpassed Sun Moon Light Buddha who taught me how to read the Buddha’s name to enter the samādhi. For example, if a person always remembers one person, but the forgets the previous, if both persons meet and see each other, they will not recognize each other. However, if both persons remember each other so deeply that their shapes are fixed in their hearts from this life to next life, they will be inseparable like a body and its shadow. Likewise, the Tathāgatas in ten directions love all existent beings and always think of them, like a mother who never ceases to love her children. If the children run away, her love fails to help them. But if they think of her sincerely, they will not be separated forever. If living beings remember and reflect on the Buddha, they will definitely see him. They will stay near the Buddha and thus without the aid of any other expedient, they will be awakened. It is like a man who is perfumed with incense will smell like the fragrance of incense and is named "the Decorated Mind by Fragrance and Light." My enlightened cause is to recite the Buddha’s name to attain Uncreated-Dharma Patience. Now in this world, I help all creature beings recite the Buddha's name to reach the Pure Land. The Buddha asked me about the foremost means of penetration. Based on my experience, I kept mindful at my six sense-organs, pure at every moment to enter samādhi. The seeing-nature element is the best.”¹²⁰

Among seven elements, the earth, water, wind, fire, and space belong to form while consciousness and seeing-nature belong to the spiritual. The function is consciousness while the seeing-nature (still has the personal and commutative karmas) is the real substance. The seeing-nature is the ability of seeing, hearing, and

¹²⁰ Giói Hương, trans., *The Samādhi Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Tâm Minh), 470–471.

knowing to belong to the awareness nature. The nature following the external conditions creates the eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, and so on. The consciousness that always rises and falls is the obvious function of the seeing-nature ability. The seeing-nature that is the eighth consciousness is subjected by human karma and bonded by the six sense-organs. The Buddha taught that thanks to this eighth consciousness, we practice returning to the basic bodhi nature. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva cultivated the seeing-nature. Why did the Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva choose reciting the Buddha name? Why does reciting the Buddha's name control six organs? Once someone recites the Buddha's name, his thoughts rise and fall constantly. Why is this called the seeing-nature? The theory is that the mental-consciousness knows each sentence clearly, which is not the seeing-nature. However, based on the nature of reading the Buddha's name, the seeing-nature can be explained.

The seeing-nature is the nature of enlightenment. It is awakened because it is enlightened everywhere, while the consciousness that discriminates everything according to conditions and karma is based on illusion. The substance of hearing-nature is Buddha-nature, while consciousness is the function following the external condition. If there is the nature, there will be the function but both are different. The seeing-element is, as the space, formless and pervades over the world. Young or old persons can see equally. In this life and the next life, we will see equally. The seeing-nature is fixed. The seeing is enlightenment, because it does not feel any hindrances. One body ends, the next one is born; the seeing will be there in whatever form it takes. The seeing-nature, hearing-nature, touching-nature, and so on, are the immovable substance, the limitless life, the limitless light, the Amitābhabha-nature; here it is called the seeing-nature.

The Buddha said the consciousness element that has no source and

nature is a false manifestation based on the six organs contacting the worldly objects to cause the function. Based on brightness and darkness, we give objects names—a flower, a bell, a cup of water. The shadow in the pupils is called the object. The eyes are called the organ. The shadow and object constitute consciousness. Without light, the eye-consciousness does not appear, so consciousness has no source. The eyes of cats are called cat eyes, the eyes of humans are called human eyes. Thus, these consciousnesses appear temporarily. The eighth consciousness that is called seeing-nature is perception, but it is the essence of mind or consciousness. Due to ignorance, we call the seeing-nature consciousness. If we are awakened, we call it the Buddha. Its nature is unchanging. The eighth consciousness is unmoved, while the other seven consciousnesses appear following the karma. When we see an object, there are always two parts: shape and its function. Looking at one thing carefully is called perception (the seeing-substance) whose function is the consciousness element. Seeing hands is the perception, while the hands holding things or raising up or down are the function. Both the perception and function cannot separate. The perception is in function, the function is in perception.

Thanks to the seeing-nature, we can see a picture. The perception of a good or fuzzy photo comes from our seeing-nature, which is the awareness or the Amitābha nature over ten directions. Eyes accord with the body following the karma. The cat eyes or human eyes can see even if the person is older or younger. If, in the future, we become devas, we will see and now as humans, we can also see. This seeing-nature still exists in the constant space. The perception is the nature, while what we see or hear is the discriminated consciousness. Because of following the external conditions, the consciousness discriminates love, anger, jealousy, and so on, while the perception is the unborn substance and is illuminating. The function cannot be apart from substance. The

function of eyes is called seeing. The function of ears is called hearing. The function of the nose is smelling. The function of the tongue is tasting. The function of the body is touching. The function of mind is knowing. The function has many, but the perception is one. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra gives an illustration that the hand is still the hand even though it is up or down. Following the external conditions, it keeps this or that thing, but the hand is itself.

Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva cultivated the perception of seeing-nature, which belongs to organ or non-organ. When we are introspective, the perception of the seeing-nature still appears or disappears. The perception is divided into six functions. If we sit quietly, close our eyes and ears, does the seeing or hearing substance exist? If I inwardly focus my mind to return to the nature, there is no selfness, only the organ and the perception. Seven elements are divided into two parts, that is, the material (the earth, water, wind, fire and space) and the spiritual (the consciousness and seeing-nature). The spiritual has two parts: the spiritual function (consciousness) and the independent spiritual nature (the perception of seeing-nature).

For many lives, we have been born as many species and in different countries. but the perception of the seeing-nature of all phenomena is one and the same. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra the Buddha taught that the space in a square or round box depends on the shape of a box. We see there is a square or round space. A human being or other creature is as the box of dust, water, wind, and fire. Whoever goes to a funeral home to chant or to a cemetery to bury or burn the body will experience the decay process of a corpse clearly. The box is made of dust, but its nature is the constant seeing-nature. We see an object, and our seeing-nature perceives according to karma. If a cat sees something, its seeing-nature sees according to cat's karma. The body of human or cat

comes from the box made of dust that will vanish, but its seeing-nature still exists as the space. Thus, the seeing-nature is independent.

Seeing comes from eye-consciousness, hearing comes from ear-consciousness, and so on. The nature of seeing or hearing is pure but because of conditions, it arises with many functions in ten directions. Thus, our seeing-nature is the source of the six forms of birth consciousness.

If we are Japanese, we have their seeing or hearing in Japan. If we are Vietnamese, we have their seeing or hearing in Vietnam. If we are American, we have our seeing or hearing in America. African people in hot areas have their seeing or hearing at their place. Fishes in the Arctic Ocean have their seeing in an icy area. The seeing-nature or hearing-nature is over the dharma realm, including many countries or continents, but it depends on each karma; it seems to appear or disappear in that place. We who are mundane people see according to our illusory karma and imagine wrongly that what we see is real. We do not know the seeing objects come from many external conditions. Because we are a result of our parents' pleasure and sexual intercourse, it causes a rebirth seed to be in the mother's womb. Then, we who are born are nourished and do many things in life. This body is born from countless conditions. However, we know the cause-condition doctrine is the limited knowledge. We should see that the Tathāgata Store (Tathāgatagarbha, the source of all phenomena) is the source of our body.

We indulge in world of saṃsāra. We do not know our seeing, hearing, tasting, and smelling is the Amitābha-nature. Thus, Sakyamuni Buddha often explained this. Each phrase, "Namo Amitābha" helps us to drop the foolish cravings and recognize our Buddha-nature. Due to ignorance, we see six external objects, and the feeling of like or dislike arises, happiness or suffering, and

we continue to engage in the cycle of saṃsāra.

We must avoid being tricked by the organ-object-consciousness. We should be awakened to return the Tathāgatagarbha. We do not need to grasp the five skandhas as our body and mind because they are illusory. We borrow the outside rice, sunlight, wind, and so on to be our bodies. We grasp the consciousness-knot to be our mind. Because of attachment to our body, we always find the best conditions for a long life. Today, we are lucky to learn the Buddha's teachings. We know that we possess Buddha-nature that is vast like an ocean or space, while the body (earth, water, wind, fire) is like a bubble.

Through this Śūraṅgama Sūtra, we practice daily. If we are completely mindful without interruption in reading the name of Amitābha Buddha, we will realize our limitless life and limitless light nature. If we use false thought, even thousands of false thoughts to recite the Buddha's name, we never obtain the state of mind only.

When we read the Buddha's name, why will we reach perfect penetration? What is the difference between cause and effect?

The limitless life means constant while reading each phrase. "Namo Amitābha Buddha" causes the arising and ceasing as we repeat our thoughts many times. Reciting the Buddha's name is the skillful means to transform our changeable thoughts; gradually we gain the state of one-pointedness to enter samādhi. Reading the Buddha's name is real purity. Amitābha Buddha is the limitless light, and this is the real recitation. Reading Amitābha Buddha is the best way to keep our six sense-organs focused on the nature of limitless light. This is the main cause to be enlightened.

Why does reciting the name of Amitābha Buddha belong to the cultivation of perception (seeing-nature)? "Namo Amitābha

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

Buddha” means limitless light, limitless life, the perception or the awareness nature. This nature that is the Unborn-Dharma Patience, has no birth and death. We use reciting the Buddha’s name to enter this Unborn-Dharma Patience, return to the limitless light and limitless life. It is called the element of perception (seeing-nature).

Mahāsthāma: “Mahā” means great, “sthāma” means strength. Mahāsthāmaprāpta means the great strength. He is so powerful that when he walks, his great strength reaches to the dark realms to awaken them. We should recite his name while we cuddle cats, dogs, or any animals so that they are awakened too.

The Buddha called Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva a great hero. He can help us to clear the darkness of dullness and transform the five layers of ignorances. Each bodhisattva has his own capacity. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who pours his pure water pot to end suffering, brings the fresh water for all beings. With a fat body, Maitreya Bodhisattva always smiles to manifest forgiveness, tolerance, salvation, and compassion for all beings.

In the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva, along with fifty-two bodhisattvas who cultivated the same method, stood up to address their own enlightenment. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva had many companions who cultivated the element of perception by reading the Amitābha Buddha name as he did.

Samādhi means the concentration and implies both dhyana (one-pointedness) and prajñā (insight). Both Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva entered a deep state of samādhi.

All the dharma doors in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra help the cultivators enter samādhi. The insight reflects and calms. Both dhyāna and prajñā provide balance. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva was

mindful of the Buddha's name to enter samādhi, which is the practice part. He said that all Buddhas in the ten directions have compassion for all living beings, and always think them as a mother who never ceases to her love her children.

If two persons remember each other so much they carve their figures in their hearts forever in many lives. They will be together like a form and its shadow, and they will never be at odds. The Tathāgatas in ten directions have compassion for all living beings and always think of them, like a mother who never ceases thinking of her children. If the children run away, her thoughts of them will not help. But if they also think deeply of her keenness, they will not be separated despite the passing of transmigrations. If a living being remembers and thinks of the Buddha, he will see him in the present or future. He will not be far from the Buddha and his mind will be awakened like a man who is perfumed by incense—the fragrance lingers on his clothing and is called “the Light Fragrance Adorned.”

The love of Buddhas is boundless. A normal mother who loves children in only a life, receives four elements (the earth, water, wind, and wind) as her children. They love and take care of each other, but if one of them dies, four elements vanish. Who can love whom forever? The Buddhas have compassion for all living beings—relatives or strangers. This love of a great mother goes beyond to other mothers. This great mother always helps them regardless of time and space.

The method of reciting the Buddha name is like “the Light Fragrance Adorned One.” In Vietnam, there is a saying, “We are dark when near the ink; bright when near the light.” It means a man is known by the company he keeps.

We remember the Buddha who is the light and reciting the light, we will be bright. Everyone knows that if we are near fish, we

have an unpleasant smell. If we hold a jasmine, we have a good fragrance. If we recite the Buddha's name, we will inherit his power. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva is called the Decorated Mind by Fragrance and Light because he used the Buddha's name, the limitless light and the limitless life to decorate his mind and body. New practitioners find it difficult to cultivate this perception method, because reading the Buddha's name belongs to the thought of arising and cessation constantly. They easily cling to the consciousness of arising and falling without going ahead to attain perfect penetration. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva did not choose this perception method.

Regarding time and space, the Buddha-nature is infinite and everlasting. We always use false thoughts to discriminate for returning to our Buddha-nature. How can we reach the final goal? Reciting the Buddha's name is the means to remember our limitless light, limitless life nature without arising and cessation. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva found this the best way to succeed in this perception. Thus, he became the patriarch of the Pure Land School and people often celebrate his anniversary on thirteenth day of the lunar month, July.

In this chapter, twenty-four bodhisattvas expressed their own dharma doors. In the next chapter, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva declared the dharma door of perfect penetration of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and explained how it is chosen as a good method for human beings in the saha world.

Twenty-five dharma doors of bodhisattvas are like the legends, but they are true indeed. Their capacities were so supreme that mundane people like us cannot comprehend completely. We only understand perfectly when we attain enlightenment. Here is the box summarizing twenty-five bodhisattvas with their own methods,

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NUMBER	ORGAN-OBJECTCONSCIOUSNESS	METHODS	OBJECTS OF CONTEMPLATION
1	Six worldly objects	Forms	Impurity of body
2		Sounds	Contemplation of Four Noble Truths
3		Fragrance	Smelling the incense
4		Flavor	Tasting herbs
5		Touch	Washing the mind

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

6		Dharma (phenomena)	Golden body, the shadows of changing objects
7	Six Sense organs	Eye-organ	Non-sleeping, blind
8		Ear-organ	Sounds
9		Nose-organ	Counting breaths
10		Tongue-organ	Food flavor
11		Body-organ	Poison thorn
12		Mental-organ	Emptiness in ten directions
13		Eye- consciousness	Realizing phenomena is perfect
14	Ear- consciousness	Hearing the discriminations of human being's knowledge	

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15	Six consciousness	Nose consciousness	Breath as the smoke and light
16		Tongue consciousness ; unobstructed eloquence in speech	
17		Body consciousness	Three thousand dignities and eighty-thousand subtle virtues
18		Mental consciousness	Mind illuminates without obstacles
19		Earth	Smooth land, repairing a bridge, and calm mind
20		Water	Contemplating a room full water, throwing a stick
21		Fire	The big fire

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

22		Wind	The changeable time and the movable body
23		Space	Body is like a vast space
24		Consciousness	The Only-Consciousness
25		Perception (seeing-nature)	Reciting the Buddha's name as the Fragrance Light Adorned

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER V

This chapter is about twenty-five bodhisattvas who addressed their ways of achieving the perfect penetration. Twenty-five dharma methods are like twenty-five stories of gaining the spiritual destination from different perspectives. Each of them showed the cause, conditions, and the fruits of each saint.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. List twenty-five names of the perfect penetration objects or methods.
2. Which one is most impressive among the twenty-five methods? Why?
3. How did Venerable Aniruddha obtain the power of the divine eye even though he was blind?
4. How did Venerable Candraprabha (Moonlight) contemplate the water element?
5. Explain the sentence: “The form nature is absolute śūnyatā; śūnyatā is the absolute form.”



The Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Statue
at Vạn Hạnh, Virginia, USA
Photo: Võ Văn Tường

CHAPTER VI

THE PERFECTLY PENETRATED EAR-ORGAN

Choose the Perfect Penetrated Ear-Organ¹²¹

It is suitable with the saha world:

Now I address the World-Honored One

The Buddha descended into this world

to guide the most appropriate doctrine.

Being pure at hearing the sound.

To attain the samādhi state

the hearing-nature is the best.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva omitted twenty-four means of twenty-four bodhisattvas because these methods were not suitable for living beings in the saha world. However, he thought that the Buddha used his voice to expound dharma and living beings used the ear-organ to perceive the dharma's meanings. If the ear-organ is of benefit in this world, it should be used as the main cause to reach the state of samadhi. So, it is fitting that the hearing-nature be used

¹²¹ Giói Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 195.

as a method to attain enlightenment and perfect penetration.

Each sect has its own dharma means. There are many methods, but ultimately, they reach the same destination. The method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is using the perfectly penetrated ear-organ to contemplate the sounds. We have the habit of looking outside, but from today onward, we will change our habit and look back at our inward nature. Reflection on the inside hearing is reversed and difficult for us. We like to chase after the external sounds. The dharma means of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is to direct the hearing-nature, while Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva's method was to recite the name of Buddha Amitābha. It transfers from the chanting to one-pointedness. Then from the one-pointedness it achieves a non-dual state of neither one-pointedness or multi-pointedness. When we reach that, we will attain the perfect penetration.

Which method of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is faster for new practitioners? Which one is slower?

The former is quick, the latter is slow, because Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva who was taught to use the hearing-nature to shine all ten directions by the Buddha (insight-hearing), lived with the hearing-nature (insight-reflection) and united with the hearing-nature (insight cultivation). Therefore, his first three basic steps, “insight hearing-insight reflection-insight cultivation” requires the hearing-nature or the basic bodhi at once, so it is fast. We, the ordinary people, have the habit of using the consciousness to approach the hearing-reflection-cultivation, so it is slow and takes a long time. Then why should the majority choose the latter not the former? We live on the consciousness and use it to cite and listen to the “Namo Amitābha” one sound by one sound. We transfer the process gradually from thought to pointedness to without pointedness, and finally we can enter samadhi. The dharma door of

perfect penetration is suitable for the wise. Whereas, we live with six consciousnesses, we should rely on the phrase “Namo Amitābha” to get out of saṃsāra.

“The most appropriate doctrine in the saha world is hearing the sound.”

The Buddha used sound to preach the dharma. With the hearing-nature, the audience listened to the sound to find wisdom. Not only the Buddha but also teachers use sound to express the dharma, and students use their ear-consciousness to increase knowledge. Everyone communicates by using the means of sound. This is a reason why the Buddha said that in the saha world, sound is the means of communication. Living beings use the ear-organ to grasp the subtle meaning of the mundane or supreme dharma. The Buddha borrowed words to create sūtras, vinaya and commentaries for all kinds of living beings. The hearing-nature is the true educated place we can create many blessings and merit. People use sound to study and educate themselves and others. The hearing-nature creates 1,200 virtues while other organs create 800 virtues. The ear-organ has less karma, so Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva chose it.

Being pure at hearing the sound, the ear-organ of living beings is very sharp and quick, thus the Buddha used it to educate for the sake of many. The word “pure” means the beneficence from the education. The pair of sound and hearing go together, that is, once we use the sound, then the ear-organ will take action. Likewise, once we use the form or smell, then the eye-organ or nose-organ will be active. In the Vimalakīrti Sūtra, in the Accumulated Fragrance Heavenly Realm, Vimalakīrti Bodhisattva taught the divine beings to eat the rice to activate their tongue-organ. Once the touch or the dharma shadow is used, the body-organ or the mental-organ will work. This is called the twelve objects and organs of each living being. If human beings choose one organ,

which is less karma to cultivate, the more benefice or purity they will gain. In contrast, if they choose the organ which has more karma and obstruction, the less beneficence or purity they will gain. In this saha world, the Buddha used the pair sound-hearing to convert living beings.

Thanks to sounds, people hear, understand, and work effectively. Thanks to the function of sounds, not only Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva could hear how to use it effectively, but also Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva could hear so deeply the phrase “Namo Amitābha” to enter samadhi. Hearing is the best means to teach or to obtain the perfect penetration in this life.

The bodhisattva’s purpose is to guide human beings in learning how to obtain penetration from the ear-organ. Human beings only reflect the sound that is heard to return to their hearing-nature ability. The saha world’s ear-organ is sharp, and the voice of the Buddha is clear, so that whoever hears the teachings of sound will not defile and be rebirthed again. Whoever hears the teachings is still in saṃsāra because he attaches to sound to express his selfish eloquence to others and forget to return his ear-organ nature.

As a learned monk, Ānanda remembered in detail what the Buddha taught for forty-nine years, but he was still attracted by the beauty of women. Attaching to sound, we will have an inflowing of srava. We only know how to return to the hearing-nature forever. Our work is done.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva detached from sounds; he only lived with his hearing-nature to enter the saint lineage. We have the habit of discriminating the sounds of sweet or tough and so on. For that reason, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva taught us the method of reciting the Buddha’s name. When we recite the phrase, “Namo Amitābhabha” it means we hear sound, and once we hear sound, we focus on the Buddha names instead of all external phenomena.

Gradually the six knots will be opened automatically. The phenomena are illusory. We are familiar with grasping the illusion, but while we recite “Namo Amitābha,” the illusion will drop or transform naturally. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva entered the sacred, perfect enlightened nature quickly and directly, while Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva was slower because he still used the sounds of “Namo Amitābha” to enter the Buddha-nature gradually. Normally, we hear hundreds of external sounds. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva advised us that we should filter out those hundreds of sounds, so we can focus on the invocation of “Namo Amitābha.”

Relying on one phrase of “Namo Amitābha,” he could gradually attain the state of no-thought, mindfulness, and samādhi. His process was gradual. As the one who succeeded in reading the Buddha name, his mind was the only place without confusion. Listening to the hearing-nature, our minds will be the only place without confusion. Mundane people such as us prefer to do charities to get blessings and merit rather than do the spiritual practice of samādhi.

We find mindfulness difficult. We always run outside to hear all the sounds and make distinctions. How can we get the state of mind-only? To get the state of mindfulness, we must enter samādhi and dwell on the hearing-nature. We must meditate alone in our room, stay away from external conditions, and penetrate whichever method we prefer. If we are too busy with charities or rituals for getting blessings and merit, it is hard to get the mindfulness. The saints, the enlightened ones, enter the markets for the sake of many. Perform charities to earn merit. From merit we get wisdom. In meditation, once it is called samādhi the practitioner must dwell on his Buddha-nature. He lives with the fundamental wisdom, and gradually attains the resulting wisdom. On the base of the fundamental wisdom, we will get the resulting wisdom for the sake

of many. The orderly spiritual process is from samādhi to the fundamental wisdom, and to the resulting wisdom to still continue to teach and transform human beings.

We live with the fundamental wisdom that the Śūraṅgama Sūtra called *samapatti*. From samapatti, we will continue entering dhyāna of the resulting wisdom. Dhyāna is the later wisdom. We find it difficult to attain this deep state if we keep thinking about external phenomena and seldom recite the Buddha's name. It is suitable for human beings in the saha world to practice the method of reflecting on the sound. This is the genuine method of the Contemplating Worldly Sound Bodhisattva. His name reminds us that we have a hearing-nature and we should live with it. Motion and stillness are originally empty, which means he was freed from the first knot. The motion and the stillness vanish like the brightness and darkness. Contemplating Worldly Sound Bodhisattva did not use organs, objects, and consciousness while we follow illusory things as if we were living in a dream. In other words, we are encircled by six organs, six objects, and six consciousnesses. Bodhisattvas live with their enlightened nature, the true substance of all animate and inanimate beings.

The nature is a bright mirror while the images in mirrors are movable, appear and disappear constantly. Are they real? Obviously, they are unreal. They come and leave; there is only a real mirror. We, who are ignorant and perceive the shadows as real do not realize the real mirror.

Among dharma methods, reciting the Buddha's name does not lead directly to penetration, but according to the nature theorem of Buddha recitation, it leads to perfect penetration, so Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva strongly declared that because of perception (the seeing-nature), he obtained perfect penetration.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra mentions three aspects: śamatha, samāpatti,

and dhyāna. Samāpatti is a state of wholly living in our real mindfulness to attain the fundamental wisdom. Dhyāna is a state of mind in which all dualistic distinctions disappear, in which we live with the resulting wisdom.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva taught us the method of returning and reflecting on the sound in samāpatti. He lived with his real nature and accomplished enlightenment so that the five hindrances disappeared completely. We receive internal forms and external forms and believe them to be ourselves. This is the first ignorant layer of impure views (*skandha rūpa*, form).

Because we believe our false bodies and objects to be ourselves, feelings arise. Because we receive the four elements of earth, water, and wind to be our bodies, we start to have life and feelings of like, dislike, and so on. This is the second ignorant layer of the impure kalpa/life (*skandha vedanā*, feeling/sensations). We cling to the inside body as ourselves and the external objects as a real landscape. Then greed, hatred, and delusion arise. This is the third ignorant layer of the impure defilements (*skandha saṃjñā*, *saññā*, perception). According to each species' karma, there is a short cycle of birth-death in the endless series of transmigration. There are various species that are born in various forms, such as human beings, buffaloes, cats, birds, ghosts, and so forth. They attach to these species as themselves. Outwardly, they contact with six worldly objects and as a result, greed, hatred, ignorance, and defilements arise. They are subjected and controlled by these illusory thoughts all day and night. This is the fourth ignorant layer of impure existent living beings (*skandha saṃskāra*, *saṅkhāra*, volition).

The four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind create the body whose functions are limited until one day it does not work anymore and returns to the earth. This is the fifth ignorant layer of impure living duration (*skandha vijñāna*, *viññāṇa*, consciousness).

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva lived with his hearing-nature, so these five layers disappeared and he dwelled in samādhi. Once we achieve this, the fundamental wisdom is the nature. Then we should go ahead and step up to the function of the fundamental wisdom that is the resulting wisdom.

When a practitioner lives with his original mind and is without any impurities the Śūraṅgama Sūtra called this the state of entering the door of samāpatti. The next step is applying the way for the sake of many that the Śūraṅgama Sūtra called dhyāna or the resulting wisdom. During the process of transforming human beings, he who uses his fundamental wisdom to overcome challenges or difficulties creates the skillful means to convert according to living beings' levels. Thanks to that merit, the resulting wisdom develops to climb on the ladder of sainthood. Going through the ladder step by step, from the first step to the fifty-fourth step that the Śūraṅgama Sūtra called the fifty-fourth *bhumis*¹²² to attain the absolute enlightenment or Buddhahood. This state is called the application of wonderful mind or the bodhisattva path.

At that time, the practitioner experiences both the states of samādhi and wisdom because he dwells on the original mind (concentration) and applies it to the external movable world to benefit human beings (the later wisdom). This is the dharma method of returning and reflecting on the hearing which Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva chose for us.

¹²² Bodhisattva virtues: Ten faiths, ten abodes, ten practices, ten merit-transferences, ten ground bhumis and four extra virtues and the supreme and absolute enlightenment to to be Buddhas.

2. Compliments Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva

**Liberation from suffering,
how marvelous the Worldly Sound Contemplator
in countless kalpas as the Ganges' sand,
entered the molecules of Buddha lands,
achieved the independent majestic power,
endowed existent beings with the fearlessness.**¹²³

This verse praises Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's virtues and merits. He cultivated the perfect penetration of the ear-organ to obtain freedom from suffering and defilements. He achieved the great power of self-mastery, and bestowed fearlessness to human beings in countless Buddha lands as many as motes of dust.

What is self-mastery? It meant he who is not subjected by five illusory skandhas and six external objects, became a saint stream entrant, and achieved the self-mastery ability to save beings without hindrances. Kuan Yin Bodhisattva attained self-mastery because she dwelled on the luminous samādhi (concentration and the absolute insight wisdom). These are the saints' abilities. Since she entered the stream, she is no longer attached to all illusions of feeling (samohaṃ), emotion, love (trishna), like (vītadosaṃ) and dislike (sadosaṃ). She dwelled on the intuitive nature to obtain the self-mastery ability to enter multiple Buddha lands.

The Marvelous Sound and the Worldly Sound Contemplator

**The purified sound, the ocean tide sound.
Once the world is saved, it must be definitely safe.
The transcendental world is permanent.**¹²⁴

¹²³ Giói Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 196.

¹²⁴ Ibid., (Bảo Giác) p. 196.

This verse praises Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's miraculous capabilities. He experienced perfect penetration, so he could echo the wonderful voice, the pure sound and the sound that is matched with the people's level and time like the ocean tides. Without separating from his samadhi, he saved and transformed all living beings, made them peaceful and delighted in their practice. The method of the hearing-nature helped him liberate from suffering, then from that he could help others be liberated from suffering. It is important that first we cultivate diligently. We enlighten ourselves first and later we help others. This above verse praised that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva succeeded using his ear-organ of universal penetration, accomplished his goal of self-enlightenment, other-enlightenment, and both-enlightenments.

The marvelous sound: The sound is so marvelous that listeners can be awakened. For example, the meat-eaters stop being a slave of their tongue-organ and killing animals for their taste. This benefits not only animals that die pitifully, but also the meat-eaters will not fall into hell. Those people who restrain from taking others' lives will be born in Pure Land. Instead of falling into hell, they go up to a peaceful land. One word that can change from the hells to the perfect realm is called the wonderful sound. Avalokiteśvara or Universal Worldly Sound means to contemplate all sounds with the hearing-nature. This nature shined so far in the ten directions that the Bodhisattva was able to save all living beings.

The purified sound: The clean voice did not mix with anything else. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva did not grasp the illusory sound, so his voice caused living beings to end the three poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance. As a result of bringing the purity to himself and others, he is praised as the Purified Sound. How much benefice should we bring others with our voice? Is our voice pure? We should improve our pure sounds and bring these

pure sounds to the external world for the sake of many. The pure sound is like the thunder of the sea that is non-thought. Similarly, the teachings of the Buddha are always suitable for all living beings' lives.

The Ocean tide sound: The Chinese-Vietnamese dictionary defines the tide as the regular rise and fall of the level of the sea waves. This implies the mighty voice of the Buddha spread over all the sea, strong as the tide. The wave has no thought as humans, but it is regularly up and down following the time, as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva expounded dharma low or high, indirect or direct, strong or soft, which is matched with human beings' qualifications.

Thus, his teaching was effective. He used the sounds to save the world by causing them to gain what they wish. For example, wishing to get out of the saṃsāra, they will get out of saṃsāra; wishing to give birth, they will give birth; wishing a treasure, they will have a treasure. His sound saved all living beings, including the mundane or transcendental.

In the beginning of the Universal Door Sūtra,¹²⁵ it states that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva saved all beings in various categories such as drowning, burning, dangerous paths, bandits, prisons in the world, and even in the transcendental worlds, Voice Hearers (*śrāvakas*), Dependent-Enlightened Ones (*pratyeka*), and so on. Therefore, he said that “Once the world is saved, it must definitely be safe; the transcendental world is impermanent.”

Saving the world is definitely safe, the transcendental world is impermanent means in the cultivating process, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva contemplated the hearing-nature but in the other support (altruism) portion, he contemplated the suffering sounds of

¹²⁵ Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra, translated into Vietnamese by Thích Trí Tịnh, the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taiwan, 2008, p. 507 (author's translation).

living beings to save them, so his name is the Worldly-Sound Contemplator. The hearing-nature helped him and others achieve enlightenment, so he took the sound to be his name. Based on the hearing-nature, he transformed living beings in countless kalpas (time), went to a multitude of Buddha lands (space) to teach and convert living beings. During the time of practice, he detached from sound, but after he attained enlightenment, he followed the suffering sounds to save being. He helped people get the wonderful sound in the secular and transcendental worlds, so this sound is supreme and his title is very unique.

He tirelessly guided dharma to living beings without obstacles, so it is called the wonderful sound. Hearing the voices of suffering and misery and trying to save them is called the Worldly Sound Contemplator. He heard all sounds without attachment. This is called the purified sound.

Responding in time to whatever they wish is called the Ocean Tide Sound. Manifesting thirty-two bodies to speak dharma and powerful mantras is called the Ocean Tide Sound. Bestowing the fearlessness is to avoid eight disasters that are called the power of Worldly Sound Contemplator. The transformed three poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance is called the Purified Sound. In the Lotus Sūtra, Chapter VI illustrates these titles with the rhetorical verse:

The true inflecting, the pure contemplating.

The great insight observing.

The gentle compassion inflecting.

Constantly praying and admiring Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

In Part II of “Compliments of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva” — ~~Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva~~ used the profound verses to praise the virtues and merits of Universal Worldly Sound Bodhisattva. He praised the sound and its function that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva

penetrated and used to convert human beings. The hearing-nature and the wonderful functions that are available inside us stay at the six sense-organs, but we always run to the external sounds. Now we should return inwardly to contemplate our mind, then we will realize the hearing-nature that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva attained. Our real substance is Universal Worldly Sound, but we foolishly chase after the delusion so that we cannot realize it. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva praised the hearing-nature of universal penetrating, reminding us to return to our ever-marvelous function.

3. Compliments the perfect penetration and permanence of the ear-organ:

a) Now I present to the Tathāgata:

As Avalokiteśvara said,

when a person is in a tranquil state,

ten directions play the drums.

Ten directions hear it.

This is the true PERFECT hearing.¹²⁶

This verse shows the function of the ear-organ that is widespread and better than others. Once the drums are played from ten directions, someone who stays in a quiet place will hear the drums' sound simultaneously from ten places. For example, all images are reflected clearly in a mirror or while we are sleeping, we can hear the sounds of a car starting in a garage, a clock ringing in the main hall, a bell ringing in the room, a drum playing on the street. We can hear all different kinds of sounds from the ten directions. This is called the perfect hearing. The perfect penetration pervades everywhere.

¹²⁶ Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 196.

**b) The eyes fail to see through a block,
nose and tongue do the same.
In the body arises the sense as a touching object.
The unremitting thoughts often move.
The ear-organ hears sounds behind a wall,
hears sounds from near or far.
Five other organs do not compete,
this is the true PENETRATING hearing.**¹²⁷

This verse compares the ear-organ and other organs. If our eyes are closed, we cannot see anything behind or in front or in the ten directions. A tongue and a nose must have some flavor and scent to experience the taste or smell. A nose and a tongue need the objects so that their functions arise. If our mouth is closed, the tongue cannot speak out. If our nose is closed, the fragrance is not smelled. The body also needs to contact with the external objects for its sensory perception to arise. The mouth, nose, and body are not completely independent. However, the ear-organ still hears the far or near sound at all times, even if we cover the ear-organ.

It can hear all sounds in ten directions. For example, if the ear-organ is not present, how do we know that Ms. A is silent in the peaceful atmosphere? This proves that the hearing-nature exists always. According to the mental-consciousness, the thoughts arise and fall constantly; it is hard to find the beginning of thoughts. The mental-consciousness does not need the presence of things, because its function is to imagine the shadows of the external objects that is often interrupted by other illusory thoughts. For example, we sit at home but our thinking travels throughout the world; we think of a rose, we stop to remember a tulip. The mental consciousness has more sins than other organs and is too tangled and impure to perfect.

¹²⁷ Ibid., (Bảo Giác) p. 197.

According to bodhisattva practice, we sincerely pray for all creatures—cats, dogs, lizards, crabs and other animals to be reborn in a good realm and meet Buddhism to cultivate the way. We believe that the animals' consciousness will receive, keep, and save our blessing in their mind store. We, who are still living in the consciousness, have the karma and do not realize the sacred wonderful mind. However, we believe that our prayers will be true through the hearing-nature and response. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra describes the hearing-nature as penetrating, so those animals will hear our prayers. Or when we pray to the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva who will hear and respond to us. Between Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and us are no hindrances. Likewise, between animals and us are no hindrances, no blocks. Among six organs, the ear-organ is the most perfect; it can hear far or near through solid walls.

**c) The sound has motion and stillness,
hearing appears or disappears,
the absence of sound is called no voice
but it does not mean there is no hearing.**

**The absence of sound does not mean the cessation of hearing.
The presence of the sound does not mean the arising of hearing.**

**The ear-organ is beyond the cessation and arising.
This is the true PERMANENT hearing.**¹²⁸

When we close all doors in the evening, we cannot see a thing, but we still hear the sounds outside. The eye-consciousness arises or falls constantly. It is impermanent, while the hearing-nature presents all the time without interruption. The external sound has two faces: motion and stillness. When the movement is there, we say we hear the sound. When there is stillness, we say that we do

¹²⁸ Ibid., (Bảo Giác) p. 197.

not hear anything. Because of ignorance, we thought that we do not hear anything. In fact, we hear the sounds or the quietness. Our hearing is very sensitive. It recognizes a sound if there is sound, and a stillness if there is no sound. Therefore, the hearing-nature is constant. It is unchanged beyond the appearance or disappearance of the sound. Sound objects disappear or appear, the hearing neither disappears nor appears. It is beyond appearing or disappearing that is called the true permanent hearing.

- d) In a dream, the thinking rests,
but the hearing does not pause.
It is beyond the mental consciousness.
Mind and body cannot compete with the hearing.**¹²⁹

In sleeping or dreaming, the mental consciousness is at rest, without paying attention, but the hearing is revealed constantly. We may hear someone calling our name or a drum's sounds while we are sleeping. The mental consciousness is not concentrated, so it dreams a lot. When we wake up, we still remember the dreams. This proves the memory function saves all things. We sleep and when we get up, we remember everything.

Our body is made from the earth. It's a false body. Our thoughts are false thoughts. Mental consciousness is like a monkey moving from this branch to another branch. If we want to realize the hearing-nature or wisdom, we need to be calm or do meditation. In contrast, if we follow the movement of mental consciousness, then we fail to recognize ourselves or the hearing-nature. When we sleep, our mental consciousness, which also sleeps, does not recognize anything even if there is someone next to us, but the hearing-nature still works. If someone calls us while we sleep, we will hear and open our eyes. This indicates that the hearing-nature

¹²⁹ Ibid., (Báo Giác) p.197.

is everlasting. The hearing is the sense-organ. The mind always thinks but it thinks falsely, while the hearing-nature illuminates all of the time, so its merit is better than the illusory earth body and movable consciousness.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva praised the merit of hearing-nature that is *the perfect penetration and permanence*. Now we know how marvelous our hearing-nature is, we should return to it. We have six organs, but the ear-organ is the best because it has the full functions of *the perfect penetration and permanence*.

The seeing-nature, hearing-nature, smelling-nature, tasting-nature, touching-nature and knowing-nature of the six sense-organs are all bodhi nature. Which nature is better? The Buddha said that the organs that are subjected the external objects of combining, separation, clearance or blocking to reveal its function, get only 800 merits. Any organ is less offenses, more merit and we can cultivate the way easily to approach Buddha-nature. If the eyes are covered by obstacles, we cannot see a thing, so it cannot get 1,200 merits. If we want to attain the Buddha-nature, we must turn back to the six sense-organs, especially the ear-organ. The Buddha, with compassion, taught us this dharma method of hearing-nature. We should filter the external objects, return to the hearing-nature to live with the bodhi nature.

In part 1 of the above verse in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra the Buddha explained the hearing suitable for human beings in the saha world. In part 2, the Buddha praised the one who cultivates the hearing as the Universal Worldly Sound Bodhisattva. In part 3, the Buddha praised the ear-organ as having fulfilled the three functions of perfection, penetration, and permanence.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva succeeded in the method of the hearing-nature pervading over time and space. His ability is to hear in all ten directions to save beings.

He who attained the limitless life without arising and cessation could enlighten and help living beings from countless kalpas of past, present, and future and gain measureless merit. He was successful in his holy career by using the method of hearing-nature. The Buddha praised the merits of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva who could transform living beings without obstacles. Whatever living beings wish, he will respond to their wishes. He can manifest in many forms to save worldly humans who want to be free from sickness, danger, childlessness, and so on. He also embodies as monks or nuns to guide the way for sages who wish to attain sainthood. He benefits not only mundane beings, but also the transcendental people.

Next is part IV, where the Buddha emphasizes the importance of the ear-organ.

4. The importance of the ear-organ

**a) In the saha world,
using the sound to expound.**

**Existent beings do not know the hearing-nature,
motion by following the external sound.**

**Though Ānanda had a good memory,
he could not avoid the craving mantra.**

**Only detached from it to return inward,
the illusory craving disappears immediately.¹³⁰**

In the saha world, there are a lot of different heretics who propagate their own way, such as the “Treatise on Phenomena Created by the Sound.” After this commentary was rejected, the new one. “Treatise on the Sounds Illuminating Phenomena” was born. They think that the sounds create and illuminate all things

¹³⁰ Ibid., (Báo Giác) p. 198.

including the hearing-nature.¹³¹ Likewise, the Christians believe God creates all things. Based on ignorance and following the falling and arising external sounds, both treatises did not realize the everlasting hearing-nature. In this world, we use, as well as wrongly attach to, all sounds. Greed, hatred, and delusion cause the karma for us continuing in the birth and death cycle. Though Venerable Ānanda was learned—he mastered all aspects and remembered all things the Buddha taught, he still grasped the eloquent commentary, dialectic, and theory but he lacked practice. Cultivation means to go against the false thoughts and turn back to the self nature. Venerable Ānanda and human beings like us favor the worldly life so much that we forget our inherent hearing-nature.

Our spiritual sickness is to chase after the sound. Now if we wish to overcome or cure it, we need to detach from all sounds. This hearing-nature method is very essential and suitable for us. This verse also means to criticize the learned ones who do not return to reflect on their hearing. Although they remember all things, they cannot attain enlightenment like Venerable Ānanda. Normally, when we say a word it is usually to connect with our consciousness and false thought (*micchā-ditthi*). Daily we often cling to various sounds, that is, movements, to settle down our mind. The Buddha praised that merits and functions of hearing cause living beings to attain the fundamental insight.

b) Ānanda, please listen clearly.

**Based on the blessing power of the Buddha,
I declare the Vajra Raja (Diamond King),
it plays as unbelievable illusions**

¹³¹ Giới Hương, trans., *Samadhi Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Tâm Minh), p. 553.

But it is Buddha's mothers of the true samādhi.¹³²

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva told Venerable Ānanda to pay attention to the verse. Vajra Raja (Diamond King) meditation is as solid as a diamond to cut the falseness. It is the mother of all Buddhas, because from this firm samādhi, Buddhas in three times (past, present, and future) who have been born to attain the basic, resulting wisdom and omniscience (*sabbavidū*), earned measureless merit to fulfill their perfect enlightenment. However, this Vajra Raja plays the role as an illusion to cure human beings' sickness.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva said modestly that the verse he spoke was not about his own ideas; it was spoken by the blessing power the Buddha vested in him. This means that he was lucky to meet the dharma door of a Vajra king and Ānanda should take it seriously. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva was representing the Buddha to speak at the dharma door of the Vajra King that is the mother of all dharma.

Vajra Raja means the steady concentration filters the impure layers of five skandhas. There is not a method to surpass it, so it is called the king. Those who can enter that nature become Buddhas. *Diamond king is an illusion* means that Anan's vajra nature is available in him. He forgets it to race out to the external objects. If he detaches from external objects, his vajra nature appears without needing to cultivate, so it is called playing the role of illusion. This dharma is cultivated without cultivating, because we own our inherent vajra nature. We neither conceive of it nor express it in words. The cultivation is like an illusion, but if we do not cultivate, we accomplish nothing. Thus, we should cultivate and practice diligently. After we succeed in samādhi, we will achieve Buddha-

¹³² Giói Hương trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 198.

nature, which will be still fullness without increasing or decreasing.

**c) At the countless Buddhas,
You learned the mysterious dharma methods,
but the lust inflows failed to transform.
Much hearing causes much error.
Turn hearing the Buddha's words to hearing yourself Buddha.
Why do not you hear your own hearing?**¹³³

Learning dharma is knowing how to cultivate to end defilements. If we fail to cut off desire, it is the same as a person who claims to be hungry, eats nothing, and is never full. Venerable Ānanda, who was a learned monk, remembered all the sūtras. However, he did not achieve strong samādhi to transform his desire and he was about to break his first important precept. The inflows (srava) means the five lusts (money, beauty, fame, beneficence, and sleep) in three inflows (the taint of sensuality, the taint of existence, and the taint of ignorance).¹³⁴

He was smart, but he could not avoid the desire mantra of Ms. Mantagi. He was not able to keep his purity because he was about to break bodily precepts. For a long time, Venerable Ānanda used his hearing to uphold the Buddha dharma, concentrated on studying things external to himself, and did not practice enough samādhi to free himself from Ms. Mantagi's magic. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva blamed Ānanda for preferring to study Buddha dharma with his hearing, but without focus to return to his real hearing-nature. For many kalpas, Venerable Ānanda, who was proficient in learning, did not cultivate samādhi and the desire

¹³³ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 199.

¹³⁴ Three taints: the taint of sensuality, the taint of existence, and the taint of ignorance.

inflows still remained in him. This part points out the faults of those who do not cultivate the dharma door of perfect penetration. Using the hearing-nature to uphold the Buddha dharma in the ten directions, the practitioner still makes mistakes as a result of lacking the Diamond King's samādhi. Using the hearing-nature to listen to the Buddha's teachings is not better than returning to our hearing to hear the self nature. The Buddha used words to explain the dharma so that we can return to the hearing to hear the self nature and detach from his words. To understand his teachings, we detach from them, cultivate, and develop that skill.

Normally, the hearing hears external sounds; it favors grasping sound, so it is called "hearing." If the hearing does not perceive an external sound, the sound is still present. What name do we call it? It is called the hearing-nature or the enlightened nature. The Buddha's deep ideas on the practice are more important than theory. When we hear all of his guidance, we need to return at once to cultivate before learning the next step. Although Venerable Ānanda used his ear-organ to memorize all the sūtras, he still had the habit of listening to the sound without inner reflection. Venerable Ānanda raced out to the sound and did not practice what the Buddha taught. He still kept the desire inflows. The more he heard the sounds, the more mistakes were made. Today we use our hearing to learn some teachings of the Buddha, tomorrow we use our hearing to receive some teachings of the Buddha. We do it again and again. Why don't we return to our hearing to hear the self nature? This is the Buddha's main aim.

Venerable Ānanda, who heard all of the Buddha's secret dharma doors, taught human beings. However, Ānanda's desire inflows (sravas) were not transformed.

The hearing does not make the mistake. The mistake is that we hear one sound then another sound, and then we forget our main aim. We continue to keep hearing and we forget our primary focus.

So, it is useless. We know and understand the theory, but we do not practice. Once we study a certain method, we comprehend it completely; we should cultivate and live with it.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva said that “much hearing makes mistakes.” The mistakes are not from the hearing, Learning and cultivating need to be simultaneous to get the full benefit. Basically, hearing many things is still good for our experience, but we must apply them in daily life.

“Why don’t you hear your own hearing” means from śamatha (stillness and contemplation), we learn how to recognize the true and false. We enter the Vajra Raja samādhi to return to the forever diamond meditation state. We understand that the meaning of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra is to penetrate our hearing-nature or the enlightened mind. To compare that understanding of the whole sūtra of Śūraṅgama is not better than keeping the mind calm to reflect our hearing-nature. This is what the Buddha really wanted.

d) The hearing cannot arise naturally.

By the sound, it has the name.

Reflect inwardly to detach from the sound.

What do you call the ability to detach?

As one organ returns to its source,

six organs are all liberated from knots.”¹³⁵

When we see shapes, it is called a perception of seeing. When we taste flavors, it is called a perception of tasting. When we hear sounds, it is called a perception of hearing. Now we return to hearing without attachment to the sound. Is the hearing still there? What do you call the ability of detaching? Depending on what kinds of worldly objects—shapes, flavors, smells, we have the

¹³⁵ Giói Hương trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Bảo Giác), p. 199.

according names, such as seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and so on. If we detach, there is no worldly object. It will return to our self nature which is freed from any name. That is the good answer for his question about the real name of sound.

Detach from forms, there is no seeing.

Detach from sounds, there is no hearing.

Detach from fragrances, there is no smelling.

Detach from flavors, there is no tasting.

Detach from touch, there is no feeling.

Detach from phenomena, there is no knowing.

If there is no name or label, what is left? That is only us, the Buddha-nature. If we are unattached to one and the entire six organs are freed simultaneously, we can see our self nature or Buddha mind clearly. If seeing, hearing, smelling are not ourselves then who are we? We can choose the best method of perfect penetration. One who cultivates this penetrating method for one day, his merit is better than one who cultivates other methods. It is said, “As one organ returns to its source, six organs are all liberated from knots.”

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva praised and chose the perfect penetration of the hearing-nature that is suitable for human beings’ capacities and the truth. Before cultivating this means, a practitioner should chant the *Great Compassion* or the *Śūraṅgama Mantra* to eradicate the heavy karma. Some practitioners have dwelled on the hearing-nature without sleeping for twenty-one days. It means they attained the parallel of samādhi (one-pointedness) and prajñā (wisdom) states, a state of ecstasy where they can use the powers of concentration to feed themselves (without eating food) for twenty-one consecutive days. Some cultivators do only the hearing meditation without sleeping for many days. We are surprised by this, but with them, it is a normal thing.

This state of ecstasy meditation is as nourishing as food. Beginners do not grasp sounds to return to the hearing-nature, that is, we have the ability to control the desire inflows. Once we can control false thoughts, Buddha-nature will arise. If we only study, see and hear the outside sounds, we are stuck in words, and we fail to reach the Buddha's aim. Therefore, to obey the Buddha's word, it is important to experience and settle in our hearing-nature.

e) Seeing and hearing are illusory.

Three realms are as the sky flowers.

Now return to the inward hearing.

The delusion organ vanished.

Objects transformed, it is the perfectly penetrating purity.¹³⁶

By being ignorant, we see the space in which we are constituted by the forms of earth, water, wind, and fire. Fire is from the sun that is bright. Seeing the darkness is deluded and seeing the brightness is also from dullness. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who was enlightened, did not attach to brightness or darkness. Due to being without ignorance, he could not see the space. So, it is clear the brightness and darkness do not exist. Then, how can the forms or shapes present and appear in this brightness and darkness? Brightness and darkness from the eyes do not exist, motion and stillness from the ears, touch and touchless from the nose, tongue, and body do not either. Therefore, in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha said because of the eyes aching, we see sky flowers, which is false. The brightness, darkness, motion, stillness are unreal. Bodhisattvas, who are enlightened, do not see flowers in space anymore.

Whoever lives and attaches to the organs, objects, and consciousness as reality is the same as someone viewing the sky

¹³⁶ Ibid., (Bảo Giác) p. 199.

flowers as real. Bodhisattvas live beyond the organs, objects, and consciousness. They know that all things, space, brightness, and darkness come from the Buddha-nature. Unenlightened people are in dreams; we dream of the brightness, darkness, happiness, misery, danger, however, when we get up to see nothing is really happening there.

Once we detach from sounds or shapes, we do not call it seeing or hearing anymore. We name the hearing-nature the Buddha-nature or the original nature. As soon as one organ returns to its source, all six sense-organs are freed from their knots. It is like a person who embroiders six roses on a coat. If one thread is removed, all six roses are removed. We, who possess bright eyes, cannot see the sky flowers, but whoever has aching eyes will see them. Flowers in space are symbols of our karma, which appears as five illusory hindrances, six worldly objects, three realms in which we exist. If we can return to the hearing and hear the self nature, there are no sky flowers. This is called “the illusion vanishes.” Once the eyes are not tired anymore, the worldly objects are transformed; it is the perfect penetration.

f) In the extreme purity, the light penetrates.

The tranquil illumination over the space.

Now looking at the worldly phenomena

as the illusions in dreams.

Ms. Matangi is the delusional dream.

How could she delude (Ānanda)?¹³⁷

Being deluded, we stare at the space that is originally unreal. Once we are enlightened, the space disappears immediately. In fact, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva or the Buddha standing in it, it is not a space. As mentioned above, being unenlightened, we do not realize

¹³⁷ Ibid., (Bảo Giác) p. 199.

that our Buddha-nature, which is extremely pure, luminous and pervasive in all ten directions with no place left unpenetrated. Any living being has this wonderful mind. Over the world there is no place without the perfect penetrating nature.

Do not discriminate among the external objects. They appear depending on us. So, if we do not discriminate with the ear-organ, flowers dancing in the sky will disappear. Then our mind is completely pure as the clear space without sky flowers. In such a tranquil state, if we use insight to reflect on the world, we will see that all phenomena are nothing but a dream—just arising, just cessation. As a part of the illusion, Ms. Mantagi is the unreal substance.

So, how could she capture Ānanda? Ānanda was fond of her. This is the desire inflows (sravas) and wrong thought. Due to his confused mind, there is a gap where he was caught by Mantagi's mantra. Once we live with the tranquil nature, without weary eyes, we see the illusory world as a dream. Everything looks like a dream. Ms. Mantagi is a dream. How did she delude him?

**g) Like a smart magician
performing with male and female puppets.
Though their bodies are manipulated
by a puppeteer,
once the puppeteer stops,
The puppets are still and unreal.**¹³⁸

A clever showman playing with a puppet is a symbol of illusory worldly appearances. The puppet moves as vividly as in life, but actually they are controlled by a string from the showman. The movable falseness creates the world. If the showman stops manipulating the thread controlling the puppets, they will be still.

¹³⁸ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 200.

Our life is as a dream. Our consciousness creates man, woman, studying, selling, playing, cultivating, and so on. In other words, we think our body, landscape, mind and everything exists apart from our mind. But once we stop breathing, there is no life, no man, woman, studying, selling, playing, and cultivating. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva concluded that “Once the machine is stopped, puppets are unmoving as unreal.”

**h) Six organs do the same,
originally came from the alaiya consciousness,
dividing into six functions.
If an organ returns to its real source,
all six units disappear.¹³⁹**

This part connects with the previous section. Six organs are from one substance of the alaiya consciousness and because of the illusory conditions, six sense objects arise. If one returns to its nature, the six organs cannot distinguish.

Those who have not yet learned the Śūraṅgama Sūtra and especially the Avalokiteśvara section, cannot see the path and still live with their false thoughts. We are studying that it shows the path in front of our eyes. Why don't we step on it? We are like a silkworm, blindly weaving a cocoon of birth and death that ensnares us in the cycle. We lead the life of a silkworm cocoon, trapped in our own prison. Six organs contact with six objects to cause six forms of consciousness or false thoughts. We receive and regard these false thoughts as our mind. We receive enemies and allow them to stay in our houses while we forget the Buddha inside. Therefore, it is most necessary that we be aware that there are flourishing enemies in our house. We must be aware of this. Do not listen to what the false thoughts decreed with the support of the

¹³⁹ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 200.

corresponding six organs. We must get rid of them. However, we only need to expel one and then all others will leave automatically.

Thus, we choose a sinless organ which has more merit and is easy for us to penetrate in practice. The Buddha said that the life of a human being or an animal is divided into three periods: the past, the present, and the future. In the past we were young, now we are in the present and we will become old in the future. Each species lives in the space of ten directions, the front, behind, top, bottom, east, west, north, south. In other words, in regard to the time, animate beings (creature beings like humans) and inanimate beings (houses, trees, stones, rocks) are subjected three times, which is called the world.

In the space, animate beings and inanimate beings have the four fundamental states of production, existence, change, and extinction. They who occupy a certain space in ten directions are controlled by three periods of time. Space and time cause the world to form. It is divided into the animate world and the inanimate world.

We are human beings; our mind is tied to our body. When our mind is good, we uphold five precepts, ten precepts or bodhisattva precepts, but sometimes the mind is affected by greed, hatred, and stupidity. So, the mind is movable when it is in a half good and half bad state. According to the type of low mind a human has, living beings will be born in six realms of the heaven, human, hell, ghost, animal, and asura. If the mind awakens, it turns into four upper realms of the voice hearer (śrāvaka), Dependent Enlightened Ones (pratyeka), bodhisattvas, and Buddhas. Ten realms appear depending on the delusive or enlightened mind. Each realm has three times and four directions. This means ten dharma realms x 3 x 4 directions=120 dharma realms.

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

The ear-organ has 1,200 virtues because we can hear when sleeping, awakening, and getting old. The other organs do not have enough of these virtues. For example, if we want to experience a table, our hands must touch the table to know smoothness or roughness. If the wind touches our skin, we experience coolness or not.

The scent mixes with the air coming in to our nose and we can smell it. If the scent does not mix with the air at our nose, we cannot smell. If there is inhalation, then at that moment there is without exhalation. If there is exhalation, then at that moment there is no inhalation. Food must be placed on the tongue; we will experience the tastes of sour, sweet, bitter, and so on. Once we swallow it without chewing, we cannot know what kind of taste. This is a combination of organs and objects. If our eyes are covered by something, we cannot see a thing, while ears can hear sound from far or near in ten directions even when sleeping or in the dark as well. Hearing does not need to touch the objects; it still hears. Thus, the ear-organ is called a perfect organ. Here we eliminate the body-organ, nose-organ, and tongue-organ which need the “touchness” to experience its objects.

Now we will examine the organ of eyes, ears and brain—which one is deep, which one is shallow? Deep is keen and active while hollow is shallow and slow. The mental-organ is hard to control, we put it aside. There are two organs left. Eyes only see the objects before them, they cannot see objects behind them. So, they have only 800 virtues while the ear-organ has 1,200 virtues. Still at this moment, we can select the organs. Which is the most active among them?

Since beginningless time, we have been foolishly knotted to six organs that are the faculties used to collect the external objects. Yesterday they received a little bit. Today they collect a little bit. Tomorrow they will record a little bit onward. Gradually these

habits form the eye-faculty (and form a nose-organ, a tongue-organ, a body-organ, and a mental-organ too). It is the illusory way of collecting the external objects or sound. It is like a person who works with many machines, researches it day by day, and finally creates a smart engine from his experiences. Likewise, we collect from the external a little bit, and then a little day by day, six sensitive organs are formed. It is called the downstream.

When we take an engine apart, it is like removing six knots (mentioned in Chapter II). False thoughts constitute a knot.

Upstream: To detach from the sounds. When we remove one organ, how can other organs be removed from the upstream as well? We knot six organs and now we open the knots together at one time. For example, space is vast and is everywhere. If we have a square box, it will seem to have the square space shape. If we have a round box it makes the round space shape. As a result, we see two spaces of a circle and a square. However, if we throw the boxes away, then the space has no shape except the vast space.

Buddha-nature is like the space. Throwing away six boxes of six organs then how many boxes are left? Only one mind is left without any organ boxes. Our mind is perfect nature no matter where we live in the six realms or who we are in the forms of Buddha, human, cat, animal, heaven devas or ghosts, we still have the ability to see. Buddha-nature is vast and unchangeable as the space. It is tranquil, motionless, and unchanging according to the conditions. Penetrating means it pervades perfectly all dharma realms. Due to our ignorance and inability to see the space, we knot the dull thoughts to form the figures.

The brightness and darkness appear. Our natures now see, grasp, and attach to the strange brightness and darkness. It creates a power that recognizes and clings to the brightness or darkness. The eye-organ chases the color sights. Similarly, we like to hear and

COMMENTARY ON AVALOKITEŚVARA BODHISATTVA

collect all sounds (movement and stillness) for a long time that causes the ear-organ to form and hear. We have the habit to smell and collect the scent (clearance and block) for long times that causes the nose-organ to smell. We prefer to taste all flavors (bland and savory) for a long time which causes the tongue organ to form and taste. We like to touch and feel (touch and without touch) that causes the body-organ to form and to sense. We often think of the images of six objects (arising and cessation) for a long time which causes the mental organ to form and to know the six organs are knotted already.

a. Eye: The seeing-nature is still perfect and motionless, but we prefer to cling to the brightness and darkness to discriminate among all kinds of images, so the eyes are formed. The worldly forms are the shadow of images in the brightness and darkness. Mental consciousness at the eye-nerve makes the distinction to inform us to be aware of what the image is, flower or animal. This means the three items of eye-organ, objects, and consciousness create forms.

Seeing is the eye-organ, the shadow of the image is the worldly form. Human karma makes us recognize such image according to the knowledge of humans. Because we keep grasping and collecting such forms that push to create an engine of seeing and knot the earth, water, wind, and fire to be organs. This is called the rising flesh organs. From the rising flesh eye-organ comes the seeing that is called the supreme function sensitive faculty. Now, the Buddha-nature clings at the eye nerves, so it is called the spiritual seeing at the nerves. The rising flesh appearance of eyes is like the small shape of a bodhi seed or a fruit. The patriarch called it “Chasing after the external objects as a falling water current, a firing forest or a running horse” to describe the eyes which favor the outside shapes or appearances and are hard to control. Chasing after beautiful shapes is usually our habit. The reality of the sexual

appearance is only earth, water, wind, and fire. We must return to our spiritual practice to reflect on this. But here the patriarch complained that the four objects of earth, water, wind and fire (i.e. rising flesh organs) are chasing after the sights. If the Buddha-nature is bonded at the organ, how can it run after sights? For example, the eye-organ attaches to a nice landscape or an attractive person so much that we must often take photos or buy magazines to watch ourselves again and again. We race out to all forms. The patriarch emphasized that for a long time our spirit has been melted into our flesh to form habits to chase after external objects (forms, sounds, and so on). It becomes an innate habit and then it is difficult to return to our real inner nature. How can the earth, water, wind and fire exist? We know the root of earth, water, wind, and fire belong to the spiritual. Now we use them so much that it makes the earth, water, wind and fire have the knowing abilities or habits as the spiritual to chasing after the shapes. It proves that material and mind are as the one unit. Our mind constitutes the eye-organ and forms that mingle with each other as one. So, whenever the eyes see forms, they follow and attaches to them quickly.

b. Ear: The ears often love to grasp and collect the sounds for a long time that causes the ear-organ to form. Sound, which is empty, is a play of motion and stillness or vibration of air. The substance of sound is as the smoke or air in space. Our ears absorb and attach to the air for a long time so much so that it makes spiral flesh shapes as ears or the sounds collect to receive the vibration of the air. All feelings of like, dislike, interest, boring, and so on arise continuously.

c. Nose: The nose often prefers and collects the fragrance for a long time that causes the nose organ to form. Two convenient, flesh nostrils appear to take scent or odor. Fragrance that is empty, follows the wind to enter the nostril for us to smell. Then, all kinds

of feelings and defilements arise.

d. Tongue: The tongue favors to often grasp and collect the flavors for a long time that causes the cells on tongue-organ to taste.

e. Body: The body often likes to receive and collect the gentle sweet touching for a long time that causes the body to sense.

f. Mental: All images, feelings, and emotions of hearing, seeing, tasting, and touching are sent to the dark room of the brain where they stay, move, count, and discriminate. It makes the mind uncalm.

At present, we must see with the eye-organ, the bright, dark, and our own karma. We know the sight with the eye-consciousness. The knowing became the illusory brightness or discriminately reflecting nature. We live with the three organs, objects, and consciousness—this is where our life is. Collecting desirable external objects established the organs. Once we are awakened to return to the source, then the organs vanish. We have an inherent intuitive nature, but we forget it. We ignorantly receive the eye-organ, external objects, and ear-consciousness to be our ego. Realizing this illusory combination of the three, organ-object-consciousness, the bodhi nature appears.

If we always race out to the six sense objects, our six organs will be falsely skillful. If we do not grasp six sense objects, the six organs will not work anymore. Because of our long-time habits, it is hard for us to detach from the six objects. The Buddha emphasized that without discriminating and chasing the external objects, without knotting, the eye, ear, nose, and other organ do not exist. But now knowing nature fixes at the faculties of eye, ear, nose, and so on, to illuminate. The eye records the brightness and darkness; therefore, vision is from the eye without other places.

Likewise, the ears record motion and stillness; therefore, the

hearing is from the ear and not another place.

The nose records the clearance and the blocks; therefore, the nose is from the nostril and no other place.

The tongue records the bland and flavorful; therefore, the taste is from the tongue and no other place.

The body collects the separate and combinations; therefore, touching is from the body and no other place.

The brain records the arising-falling shadows of six-organs; therefore, the mind is from the brain no other place.

Now six machines are at the six sense-organs with six different functions. The eyes are seeing without hearing. Ear is hearing without smelling. Nose is smelling without vision. Tongue is tasting without smell. Body is touching without seeing, and brain is knowing without tasting. Each organ has its function. Now we reflect inwardly, we detach from twelve objects (bright-dark, motion-stillness...), our Buddha-nature will appear as one without six functions anymore. Without discrimination between brightness and darkness, the eyes are freed from the knot of suffering. Without discrimination between movement and stillness, the ears are freed from the knot. Without discrimination between clearance and disturbance, the nose is freed from the knot. Without discrimination between flavor and flavorless, the tongue is freed from the knot. Without discrimination between separation and reunion, the body is freed from the knot of suffering.

Without discrimination between production and extinction, the brain is freed from the knot. At this time, there is only one awakened nature that has six functions, but it does not bond at the six flesh organs. Because they cannot separate, we can see, hear, taste, smell, and touch simultaneously. We can use the ears to see or smell. We smell by our eyes, touch by our ears, and so on. For a

long time, we were familiar with using the eyes to see, the ears to hear. Now the Buddha taught our enlightened nature to have great ability in performing all six functions. Because of ignorance, our nature is divided into six false parts that came from many conditions. What is made from conditions is empty. It is divided into six organs, six realms in which thousands of varieties arise and fall. Once the body expires, the consciousness stops working and all body and realms disappear.

We can see, work, and go back and forth as well, but if the breath stops, how is it? It is important to realize that when the breath as an image stops, the body also pauses, because it is impermanent and unreal.

**i) When the defilements are transformed,
the pure enlightenment is experienced.
In learning position, the inflows (sravas) remain.
Further practice is needed.
Once the awakened illumination is supreme,
Tathāgatahood is reached.**¹⁴⁰

As we know, the Buddha-nature is pure, never changing. The natures of living beings and Buddhas are the same. Cultivation means to wipe out defilements. Once defilements are cut off, the awareness nature appears.

One organ is constituted by many parts such as nerves, flesh, skin, and bone, but it must have the Buddha-nature to help us recognize the seeing, hearing, tasting, and so on. The six organs are six engines. If one engine runs down, the others stop working as well. It means if we penetrate one organ, the others are liberated.

“When the defilements are transformed,” means the relationship

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 200.

between six organs and six objects comes to an end. The objects are external things such as the five skandhas (forms, feelings/sensations, perception, volition, and consciousness) or six forms of consciousness (form, sound, smell, flavor, touch, and shadows of objects). Defilements are the inclination of the dependent mind to cling to six objects. Once there are no objects and defilements, the false thoughts will vanish. The false thoughts arise by the skandhas of sensation and imagining. When there are no defilements, the pure awakened nature is revealed. When the pure awakened nature is revealed, the ignorant karma of rebirth will end.

j) Ānanda and all listeners

Return to your inner hearing,

hear your own hearing-nature.

It becomes the supreme bodhi.

The perfect penetration is a reality.¹⁴¹

The six sense objects are false views. Six forms of consciousness are false thoughts. If we are meditating, and suddenly remember yesterday there was a person who praised us or today some criticized us, this is called false thought—sticking with false view. Do not let us run outside. Please look within yourselves. At that moment we become a Buddha. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva advised Ānanda and listeners in the assembly to return to their hearing-nature without running outward. Once our mind enters the hearing samādhi, we will attain perfect penetration and the supreme bodhi. The ear-organ, which possesses the merit of permanence, penetration, and perfection, is the easiest to cultivate successfully. Returning to the hearing and listening to the bodhi nature, all falseness vanishes. All of the audience in the assembly attained the hearing-nature, cut off subtle defilements, and obtained the pure

¹⁴¹ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 201.

dharma eye.

In this section, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva taught us how to choose the ear-organ that has less karma and is close to the Buddha-nature. It is close because the six sense-organs are the fundamental bodhi or Buddha-nature. He advised us that daily we should avoid racing out to the sense objects and instead, turn our hearing inward to listen to the real self nature.

**5) The ear-organ is unique and wonderful,
This method is the way leading to nirvana,
of Buddhas as countless as the Ganges' sand.
All the past Tathāgatas
succeeded at the ear-organ.
All bodhisattvas in the present
by this method enter this perfection.
Whoever will cultivate in the future,
choose this dharma door.
Not only Avalokiteshvara
but also, myself, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva
achieved enlightenment by practicing it.¹⁴²**

In this verse, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva praised that the dharma door of the hearing-nature is perfect and commonly used. Multitudes of Buddhas attained enlightenment by means of this ear-organ method. The dharma door of the hearing-nature is so effective that cultivators in the future should penetrate this method. Not only Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, but also Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva cultivated it. The penetrating destination is one. Although practitioners cultivate many methods, they attain the same perfect penetration. The method of perfect penetration is necessary for people who want to attain Buddhahood.

¹⁴² Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 201.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva is the symbol of the Fundamental Insight while Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is the Compassionate One. To be enlightened, we need to replace the rebirth way of living with our real awakened nature. This is the best way of all Buddhas in the past, present, and future. This is the unique way for whomever wants to be awakened.

To obtain the penetration, the most important condition is to detach from the organ-object-consciousness. Whoever wants to be a Buddha must follow this. In the saha world, the ear-organ method is like taking the correct medicine to cure a sickness. To new practitioners, it is suitable, simple, necessary, and quickly effective.

The sūtra confirmed that in the time it takes to snap a finger, we can become arahants, because the Buddha-nature is inherent in each of us. We just have to simply return to it. We study many methods without returning to receive the intuitive nature. It is as if we go for alms with a golden bowl; we do not realize that the golden bowl is more precious than food.

The Buddha compassionately taught us this dharma door so that we can obtain penetration. The Buddha said that:

- a) Because the sounds constitute an organ, when there are no sounds, there is no organ knot. It is dependent on conditions.
- b) When one organ returns to the source, the other organs are liberated.
- c) The six sense objects come from six sense-organs. When six organs cease, we transcend the world. The sky flowers are the shadows of weary eyes. The sky flowers and weary eyes appear or disappear at the same time. When the organs disappear, the world does too.

These three points prove that the hearing method of perfect penetration is effective and quick. When the organs and objects are

paused, pure enlightenment is revealed. The hearing, which is the original, wonderful tranquil nature without arising and cessation is the main cause to achieve bodhi nirvana. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva emphasized that the Buddhas in the three times (past, present, and future) practiced it. Why don't we choose and follow this method?

Ānanda was foremost in learning, so this hearing method was the most suitable for him. We all have the inherent hearing-nature; hence this method can save all beings in saha world.

First, cultivators attain the self-śūnyatā (non-self), and then next they achieve the dharma-śūnyatā (non-phenomena) form that can meet the needs of anyone who seeks the transcendent world. The hearing-nature is suitable for any person in the saha realm. It is correct according to the truth; thus, it is very useful.

b) A true address to the World-Honored One

What are the best means in the end?

**To save people in the final dharma kalpa period
for those who wish to be transcendent,
attain gloriously the nirvana's mind
the method of Avalokiteśvara is the best.**¹⁴³

This verse addresses the Buddha's question about which dharma door is the best. Contemplating the worldly sounds is the best. In the saha world, sounds are used for many purposes, so people are controlled by sound. The hearing door of perfect penetration is appropriate for us. For example, we fight against each other because of words, many disasters or wars happen because of unskillful words of disagreement. Therefore, the hearing is suitable for humans.

“World-Honored One, what is the best means in the end?”

¹⁴³ Ibid., (Báo Giác), p. 202.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva examined all methods to save beings. The method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is foremost and helps to return to the original awakened nature. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva lived his dharmakaya. The hearing method has 1,200 merits, so it is number one. Each of the twenty-five bodhisattvas practiced one of the six organs, six objects, six forms of consciousness, and seven elements. Among them, the hearing-nature of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is the most outstanding.

c) All methods are presented thanks to the blessing power of Buddha. Transformed defilements as touching the objects the ordinary people feel it is difficult to practice. There are the deep and shallow methods bodhisattvas explained in detail.¹⁴⁴

This verse section means twenty-four other methods have the same aim as the hearing, to cut off the defilements of contacting with the world. Whoever is cultivating twenty-four other means and practicing the hearing-nature all need the Buddha's support and power to succeed. Without the Buddha's support, cultivators find it difficult to accomplish their enlightenment. However, some other methods are appropriate for some people. No matter what method, the new practitioners need to lean on the Buddha's mighty blessings to cultivate. In brief, bodhisattvas cultivated many methods, but the method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was easily cultivated.

“All methods are presented, thanks to the blessing power of the Buddha.”¹⁴⁵ Besides the hearing method, there are twenty-four other methods that are supported but the blessing power is from the Buddha. It is difficult to transform defilements, so we need support

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 202.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 202.

from the Buddha. All bodhisattvas revealed in detail that there are deep and shallow methods of practice. Among these, the method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is the best. He advised that we must return our attention inwardly. If we are forced to go market for business, to cook or do something outside with much struggle and competition, we ask which one is harder or easier? Only sitting returns us to the inner calm. The method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is easier, but we do not follow it, because we are used to running outside to cling to like, dislike, sadness, happiness, and so on. The patriarchs know this well, so they guide us to the method of reciting the Amitābha Buddha's name for us to cling to the names of Buddhas, instead of clinging to other defiling objects. This is the skillful means to convert us. There are no difficult methods, only lazy minds that do not cultivate. Returning to the hearing to listen to the self nature is very easy, but we do not follow this because we do not have the knowledge.

6. Pray for protection

Prostrated on the Tathāgata Store,

his outflows are unbelievable.

For the blessings of future generations,

trust in this method completely.¹⁴⁶

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha taught us how to obtain the Buddha mind from the fundamental bodhi that is inside our body and manifests as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and knowing at our six organs. As we know, in Chapter V, there are some bodhisattvas who penetrated at six entrances, twelve contacts, eighteen realms, and seven elements and they all experienced enlightenment. Twenty-five saints used the fundamental method to attain their Buddha-nature pervading all dharma realms. Thus, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva confirmed that anyone

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., (Báo Giác), p. 202.

who cultivates reaches the same goal.

According to the kind of worldly objects, its proper organs will appear. Because of the presence of sound, the hearing works. Because of presence of form, the seeing works. Because of the presence of scent, the smelling works. Because of the presence of flavor, the tasting works. Because of presence of touching, the feeling works. Because of presence of phenomena, the knowing works. As mentioned above, the six organs are the fundamental substance of bodhi nature. Among them, the Buddha confirmed that the ear-organ that has less karma has more merits of permanence, perfection, and penetration, and is the shortest way to enlightenment. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva summarized it by the above verse. He praised the measureless virtues and merits of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who succeeded in returning to his real nature. This real nature is the Avalokiteśvara's nature and is available in everybody.

Trust in this method completely: Do we recognize clearly the way of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva?

We must have faith in this hearing method. If we hear someone practicing it correctly, we accept it. If someone cultivates wrongly, we will not follow it, but we avoid looking down on him or her because we must respect all other methods and respect the ones who cultivate other methods. The practitioners spend much time and energy to cultivate. However, whether or not they attain enlightenment depends on their karma and ability and we must honor their commitment.

We should not blindly believe anyone or any method. Buddhism is a wisdom religion. Buddhists must have the right view. There are various methods, shallow or deep, false or true. We should choose insight to avoid blindly following the crowd or the current trend. If we do not know which method to choose, we should pray for the

Buddha's support, so we can choose an appropriate method.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva prostrated on the Tathāgata Store: Tathāgata Store means Tathāgatagarbha (the source of all phenomena). He prostrated to the Tathāgatagarbha, that is, he bowed to Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the Buddha-natures within all living beings in ten directions. He prayed that all bodhisattvas will help all living beings in the future, so they do not have any doubts about the hearing method. He hoped that they can understand this method is the best, and suitable for all human beings, regardless of their low or high level. It means our real nature is the same, but the means or methods are low-high or easy-hard. Anyone can feel free to choose the proper one for himself or herself to return to their Tathāgatagarbha. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva devoutly wished for Venerable Ānanda and all living beings to choose the hearing method. The six organs can be used for perfect penetration, but the ear-organ is the foremost. The cause is the fundamental bodhi, and then the result will be bodhi enlightenment.

We make the distinction between the consciousness and organ. Consciousness is the root of birth and death while organ is the root of bodhi. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva used the ear-consciousness to perform his ten universal vows in ten directions. It is hard to transform from consciousness to the fundamental organ to enlighten that is for the upper level. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva who contemplated the ear-organ (without using the consciousness) to directly go the fundamental insight, accomplished the pure nature of three Tathāgata Stores.

Śūnyatā is the absolute, non-śūnyatā Tathāgatagarbha is non-absolute, and without non-śūnyatā Tathāgatagarbha is non-absoluteness and absoluteness (all falseness is true).

These supreme states are the application from samādhi and the limitless outflows (āsravas) and are indescribable. Avalokiteśvara

Bodhisattva who entered the stream of samādhi, applied these benefits to living beings in the ten directions. Because he lived with the outflows without learning or working anymore, he could perform many unbelievable works from his thirty-two bodies, fourteen kinds of fearlessness, and four affectless virtues. This is the entire great beneficence of the absolute dharma kāya that even mundane people possess. Now Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva prostrated on the Tathāgata Store to use this wonderful store for the sake of many.

7. Conclusion

This means is easy to succeed

Ānanda should learn it.

**People in the final dharma kalpa
can practice with the ear-organ
perfectly penetrating everywhere,
the true mind as such.¹⁴⁷**

Once again, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva praised that among methods, the hearing method is easy to cultivate and will succeed. Ānanda and human beings in the period of the final dharma kalpa should learn about it.

“The true mind as such.” He strongly confirmed that from his pure mind, he experienced such a hearing-nature; it wasn’t just theory or speculation. The nature of living beings is pure and tranquil like Buddha-nature. Because of ignorance, living beings see the subject and object, landscape, worlds, humans, and other beings. The true mind is as one, even if there are a variety of methods to return to it.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva omitted twenty-four methods that were difficult, according to living beings’ capacities. If cultivators know how to overcome their difficulties, they attain enlightenment.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., (Bảo Giác), p. 202.

Lastly, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva picked the hearing door of perfect penetration which is the easiest method with some strong points.

Actually, with any method, if we put in much effort, we will attain perfect penetration at the hearing-nature. The way to attain penetration is inside us. We do not need to go far to search.

d) Listen to dharma to attain enlightenment:

After listening to the dharma from Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, Ānanda and all of the audience felt their body and mind to be enlightened. They saw clearly the bodhihood and parinirvāṇa, like a traveler far from home who knows the way back. In the assembly, eight sets of heavenly dragons, the South Hearers (śrāvakas), and new bodhisattvas, as many were as the sand in ten Ganges, realized their original minds, detached from defilements, and achieved the pure dharma eye. After having heard this gatha, Bhikkhunī Matangi (Self nature) experienced arahantship. Countless living beings developed the unsurpassed bodhi mind.¹⁴⁸

What is the pure dharma Eye? What does the eye see to be called the pure dharma Eye? There are fivefold eyes, that is, the flesh eye (as humans), the deva eye (as Ānanda's eyes), the insight eye, the dharma eye, and the Buddha eye. Once the cultivator reaches this state of penetration, he will attain the dharma vision. This means he will see the true things or the fundamental nature. With human karma, we see pagodas, Buddhists, societies, rivers, mountains, and so on. Our eyes are bonded to human visions (we cannot see through a block or wall). This is called the "flesh eyes." The heavenly beings have heaven eyes and can see through a block, wall, underground to the hells or up to the heavens. The śrāvakas have insight eyes because they reflect the human and

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., (Báo Giác), p. 203.

animal bodies that are made from the earth, water, wind, and fire. They see deeply inside a pretty bird or cat, which is composed of many cells or parasites. They do not see a bird, cat, or human. They have attained the insight eye to realize all illusory phenomena.

Bodhisattvas attained dharma vision to enlighten all to the nature of earth, water, wind, and fire that are the intuitive nature pervading all of the dharma realm. The original mind of everyone exists in flowers, leaves, mountains, rivers, and all phenomena. The Buddha had Buddha vision to experience that all living beings have the capacity to become a Buddha like him.

“Bodhisattvas as many as grains of sand in ten Ganges realized their original minds, detached from defilements, and achieved the pure dharma eye” means that in the Śūraṅgama Dharma Assembly, there were countless other existent beings, as many as grains of sand in ten Ganges Rivers, who also awakened their fundamental minds, detached from defilements and won the pure dharma eye. Here the enlightenment of Venerable Ānanda is not mentioned. Maybe he played the role as a bodhisattva who supported the Buddha’s preaching. Therefore, he manifested to get stuck in Mantagi’s mantra in order that Sakyamuni Buddha had a good occasion to deliver the Śūraṅgama scripture to guide the Saṅgha in the present and future. We are ignorant, so we do not know how deep their works and goals were.

After hearing the Buddha’s teachings, Bhikkhunī Matamgi (Self nature) attained arahantship at once. Her mind was pure as a white cloth, because wrong view and thought did not exist in her anymore. She, who cut off the bad habits of recording worldly objects, also attained the insight eye to realize all phenomena as empty.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER VI

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva omitted twenty-four methods of twenty-four Bodhisattvas, because they were inappropriate for human beings in the saha world. He recognized that the Buddha used the words to deliver the sermons while sentient beings use hearing to get the meaning. Sentient beings, who have heard the Buddha's teachings, also must use their hearing to attain samādhi. So, the ear-organ of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is appropriate for them. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva also praised 1,200 merits of the ear-organ (more than other units) because it has three unique virtues of permanence, perfection, and penetration.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define three special qualities of the ear-organ of permanence, perfect, and penetration. Provide examples.
2. Interpret: "Sentient beings who have heard the Buddha's teachings, also must use their hearing to attain samādhi."
3. Explain the process of śamatha, samāpatti, and dhyāna through the ear-organ method.
4. Explain the connection between five skandhas and fivefold impurities through the ear-organ method.
5. Why, after listening to the verses of the ear-organ, did Bhikkhunī Matangi (self nature) attain arahantship while Ananda had not yet attained this realization?



The Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Statue
at Hương Tích Cave, Hà Nội
Photo: Võ Văn Tường

CHAPTER VII

THE METHODS OF PURE LAND AND HEARING-NATURE

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva were often standing next to the Amitābha Buddha. The dharma kāya (bodies) of three saints is over the dharma realm.

Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva: “Mahā” is the great, “sthama” is the high authority. He who has the great power with transcendental spirit, liberates all living beings from hells entering the Pure Land. If we want to become his disciple, we must have:

The great power to determinedly cut off false thoughts.

The stable willingness.

If someone wants to be a sage, he should go determinedly to the final destination. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva helps us to be relieved of suffering and disaster in this world, while Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva has great mightiness to break through the darkness and shine the way to escape from the cycle of rebirth. He teaches us how to cultivate and get out of saṃsāra in

the present and future while Maitreya Bodhisttva cultivates the great four immeasurables (*appamañña*, *apramāṇa*). They are love (*mettā*, *maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*, *upekṣā*).

Why does reciting the Amitābha Buddha’s name helps us to return to our original nature? The Buddha said clearly that all Buddhas and living beings in ten directions, never separate, have the same mind that is over the dharma realm, not only in Pure Land. Thus, reciting the name of one Buddha means remembering our original nature. Realizing this, we believe that there are Buddhas in reality, not only in our awareness nature. Each Buddha has three bodies, dharma kāya (as Amitābha Buddha manifests here and now; all phenomena are dharma body), *sambhoga-kāya* (blissful body) and *nirvana-kāya* (transformation body, manifesting in ten directions to convert living beings).

If we want to see the Buddha, we have to remember him—we remember our dharma body. While we recite “Namo Amitābha,” the Buddha exists here and unites with us. We are returning to our original nature. He still sits without moving; only we are too movable with many causes and conditions. We who do not race out to false thoughts anymore, do not manifest any more can unite with the Buddha. We return to the hearing to hear the self nature. This also means we hear our Buddha-nature.

When we recite “Namo Amitābha” and hear clearly every word, at that time we dwell on our Buddha-nature. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva dwells on his hearing-nature. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva was mindful at “Namo Amitābha,” which means that he dwells on his hearing-nature to hear clearly the the twelve letters of “Namo Amitābha.” Hence, it seems that the dharma door of Pure Land and the ear-organ are different, but in fact, their goals are the same, although they are called by two different names.

Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva hears the name of Amitābha Buddha, while Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva hears the hearing-nature. Returning to Amitābha is as if we are next to an adorned fragrant light and grasp the scent and radiance to cover our body. Contacting with the Amitābha Buddha, we will inherit the aloeswood; we will be scented. Returning to the Amitābha Buddha, we will receive the light of insight and inherit part of his measureless virtues and merits. Inheriting his virtues and merits, we can dissolve the five skandhas. Once we dwell on the hearing-nature and the phrase “Namo Amitābha,” the darkness of ignorance will vanish. Once we stay in the brightness, the darkness will disappear. The five skandhas are the five layers of darkness. Once the darkness of ignorance disappears, the Amitābha-nature, the measureless life and light appear.

Reciting the Buddha’s name is to restrain from the six organs and detach from the sense objects. This is the tranquil state for (reading Buddha’s name or returning to the hearing) entry into the saint stream.

Motion and stillness clearly have non-arising. Removing all movement and stillness, the ear-organ with the habit of recording the sound disappears. Gradually, we will attain higher levels.

The ear-organ method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is to dwell on the hearing-nature, while the means of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva is to recite the Amitābha Buddha’s name. We have the same mind as Amitābha Buddha, but we keep living with the arising-falling false thoughts so much that we forget our intuitive nature.

The five skandhas vanishes. This means the arising and falling disappear. Once the discrimination of arising and falling does not exist, we return to our non-arising nature. In regard to the perfect penetration, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Mahāsthāmaprāpta

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Bodhisattva cultivate the same method of hearing the motionless self nature. One heard the name of Amitābha Buddha, while the other heard the hearing-nature, but both returned to the unmoving tranquil state. Once we don't distinguish, we return to our Buddha-nature.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva both require three basic steps of hearing-reflecting practice. However, the method of returning to hear the self nature is not popular these days, while the method of reciting the Buddha's name is common and appropriate for many kinds of people. We should contemplate and pick one method that is suitable for us.

What are three basic knowledges in the method of reciting the Buddha's name? Three basic knowledges means that we hear the phrase "Namo Amitābha" clearly, word by word (knowledge of hearing). We use our mind to contemplate the meaning of the Buddha's name (knowledge of thinking). We should practice reciting the phrase regularly (knowledge of practice). Mundane people like us usually commit offenses whenever we walk; this method helps us decrease the false thoughts (practicing of wisdom).

What are three insights into the method of the hearing-nature? We usually use the consciousness to discriminate among the external objects, but we do not return to the inside hearing-nature. In the method of the hearing-nature, as soon as we understand the permanent hearing-nature and dwell on the bodhi essence, it is called insight hearing. We spend time to reflect that is called insight thinking. We take action and meditate on it until we successfully penetrate that is called insight practice. We recognize that at the beginning step, the insight hearing-reflecting-cultivating requires entering the basic bodhi to filter out the rebirth base, so it is harder than reading the Buddha name.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva did not use voice or sound. He entered directly the bodhi-essence. Only a few people cultivated this method. Perhaps some engaged in this practice secretly, we do not know. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva uses the expedient of the phrase “Namo Amitābha” to slowly enter the state of no-thought.

The three knowledges of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva we can understand easily. It is like coming to the pagoda to study dharma (knowledge of hearing). First we use the ear-consciousness to hear and think that “Oh! Pure Land is so great, the method of reciting without confusion the name of Amitābha Buddha is appropriate for me (knowledge of reflecting). We should make vows to read his name to go to his peaceful land. Then we start to recite his name continuously to one-pointedness (knowledge of practice). Thus, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva’s method is easier than Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s.

Those who do not study the Śūraṅgama Sūtra do not know the deep significance of the hearing-nature. They only know how to pray to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva to overcome suffering and disaster.

Those who study the Śūraṅgama Sūtra know that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s method is returning hearing to hear the self nature. This is not easy to cultivate. The way Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva cultivates is suitable for all ordinary human beings, but the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva way is difficult. The cultivators need to realize the bodhi nature then reflect on the hearing-nature. If not, they can get lost and be a ghost in the first stage.

Shakyamuni Buddha recommended the Pure Land of the Amitābha Buddha to us and advised us to make vows to go to his land. The Amitābha Bodhisattva was the leader of Pure Land; Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva was the patriarch of Pure Land School, while Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was the patriarch of

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perfect penetration. In the methods of the twenty-five Bodhisattvas, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva choose the perception of the seeing element to read the Buddha's name. Reading the Buddha's name is so easy that many mundane people can become Buddhas and step into the saint position, free from the defilements. So, this method is the supreme one.

Each method has two parts, that is, theory and practice whose genuine purpose is awakening and receiving the hearing-nature to filter out five layers of ignorance. In general, the ways of the perception of the seeing element of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva and the hearing-nature of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva are to return the Buddha-nature.

The means of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is to penetrate and practice with the hearing-nature to attain the vajra samādhi while the method of Mahāsthāmaprāpta is adorned by fragrance and light.

We can understand these methods through their names. The method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is called the penetration to the hearing-nature. In fact, according to the Mahāyāna philosophy, our nature is inherently full of penetration. We must filter our five hindrances and hear back to our original hearing-nature (vajra nature), then it will return to the inherent universal essence. The hearing-nature is our original enlightenment. The three insights of hearing-reflecting-cultivating are only the new awakening. Thanks to hearing, we can attain the vajra samādhi that is unshaken and illuminates all the dharma realm. Samādhi with insight is called the true concentration. The opposite, samādhi without insight is called blind concentration. In the state of samādhi, we still see and hear clearly, because the substance of samādhi is the insight substance. Insight is the function of meditation. When we have meditation and wisdom this is called true samādhi and is as firm as a diamond (vajra samādhi). It can destroy all the darkness of five skandhas.

In order to cultivate the method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, we have to believe that we have the original Buddha-nature or vajra samādhi and that we can definitely become a Buddha. The method of Mahāsthāmaprāpta is called the method of the adorned fragrance and light. It means that we have to rely on the Buddha's light to awaken us or decorate our mind.

We rely on the the name of Amitābha Buddha. This means we borrow the blessing or the glorious fragrance of the Amitābha Buddha in order to scent our wisdom, concentration, and precepts.

Amitābha has not only light, but also fragrance. Through the merit of reciting the Buddha's name, our kammic retribution vanishes. Hence, the dharma door of Mahāsthāmaprāpta has to rely on other's power. When we let go of external phenomena and turn back to the Buddha, it is called *self-effort*. It is said that this method is appropriate for the dharma-ending age where people often do not have enough merit, meet disasters, and encounter troubles from the heretics and Maras. They are affected by ghosts, so they need to rely on other's blessings every moment. There are two meanings of relying on the Buddha's power:

1) *Relying on the wisdom and mightiness of Buddhas* to decrease our kamic retribution. We do not believe in our Buddha-nature and forget it completely, so we often feel scared, but if we rely on the Buddha's power, we feel safe.

2) *Relying on the phrase "Namo Amitābha"* means relying on his awakening light to destroy Maras and heretics. Then we start to build our solid belief that we should continue cultivating. This dharma door is matched with human beings' qualifications.

The dharma door of returning to the hearing to listen to the nature of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is suitable for one with a superior character or capacity, because they have the strong self-effort to control themselves. They who attain the state of non-self and non-dharma realize all phenomena to be impermanent. They

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experience that what they hear is empty, the play of movement and stillness. Why do we chase and lean towards the dullness of the external sound? Today we should be mindful of the phrase “Namo Amitābha.” Then our delusion will vanish automatically as fog is cleared away under the sun. Avoid the habit to chase after the east, the west, the sky, the sea to discriminate because it wastes our time and health. Once we stop grasping all external phenomena, we are practicing mindfulness. All false thoughts of motion cease. The Buddha called it destroying the prejudice. Due to ignorance, we grasp it. Now we detach and it disappears. Be mindful at the state of non-thought.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva chose the method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva to be the foremost among the twenty-four other methods. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva dwelled on the Buddha-nature, did not discriminate between movement and stillness, transformed the five skandhas and six knots, and transcended the mundane and transcendental worlds.

In the śamatha section, he expressed clearly that after having discriminated between true and false, following the true nature, he entered states of limitless life and light. He obtained the main method to filter out the five skandhas and open the six knots. When the motion and stillness were transformed, the form skandha would end (the knots of motion and stillness). Without motion and stillness, the six organs are useless (the knot of faculty). At that time, his craving of ego and the sensation and imagining skandhas vanish. The awareness and the objects of awareness became empty (the knot of awakening), the formation skandha ceased. Then the emptiness and the object of emptiness disappeared (the knot of emptiness).

Once there was no duality, the consciousness skandha paused and the tranquil extinction appeared (the knots of extinction). This method is suitable for high-level people, normal people cannot

cultivate. Only those who cultivate can understand themselves, we cannot explain completely as our ability has not reached that level. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva penetrated that the five skandhas are empty, form is voidness, and voidness is form. There are two kinds of forms: internal form (six organs) and external form (external sense objects).

Now we reflect that form is emptiness and emptiness is form. Because we do not know that this body is emptiness, we borrow the outside objects of rice, water, air, sunlight, blood, and cells to nourish this body. But once we do not breathe anymore, there is no warmth; this body disintegrates; the body ends. We receive the falseness to be our body which is totally empty. In the absolute nature, we cannot seek the awakening-unawakening or the cycle of rebirth because they are illusory.

Sensations are not different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from sensations. Other skandhas are similar. False thoughts vanish; the intuitive nature is full in the Pure Land. From the illusory mind, many different sights appear. A is not same as B, B is not same as C. Trees are different from houses; houses are different from streams. Mountains, rivers, the earth continuously arise. We are on the delusive way, so myriad views appear in our view. Such various forms come out of Tathāgatagarbha, but their nature is as one. We have to trust in this truth. The Tathāgata Store is illustrated over the dharma world; thus, it is called the perfect penetrating.

Bodhisattvas attain and live with the penetration while we who are dull live a delusive life and see many obstacles without penetrating. To bodhisattvas, all sense objects and phenomena present the means of cultivation. The Buddha used his power to express the penetration.

Forms are the false figures. We are living on the base of the

Tathāgata Store that is the absolute śūnyatā in the colorful world. Amitābha nature is perfect and penetrates over the dharma realm, so it is called limitless life and light.

We daily recite the phrase “Namo Amitābha” to reminds us that false forms came from false thoughts, but our Tathāgata Store) is our real nature, which is proved by our ability to see, hear, speak, and so on. This awareness nature is inside our body, and outside our body pervades all the dharma realm. Twenty-five saints attained penetration (four departments and seven elements).¹⁴⁹ Their bodies, minds, and views were pervading over the dharma realm. Hence, the phrase “Namo Amitābha” also represents all contents of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra. We are lucky to uphold this easy method. After learning many Buddhist sūtras, we will experience the phrase “Namo Amitābha” in each sūtra that was taught the Buddhas. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva declared that thanks to the cultivating perception (the seeing element), he was restrained from the six organs and lived with the bodhi essence. Owing to using his whole mind to recite the Buddha’s name, he transformed the six worldly objects, attained penetration.

Although both methods of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva are different, they both still dwelled on the hearing-nature as the final goal, so both methods seem as one. Returning to the hearing to listen to the self nature without collecting the sound anymore, the eye-organ ceases. Once one organ ceases, others pause too. There are not six organs; there are not six sense objects. When organs, worldly objects, subjects, and its environment disappear, the perfect penetration appears. Thus, the hearing-nature is the main cause to enter samādhi.

If we hear the Amitābha Buddha’s title chanted a whole day,

¹⁴⁹Four departments (five aggregate skandhas, six sense-organs, twelve bases, eighteen realms) and seven elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space, perception, and consciousness).

we also can enter samādhi, because by hearing the Buddha's name (hearing the Buddha-nature), we can enter this state. The perception (seeing element) is also a method. If we want to hear the name, we have to use our hearing-nature, so for a whole day we dwell on our hearing-nature. Thus, both methods of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva are as one. When we hear the phrase, "Namo Amitābha" we are returning to our "Amitābha" nature that is the inherent awakening or the hearing-nature.

Thus, all Buddhas in the ten directions praised the Amitābha Buddha who compassionately taught us the method of reciting his name for the sake of human beings in the saha world. This method is appropriate in the saha world, because the ear-organs of humans are keen and have 1,200 merits. Amitābha Buddha vowed to bring beneficence to all dharma worlds, especially the saha realm where existent beings' ear-organs are sharp. He used voices and Amitābha's name to convert human beings in saha. As a result, reciting the Amitābha Buddha's name is also to let human beings who are able to "hear their hearing-nature."

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER VII

Chapter VII compares the perception (seeing or perceiving the element) or the Pure Land method of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva and the hearing-nature of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva practiced the perception (the seeing element). He realized that the seeing element is the limitless life and light of Amitābha Buddha and each of us. By reciting the Buddha's name to return to the perfect penetration, he is called the Fragrant Light Adorned.

Meanwhile, Kuan Yin Bodhisattva went straight to the hearing-nature, so his awakening time was faster. In regard to the practice, using the seeing element to view the limitless light of the Buddha's

names, that is, using temporarily the rising-falling sentences of the Buddha's titles to focus the mind to become one-pointed. With this method, the practitioners diligently put whole their mind on it, without any thoughts, then go ahead and return to the original enlightened mind. This method is called the gradual awakening (due to the many phrases). The method of Mahāsthāmaprāpta that is heard in each letter of "Namo Amitābha Buddha" is the same the method of Kuan Yin who listened to the hearing-nature. Both are using the hearing and reaching the same goal of perfect penetration, so both are as one. In brief, two means of the perception or Pure Land and the hearing-nature have different and similar points.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain how the perception relates with "the samādhi on reciting Amitābha Buddha's name" of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva.
2. Compare the differences between perception and the hearing-nature.
3. Compare the similarity between the two divine qualities of Avalokiteshvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattvas.
4. The hearing-nature goes straight into reality, so enlightenment will be reached quickly. Why do few people cultivate this hearing-nature, while the Pure Land method, a gradual awakening, is widespread in the saha realm?
5. Explain "Namo Tathāgata main cause, supreme enlightenment, Bodhisattvas virtues, Buddha Head Great Peak" of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra.



The Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Statue,
At Khánh An Temple, HCM City
Photo: Võ Văn Tường

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Venerable Ānanda was attached to Matangi, almost to the point of breaking his main precept against impure conduct. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva used the Buddha's mantra of Śūraṅgama to save him. Venerable Ānanda regretted that even though he was a learned person, he still made mistakes. He put his head on the Buddha's foot and asked the Buddha to teach him the way out of the cycle of craving and rebirth. The Buddha taught him the way of entering samādhi to go beyond his mundane knowledge. He had already learned the Śūraṅgama Sūtra but was attached to the dialectics and did not practice. He lacked concentration, and this led him to make mistakes. Like a wise physician, before giving herbs to patients, one must determine the reasons for a sickness. Similarly, the Buddha asked Ānanda the source of his attraction to Matangi and the source of his admiration of the Buddha's thirty-two good characteristics. Venerable Ānanda replied that it was his mind that made him admire those characteristics. The Buddha disagreed that it was Ananda's mind. When hearing this, the assembly and Ānanda were surprised. Ānanda said that if it was not his mind, then what was it? Did they have no mind like inanimate stones or

trees? Where did aspiration come from? The Buddha asked Ānanda to show the location of the mind. Ānanda found the mind at seven places, but in fact, it does not exist.¹⁵⁰

1. It was not in the body.
2. It was not outside the body.
3. It was hidden behind the eyes.
4. When closing the eyes, that is, to see the internal organs.
5. Clinging to a certain place where the mind is.
6. It was between inside and outside.
7. It clung to nothing.

The Buddha broke Anan's points on the mind at seven places with his logic. He emphasized that what Ānanda accepted as his mind was not his mind. It was just the illusory consciousness. This consciousness appears or disappears according to causes and conditions. It's like a motel where a customer comes and goes, while the owner stays forever. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Chapter II,¹⁵¹ the Buddha pointed out ten true minds as an owner at the motel:

1. The seeing-nature is the sensitive mind.
2. The unshaken seeing-nature.
3. The non-cessation seeing-nature.
4. The perfect seeing-nature.
5. The non-birth seeing-nature.
6. The true-self seeing-nature.
7. The seeing-nature of the conditioned immutable.
8. The non-dual seeing-nature.
9. The transcendental seeing-nature.
10. The seeing-nature is not the Buddha-nature because it

¹⁵⁰ Giới Hương, trans., Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Tâm Minh), pp. 35–63.

¹⁵¹ See *Rebirth Views in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, Báo Anh Lạc, 2008, pp. 25–51.

remains the personal and community karma.

Because of this false view, the worlds, living beings, and cause-effect appear continuously. We do not know our wonderful mind, so we chase after the illusory consciousness that we consider as our mind, thus the Buddha exclaimed that:

From beginningless time, living beings have not recognized their true selves. They have wrongly considered themselves as the illusory consciousness that forced them to move in the rebirth cycle. In this ignorant world, humans see various things—large/small, hate/love, happiness/anger as their mind. If they can correct their wrong views, they will be the same as the Tathāgata. Their bodies and minds will illuminate perfectly. At the motionless awakened place, each of their hair tops will have the ability to hold all countries of the ten directions. Ānanda, you do not experience the illusory worldly objects arising from the mind where they also cease. These arising and passing objects are simply the illusory forms whose nature is the wonderful, awakened mind. The substance is the bright awakened mind. Five skandhas, six organs, twelve dependent-originations, and eighteen realms appear falsely from combining the cause-conditions and falsely disappear from the disconnect of cause-conditions. They do not understand that arising, falling, going and coming are originally from the permanent absolute (Bhutatahata). It is the luminous, motionless, profound, sacred nature of the Tathāgata Store wherein they found neither coming nor going, neither ignorance nor awakening, and neither birth nor death.”¹⁵²

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 161.

Thanks to the Buddha's compassionate guidance, the assembly and Ānanda realized that they possessed their miraculous nature pervading over the dharma realm. They saw the space in ten directions as small as a leaf in their hands. All phenomena in this world came to exist from the true substance of the bright enlightened mind. The perfect nature was large over the dharma realm while this body, born from parents and too tiny in the space, suddenly existed; suddenly ceased, and did not affect the vast space, as when a bubble suddenly exists then suddenly bursts does not affect a vast ocean. Although knowing the Buddha-nature is everywhere, Ānanda did not know how to cultivate. He asked the Buddha to show him the way out of saṃsāra. The Buddha told Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva to choose the method that is suitable for living beings in the saha world.

Twenty-five Bodhisattvas revealed their own methods of enlightenment in an orderly sequence (six sense-organs, six sense objects, six consciousnesses, and seven elements).

Among the twenty-five methods, some were easy, some were hard, but their aims were returning to the perfect penetration. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva chose the hearing-nature of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva because it was appropriated with human being's capacities in the saha world and was the best. The Buddha also added that if someone wants to enter perfect penetration, he or she needs to know two decisive factors:

1. Recognize the bodhi essence as the main cause of cultivating:

This is called using the expedient to reach the reality. We usually take the consciousness of birth and death to be our mind. Initially, the Buddha said that we can use the consciousness temporarily as the means of cultivation. Gradually, we leave such means of the six forms of consciousness to enter the bodhi essence that is revealed at our six organs.

When we detach from the eye-consciousness, seeing appears.

When we detach from the ear-consciousness, hearing arises, and so forth. What we are seeing or hearing daily are the eye-consciousness or the ear-consciousness. Once the triple set of organ-object-consciousness is transformed, we will enlighten our bodhi nature of seeing and hearing as our main cause to become the Buddha. Thus, the Śūraṅgama Sūtra named it “the esoteric basic dharma door,” that we can cultivate to attain instinctive enlightenment. It is the real cultivation and realization. If we do not rely on this, we will attain nothing of salvation and instinctive enlightenment.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva recognized the esoteric basic dharma door. He only used hearing to listen to the self nature. He received the Buddha-nature that is revealed at the six organs. The seeing and hearing-nature is wonderfully luminous, so it is called the measureless light. It is permanent and bright, without arising and falling even though the body ceases. It is also called the limitless living duration, because it is neither old nor young, neither birth nor pause. We must receive this bodhi-essence door as the means to attain perfect penetration.

2. Examining the root of defilement:

The five skandhas prevent or cover our mind from the truth. They are impermanent and we need to detach from them completely. It is like a gardener who wants to plan for flowers. He must cut grasses in order that flowers can receive all the nutrients from the soil to flourish. Likewise, we who hope to receive the bodhi essence must cut off the root of defilements hidden in the five skandhas. The Buddha called these the five false thoughts or the five impurities. They are empty, but we consider them as ourselves. For example, normally, we think these bodies are ourselves, so we will be angry if anyone hurts our body or mind. However, if we understand our body, we deeply understand that this body is constituted by earth, water, wind, and fire and we will

detach from it. We know that all external phenomena are empty; we do not care if there is praise or blame. We are a pile of earth, water, wind, and fire and tomorrow we will be the same thing. So, even if we are complimented or abused, we are calm. Understanding this, we live tranquilly and independently without racing out to chase after outside things. External things are empty; we simply do not chase after them and we keep our mindfulness.

In regard to the formation and sensation skandhas, we consider our body as ours, so we think that all feelings of happiness/sadness, like/dislike are real. Now we experience that all internal and external phenomena are illusory. We are independent without the interference of happiness and sadness, so the sensation skandha is ended. We know it is empty, so we are not subjected to the feelings. By the means of diamond (vajra) wisdom, we understand that if the formation and sensation skandhas are unreal, then the perception and other skandhas are empty too. The formation skandha is moving, which is delusion or ignorance, while our real nature is the motionless, permanent, absolute śūnyatā that no one can destroy.

Because of human beings' karma, six organs produce six sense objects. Thanks to vajra wisdom, we contemplate the falseness of six sense objects that cannot control us anymore. Examining the root of defilements prevents us from considering the earth, water, wind and fire as our body and our attachment to our external views as our mind. With such an insight, we can begin to understand where our foolishness is. By conquering the knot of foolishness, we are freed from defilements and suffering. The ignorant knots are at the six-organs. Every time we open our eyes to see, in the consciousness arises the discriminations between good/bad, love/hate. That is the knot. Now we understand it is illusory. We open the dull habit of making the knots and we understand the self-restraint of six-organs will prevent the knots.

Fortunately, ignorance, suffering, and defilements all are empty, not real. We only need be awakened to their falseness and detach from the five skandhas to see our true nature as bodhi essence. The limitless life and light nature will pervade all over the world. At that time, we become true happiness, permanence, selfness, and pureness.

Hence, studying the Buddha dharma means learning to detach from the external phenomena, because we are originally Buddhas already. When we feel bored, disturbed, or angry we have only one thing to do—just drop it. We must examine clearly both the ways of the Buddha and ghosts. Because we grasp five skandhas to be our egos, we stay in saṃsāra which is the way of ghosts (*pittivisa*). Doing the opposite is the way of the Buddha and bodhisattvas.

The entire Śūraṅgama Sūtra requires three dharmas as follows:

1. Śamatha: Contemplate to distinguish trueness and falseness; discriminate between reality and falseness. The Buddha pointed out how to remove the root of birth and death and how to cultivate the bodhi essence. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva detached from external objects to enter the saint stream. We need to be clear about the reality and falseness before we go ahead to the next level.

2. Samāpatti: Tranquility and concentration (followed by the trueness and dropping of falseness). By removing falseness and living with reality (fundamental wisdom), we enter samādhi as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who put his whole mind to listening to the hearing-nature. Samāpatti is a means to return to our real nature.

3. Dhyāna: The later insight, the harmony between trueness and falseness. Establishing falseness does not differ from reality

(afterward wisdom). In this state, the cultivator realizes the great samādhi as his nature. Whole falseness means reality, so he saves living beings. We experience all phenomena as illusion that does not differ from reality. Once bodhisattvas attain the intuitive nature, they can convert all living beings in ten directions. Samāpatti (the foundation wisdom) and dhyāna (afterward wisdom) support each other to reveal the Tathāgatagarbha (source of all phenomena).

Once we obtain the complete three Tathāgata Stores: śūnyatā Tathāgatagarbha, non-śūnyatā Tathāgatagarbha, and without non-śūnyatā Tathāgatagarbha, we realize that all falseness does not differ from reality. All are without non-śūnyatā; Tathāgatagarbha is non-śūnyatā Tathāgatagarbha. All living beings are deluded and false, but their substance is the Buddha-nature. It only needs to be awakened. Their original Buddha-nature or Tathāgatagarbha appears clearly over the dharma world. Thus, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva transforms all kinds of living beings in the dharma realms because all of them are in his mind. He causes all of them to return to their original nature by returning to hearing to hear the self nature.

In regard to the self-beneficence of cultivating, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva listens to the hearing-nature, but when he is engaged in the other benefit field, he listens to the outside crying of living beings to relieve them from suffering. Because the hearing is useful at both fields of the other and self beneficence, his name is Universal Worldly Sound Bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas benefit other beings in countless kalpas while in regard to the time, he enters Buddha lands as many as molecules of dust to serve for the sake of many. Thus, thanks to the hearing-nature, his merits are incredible. At the practice time, we need to drop the external sound, but when we succeed, we need to use the sound to perform the altruism. This is the unique method of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

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The five hindrances are illusion, but their nature is absolute. Bodhisattvas and Buddhas in the ten directions accorded this nature to be awakened and enter parinirvāṇa. Thus, five skandhas are not dull as insentient beings, but they have real substance. We know that five skandhas are empty, but we keep living with them. This is why bodhisattvas and Buddhas manifest in this world to convert living beings.

Shakyamuni Bodhisattva manifested to cultivate for countless eons (gradually awakening) and he attained the enlightenment step by step. Those who cultivated the ear-organ of perfect penetration did not need much gradual practicing and dwelled on the hearing-nature directly (spontaneous enlightenment). This method is appropriate for those who have a high-level superior character or capacity. It takes one life to cultivate if it is accomplished fully. As soon as bodhisattvas attain sainthood, naturally they cut off their old habits of ignorance, greed, hatred, delusion, conceit, doubt, and false view. From the bottom of their eight forms of consciousness, all kinds of defilements must end completely, and then they step up to the saint position.

Once we are dwelling on the hearing-nature, the five hindrances vanish. However, some subtle defilements still exist, so the cultivator is still a mundane person. Whenever the consciousness skandha is paused, ignorance ends completely, then all the habits will vanish. If the five skandas still have control over us, we cannot become a saint.

The Buddha praised Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who was a good example of cultivating the perfect penetration in the samapatti.

Living beings in the saha world have the same karma of the ear-organ, which has 1,200 merits, less sins, and is unique with permanence and perfect penetration. In the Medicine Buddha's

land, the nose-organ is the best, because bodhisattvas can smell the accumulated scents to be enlightened. In the saha world, the human's eyes are much too sharp, the nose organ is ignorant, the tongue organ discriminates flavor, the body is sensuous, and the mental organ acts quickly. These five organs do not possess the three basic virtues of permanence, perfection, and penetration as the ear-organ, so the dharma door of the ear-organ is the most useful in this world.

It is important that we take action, experience and realize, then we can teach and transform other people. Only talking will lead to the wrong result. We can do nothing with talking. We are living under the control of a human's karma that is like a dream. We are staying with the dreamlike body, dreamlike sights, and dreamlike mind. We are subjected by the dream, so we should stop the dreamy greed, hatred, and delusion. First of all, we detach from bad habits of lustfulness in order that we have time for cultivating. Ānanda manifested to the cultivators who made often mistakes to remind us that when we study Buddha dharma, we put importance in much hearing and learning, but without focus on training or removing all our old bad habits.

Only by transforming such habits can we can have the ability to move out of saṃsāra. If we are blindly fond of the transmigration way, it will be useless when we amass learning. After studying, we will forget all and after that we are ignorant again. Therefore, the Buddha confirmed that studying accompanies practicing. It is like a bird with two wings.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Ānanda exposed his mistakes. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva again rebuked Ānanda for his learning. We, who read countless books, also reflect on it, also chase after the outside world, and finally forget to return inside to our own minds to correct our mistakes. We need to build good habits to repair bad habits, avoid hearing or discussing just for fun. It is the simple

way. Venerable Ānanda begged the Buddha to show the way to enter samādhi. The Buddha compassionately guided him to be introspective.

Seeing the way, cultivating the way, and entering the way are three genuine ways. The way is the method to be Buddha. Firstly, śamatha is seeing the way to distinguish between falseness and reality. *Samāpatti* is cultivating the way to live in the reality to filter out the falseness. Dhyāna is entering the way to enlighten the falseness that does not differ from reality; reality does not differ from falseness.

For example, if we see a cloth (seeing the way), we discriminate where it is dirty, where it is clean, and we choose the clean section of the cloth (cultivating the way). We wash the dirt out, make it into a tablecloth for the sake of using (entering the way). From this state on, the cultivator who starts to step up to the saint stream transforms defilements into bodhi. This is the cause, while the process from birth to death to nibbāna is the effect.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, fifty-four stages¹⁵³ on the Mahāyāna bodhisattva's path of awakening are mentioned. The dry or unfertilized wisdom stage is the first state to enter bodhisattvahood. There are forty-four kinds of enlightenment that include ten stages of enlightenment-being faith, ten stages of enlightenment-being dwelling, ten stages of enlightenment-being conduct, ten stages of enlightenment-being transferences, and four stages of enlightenment-being conduct adding “to be bodhisatta position” (a position preparing to become a bodhisattva). As soon as the cultivator enters the ten stages of enlightenment-being grounds (bhumis) he starts to enter sainthood and needs time to cultivate and transform his subtle defilements to attain the

¹⁵³ Ibid, pp. 649–658.

bodhisattva stage completely. He must go gradually in fifty-four stages, and then he will achieve the equality enlightenment and supreme enlightenment to become a Buddha. Once we are Buddhas we live in the nibbāna state.

Our seeing and hearing are our bodhi nature. When the Buddha-nature appears, we transform the basic root of birth and death. We conquer the false organs, objects, and consciousness. Dwelling on the hearing-nature is as if we have medicine to cure our disorder. The main thing is that we avoid bringing our mind to external objects. Being calm and mindful is good medicine. The ear-organ is a simple means to keep mindfulness that is easy because we originally possess samādhi. Just keep silent and our concentration will be revealed. The ear-organ method will bring a fast result for us. Our duty is not to race out to the six sense objects. The hearing-nature is latent in every being and is an easy method. As we know, for many kalpas Dharanimdhara Bodhisattva dug soil, carried rock, and finally attained enlightenment by realizing the Buddha mind from seeing a rock.

We can see this was a hard process for him to realize the Buddha-nature. Likewise, Candraprabha Bodhisattva contemplated a drop of water to experience his intuitive nature. Many other bodhisattvas cultivated seven elements and six forms of consciousnesses, which are hard to cultivate and take much time. Luckily, if we select the ear-organ method to return to the hearing and listen to the self nature, we will become a Buddha in a shorter time than if we use other methods, because this real nature exists in us already.

Every day, we live according to our organs. We follow external objects—our eyes race out to forms, our ears race out to sounds, our nose chases after fragrance, our tongue chases after flavors, our body chases after sensations, and our mind generates greed, hatred, and delusion.

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Because of this greed, hatred and delusion, we go to the womb to take rebirth in another body again and continue the cycle of saṃsāra, while arahants never go to the womb again and do not take rebirth in any form of body with six organs anymore. They are freed from the cycle of birth and death. This life is their last birth; they enter the ideal nirvana forever. In contrast, bodhisattvas still live with six organs, six objects, and six forms of consciousness to convert living beings, but they are not controlled by these eighteen fields.

Arahants realize the function without the nature; they see the dangerous function of the cycle of birth and death. They stop it to enter nirvana while bodhisattvas with their insight into the nature of mind know how to control the functions. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra teaches that because we have hands as the source (Buddha-nature) and the functions of raising the hand up (the high worlds of heaven and humans) or go hands down (the low worlds of hell, animals, and ghosts). The motivation directing the hand is important. Because there are hands, the sufferings of a hand burnt or broken can happen if we make a mistake and put our hand in the wrong place. Living beings are ignorant and put their hands into the flame. Do not put the hands into the flame. Instead, put the hands into good deeds. In order to do such good deeds, we must realize that the mind-nature is like the hands. The nature possesses various dynamic functions including knowing rightness and falseness. If the function inclines towards the cycle of rebirth and death, we become mundane people. If the function inclines towards the permanent perfect penetration, we will become Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the Brahma Sound, the Ocean Tide Sound, and other wonderful sounds.

The essential point is that we, who must experience our original reality, know how to control our functions. We are not the same as arahants who are afraid of the hands' function (the high or

low realms) so much that they must quickly enter nibbāna to be safe. We will follow bodhisattvas who manifest as many bodies of different species to transform them. With each kind of existent beings, he embodies their form so that he can easily convert them. Right now, their minds are in our minds. Bodhisattvas can see and understand what we are thinking. They can speak to us as well as speak to cats, dogs, bears, ants, lizards, and so on. They understand that the lives of human beings, animals, and others are illusory as a dream.

Bodhisattvas dwell on the hearing-nature and no longer attach to their body and organs. If the body is empty, organs are empty. There are not six organs, and there are also no six sense objects. There is no subject (we are); there is no object retribution (our world). As soon as we are freed from an organ, five other organs stop working.

Living with the reality, we will delight forever. In contrast, living with illusion, we will wander from this life to another life. From beginningless time, for countless eons we have kept indulging in ignorance, so much so that the Buddha compassionately manifested in this world to remind us to cultivate. Our karma mind, speech, and body are controlled by the formation skandha. It pushes us to create karma, so we must bear our karmic result. The five hindrances obstruct realization of the truth. Our existence is covered by five impure layers of kalpas, seeing, defilements, human beings, and living duration. However, its nature is the reality of neither arising nor cessation. This body subject is made from five impure layers so people treat each other badly (chādeti) and easily become jealous (issā). Our environmental object is constituted by three poisons of greed, hatred, ignorance, and evils, so that this world is called the evil world. We are subjected to these negative results.

Out of compassion, the Buddhas descended into this saha

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world to guide us to the most effective way to escape saṃsāra. If we recite only the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, we get as much merit as those who uphold the names of countless bodhisattvas, as many as grains of sand in 62 million Ganges. The ear-organ is wonderful in that it contains many merits. Reading his name is equal to reading other bodhisattvas' titles. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva cultivated the ear-organ because it is the same reality as other organs. The seeing and hearing of six organs and our eight forms of consciousness or original mind is well illustrated in a poem:

*The enlightened cause to cultivate is often available.
The Dharma kāya exists always here and there.*¹⁵⁴

We are seeing and hearing with the six organs, which is the main cause to be Buddhas. The seeing at the eyes, the hearing at the ears, the smelling at the nose, the tasting at the tongue, the sensing at the body, and the knowing with the brain are the important cause to return our one reality or one mind.

Our mind is like space which is hidden in this body. For example, depending on the shape of a square or rectangle box, the space seems to be square or rectangle. Without the box, space is space. Without the karma of human or animal boxes, our Buddha-nature, the limitless light and life exist always here and there in ten directions. This reality is displayed at our six organs that are the main doors to return to the reality over the dharma realm.

The Buddha-nature is bonded to our body, but in fact, it does not bond as the space. The hearing-nature that is the main cause for cultivation is our dharmakaya, the phenomena of reality present all the time. This is the meaning of the verse.

¹⁵⁴ Avatamsaka Sūtra (Flower Garland Sūtra),
<https://selfdefinition.org/zen/Garland-Sūtra-Avatamsaka-Sūtra.pdf>.

Due to our ignorance, we do not realize our reality. The hearing-nature is the perfect penetration organ and it contains all of the dharma realms. When we recite the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva it is as if we are reciting the names of all Buddhas. Countless Buddhas are in this dharma realm, so upholding one name means upholding all names.

When we recite the name of a certain mundane person, why do we not get the same merit, even if he is living in the same dharma realm? Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is a saint who succeeded in returning to his reality, so we gain measureless merit if we read his name. Someone who is a mundane person has no spiritual power to bless.

If we cultivate the sacred supreme dharma door of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, we can use the ability of our dharma bodies, then all dharma realms will always be present inwardly. We have great causes and conditions with Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, thanks to Shakyamuni Buddha. We are ordinary people, and we keep relying on his support, but we need to know all bodhisattvas have the same powers and vows. If we understand this truth, we can follow whichever methods we like.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva confirmed that the dharma door of returning to hearing to listen to the self nature is wonderful and perfect. We can practice other methods that are rather hard, but only the hearing method is appropriate for us. Reciting the Buddha's name is also wonderful and suitable. Both of these methods have some similarities. In the past, Buddhas also cultivated these methods. There are many dharma doors to cultivate, and each has a unique way of turning to the bodhi essence. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva advised that we should imitate Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and turn back to the bodhi essence.

This hearing method is matched with human beings'

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qualifications and the truth. We should reflect and choose this correct method for us to return to the reality and transform the five skandhas. For a long time, we have considered the wrong functions of the six organs as our craving selfness. Now we experience that its nature is true and we develop our bodhi mind to return our substance. Cultivating the dharma door of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is according to main teaching Shakyamuni Buddha and other Buddhas in the ten directions.

A thought of returning to hear the self nature

Drop phenomena down to only hear the hearing-nature.

Listening deeply, without chasing after objects

Objects separate organs, only hearing-hearing is revealed.

*Namo Tathāgata main Cause, Supreme Enlightenment,
Bodhisattvas Virtues, Buddha Head Great Peak of the
Śūraṅgama Sūtra.*

Namo the ear-organ of perfect penetration,

*Great Compassion Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva proved for this
writing and presenting.*

GLOSSARY

Pāli/Sanskrit/English

Abhijjhā (Skt. abhidhyā): greed

Ābhassarā: a class of brahma deities who radiate light

Ākāsānañcāyatana-bhūmi: state of infinite space

Ākiñcaññāyatana-bhūmi: state of nothingness

Alaiya consciousness: the eighth consciousness

Amitābha Buddha: name of the Buddha in the West, the Pure Land Realm, and the Blissful World (Amitābha means limitless light and life)

Ānanda: the great attendant and cousin of the Buddha

Anutpattika-Dharmakshanti: uncreated dharma patience

Appamāṇābhā: Limitless Light Heavenly Beings;

without

measure; endless

Appamāṇasubhā: Measureless Purity Heavenly Beings; devas of unbounded glory

Arahant (Skt. arhat): one who has attained full liberation and will

never go to the womb again

Ariyasacca (Skt. āryasatyāni) Fourfold Noble Truths: the basic teachings of the Buddha. They are:

1. dukkha, the truth of suffering
2. dukkha samudaya, the truth of the cause of suffering
3. dukkha nirodha, the truth of the cessation of suffering
4. dukkha nirodha gaminipatipada, truth of the noble path to the cessation of suffering

Arūpāvacara-bhūmi: the immaterial sphere plane

Āsava (Skt. āsrava): affliction

Asura (Pāli & Skt.): demigod or titan

Asurakāya (a-tu-la): an assembly of asuras

Atimāna (Pāli & Skt.): arrogance

Avijjā (Skt. avidyā) ignorance

Āyatana (Pāli & Skt.): sense base, sense media or sense sphere

Bhava (Pāli & Skt.): habitual or emotional tendencies, sentiment, state of body or mind, disposition and character

Bhikkhu (Skt. bhikṣu): a Buddhist monk

Bhikkhunī (Skt. bhikṣuṇī): a Buddhist nun

Bodhi (Pāli & Skt.): enlightenment

Bodhisatta (Skt. Bodhisattva): a person who is able to reach nirvana but delays doing so out of compassion in order to save suffering beings

Brahma: name of a heavenly being in the Brahma realm

Brahmā King: a leading god (deva) and heavenly king in Buddhism—adopted from other Indian religions such as Hinduism that considered him a protector of the universe; creator god in Hinduism

Brahmapārisajjā: Community Heavenly Beings

Brahmapurohitā: Brahma Minister Heavenly Beings

Byāpāda: ill will; malevolence

Catummahārājika (Pāli & Skt.): Four Heavenly Kings

Deva (Pāli and Skt.): a heavenly being

Dhamma (Skt. dharma): the teachings of the Buddha;
phenomenon, state, mental object

Dhamma Suññatā (Skt. dharma śūnyatā): the emptiness of
phenomena

Dhammakāya (Skt. dharmakaya): truth body or reality body

Dhyāna (Pāli jhāna): meditative absorption; a meditative state of
profound stillness and concentration

Dosa (Skt. dvesha): hatred

Dukkha (Skt. duḥkha): pain and suffering

Gandhabba (Skt. gandharva): distinct heavenly beings in
Hinduism and Buddhism; one of the lowest-ranking devas
in Buddhist cosmology

Gahapati (Skt. ghapati): an elder

Heart Sūtra: a Sūtra from Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya (The Heart of the
Perfection of Wisdom); a popular sūtra in Mahāyāna Buddhism
and is often chanted at the closing course

Jarāmaṇa (Pāli & Skt.): decay and death

Jarāmaṇam (Pāli and Skt.): birth, aging, sickness, and death

Jāti: (Pāli and Skt.) group of clans, tribes, communities and sub-
communities in India

Jhāna (Skt. dhyāna): meditative absorption; a meditative state of profound stillness and concentration

Kalpa (Pāli and Skt.): an eon or a relatively long period of time

Kāmasugatibhūmi: the desire heaven; blissful planes of existence (six realms of gods and the human realm)

Kapilavastu: an ancient city, the capital of Shakya where the Buddha grew up

Karuṇā (Pāli and Skt.): compassion

Kāya (Pāli and Skt.): body

Khandha (Skt. skanda): heaps, aggregates, collections, groupings

Kandha rūpa (Skt. skandha rūpa): form; eye, ear, nose, tongue, body

Khanda sañña (Skt. skandha saṃjñā): skandha means “heaps, aggregates, collections”; sañña is typically translated as perception

Khanda vedanā (Skt. skandha vedanā): feelings, sensations

Khandha viññāṇa (Skt. skandha vijñāna) the aggregate of thought; one of the five skandhas, the aggregates that constitute all that exists

Khanti (Skt. kṣānti) patience

Kilesa (Skt. kleśha): defilements

Kimnara: according to Hindu mythology, musicians of the deity Kuvera who excel in singing and dancing (they have a human body and the head of a horse and were regarded as the gods of music in Buddhism)

King Vītarambha: Vītarambha is defined as “precious store”

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Kinnaras (Pāli & Skt.): a paradigmatic lover, celestial musician

Kodha (Skt. krodha): wrath

Kṣīti-garbha Sūtra: Sūtra on the Original Vows on the
Attainment of Merits of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva

Kuan-yin (Ch), Avalokiteśvara (Skt.): the goddess of compassion;
of all the goddesses, she is most revered and beloved throughout
the world

Lord Shakra: king of the heavenly gods

Mahābrahmā: Great Brahma Heavenly Beings

Mahākaruṇā Puṇḍarīka Sūtra: The Lotus

Sūtra

Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva: a great hero who can help
clear the darkness of dullness to transform the five layers of
ignorance

Mahāyāna: Great Vehicle

Mahoragas: a king of the Kāgas

Maitreya Bodhisattva: the future Buddha, presently a bodhisattva
residing in the Tushita heaven who will descend to earth to preach
anew the dharma (“law”) when the teachings of Gautama
Buddha have completely decayed

Makkha: fighting

Māna (Pāli and Skt.): ego

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva: Mañjuśrī means “gentle glory,” a
bodhisattva associated with prajñā (insight) in Māhayana
Buddhism

Mantra Sect: a sacred secret Buddhist school

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Manussa (Skt. mānuṣa): human being

Matangi: the prostitute who deluded Ānanda for sensual lust

Mettā (Skt. maitrī): lovingkindness

Micchāditi (Skt. micchāditti): wrong view

Muditā (Pāli and Sanskrit): sympathetic joy

Musāvāda (Skt. abhūtavādi): cheating

Nalanda University: a large Buddhist monastery in the ancient kingdom of Magadha in India

Nāmarūpa (Pāli & Skt.): name (nāma) and form (rūpa)

Người (Vietnamese): human beings

Nibbāna (Skt. nirvana): the unconditioned state beyond the cycle of rebirth; final deliverance from suffering

Nimmānaratī: A class of devas inhabiting the fifth of the six deva-worlds

Niraya (Skt. naraka): hell realm

Noble Eightfold Path (Pāli: ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo; Skt. āryāṣṭāṅgamārga): an early summary of Buddhist practices leading to liberation from the cycle of rebirth

Pacceka Buddha (Skt. pratyeka) a Buddha who enters nirvana without teaching others

Pamāda (Skt. pramāda): carelessness, negligence

Pañcakhanda (Skt. pañcan skandha): five aggregates, the constituents of our experience: form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness

Paññā (Skt. prajñā): wisdom

Paññā paramita (Skt. prajñā paramita): perfection of wisdom

Pāramitā (Pāli & Skt.): perfection or completeness

Paranimmitavasavattī: the transforming heavenly beings of the comfort from others; a class of devas, inhabitants of the highest stage of the sensuous universe.

Parideva (Pāli & Skt.): suffering; wailing and lamentation

Parinibbāna (Skt. parinirvāṇa): total unbinding; complete cessation of the khandhas that occurs upon the death of an arahant; final release from transmigration; death after the last lifespan of an arahant

Parittābhā (Skt. parittābha) Lesser Light Heavenly Beings

Parittasubhā (Skt. parittaśubha): Lesser Purity Heavenly Beings

Pasaka : vertical; standing, pointing, or moving straight up or down

Paiccasamuppāda (Skt. pratītyasamutpāda): dependent arising; twelve causes-conditions

Phassa (Skt. sparśa): sense impression

Pittivisaya: evil demons

Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra: Perfection of (Transcendent) Wisdom Scripture, one of the most important Sūtras in Mahāyāna Buddhism (prajñā, wisdom; pāramitā, complete)

Punnamantaniputta (Skt. Purnamaitrayaniputra): usually known as the disciple who was best at preaching the Buddha's teachings

Rajja (Skt. raja): human king

Raksa (Skt. raksha) ignorance, the devils

Rakshasa (Skt. rākṣasa): a mythological being

Ratnagarbha: the precious store

Sadosaṃ: hate

Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra: The Lotus Sūtra

Śākyamuni Buddha (Skt. Shākyamuni), c. 563/480 – c. 483/400 BCE, also known as Siddhārtha, Prince of the Sakya royal clan

Samādhi Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra (Chánh Pháp Hoa Kinh Quan Thế Âm): Lotus Sūtra

Samāpatti (Pāli and Skt.): tranquility and concentration

Sahā world: this world, full of suffering

Sakra (Skt. Shakra): a lord in the sixth heavenly realm

Samādhi (Skt. śamatha): stillness

Samādhi Avalokiteśvara Sūtra (Kinh Quan Âm Tam Muội):
Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva attains samādhi (concentration state) as a result of returning to the interior hearing-nature

Samādhi Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra: The Lotus Sūtra

Samādhi Sūtra: a sūtra of Indian origin that focuses on the transcendental nature and supernatural powers

Samādhi (Pāli & Skt.) stillness, concentration

Sambhogakāya (Pāli & Skt.): one kind of Buddha; a subtle body of limitless form; Buddhas and bodhisattvas who manifest for the benefit of others

Samohaṃ (Skt. samohaṃ): delusion

Saṃsāra (Pāli & Skt.): the cycle of rebirth

Saṅgha: a monastic order, the community of noble disciples

Saṅkhāra (Skt. saṃskāra) volitional activity; conditioned phenomenon

Saññā (Skt. samjñā): perception

Sarāgam: lustful thoughts, craving

Sārambha (Pāli & Skt.): conflict

Sāvaka (Skt. śrāvaka): sound-hearers; voice-hearer or more generally, a disciple who hears the teaching, then attains enlightenment

Sāvaka-yāna (Skt. śrāvaka-yāna): the voice-hearer vehicle

Self-sūnyatā: non-ego, non-self

Soka (Skt. śoka): pain, grief

Subha Vūharāja Sūtra (Nhất Thiết Đức Trang Nghiêm Vương): the scripture that describes merits to adorn the mind

Subhakiṇhā: Prevalent Purity Heavenly Beings

Súc sanh: tiracchāyoni, animal

Suññatā (Skt. sūnyatā): in the Mahāyāna tradition, this refers to the tenet that all things are empty of intrinsic existence and nature; refers to the empty nature of the five aggregates of experience and the six sense spheres

Śūraṅgama Pāramitā Sūtra: Mahāyāna Sūtra that focuses on the supernatural powers bestowed upon the meditator by the state of meditation called Śūraṅgama Samādhi or the Samādhi of the Heroic Progression

Suyama Heavenly Beings: the length of life in the Tushita Heaven is 1,000 years; one day and night is equivalent to 100 years on earth; the length of life in the Suyama Heaven is 1,500 years; the height of beings there is one and a half miles

Taṇhā (Skt. tṛṣṇā, also trishna): thirst, desire

Tathāgata: the term is often thought to mean either "one who has thus gone" (tathā-gata) or "one who has thus come" (tathā-āgata)

Tathāgatagarbha: source of all phenomena

Tāvatiṃsa (Skt. trāyastrīṃśa): an important world of the devas in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology; the word trāyastrīṃśa is an adjective formed from the numeral trayastrīṃśat

Tettiṃsā: leave it alone or let it be so

Thambha (Skt. thambha) difficulties

Theravāda: southern Buddhist tradition

Therīgāthā: Songs of the Elder Nuns

Tiracchānayani (Skt. tiryagyonī) animals

Trayastrīṃśa: heavenly beings

Trishna (Skt. tṛṣṇā): craving

Tusita (Skt. tuṣita or tushita): realm, contentment

Tusita Heavenly Beings (Skt. Tuṣita or Tushita): in ancient Indian and Buddhist cosmology, the fourth of the six heavens in the world of desire

Upādāna (Pāli & Skt.): fuel, material cause, substrate that is the source and means for keeping an active process energized

Upāsaka (masculine) or Upāsikā (feminine) are from the Sanskrit and Pāli words for attendant or one who sits close by; male or female lay Buddhists

Upāli: a monk who was one of the ten chief disciples of the Buddha; he was originally a barber from a lower caste family in service to the Sakyan princes

Upekkhā (Skt. upekṣā): equanimity

Uttarakuru: northern continent

Vajira (Skt. vajra): firm and constant as a diamond

Vajra deity: Buddhist deity Vajra Tara (Diamond Tara or Thunderbolt Tara) known as providing magical protection

Vajra samādhi: diamond-like concentration

Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra: The Diamond Sūtra

Vedanā: (Pāli& Skt.) feeling, sensation

Viddesaṇā: disasters

Vinaya (Pāli and Skt.): education, discipline, literally “leading out;” rules related to monastic protocol

Vipassanā (Skt. vipaśyanā): contemplating insight

Viśama-lobha (Skt. viśama): greed

Vītadosaṃ: hate

Yaksha (Skt. yakṣa): broad class of nature spirits

Yogācāra: a school of Buddhist philosophy and psychology emphasizing phenomenology and ontology

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