

# The Lankavatara Sutra

Highlights of the “Appearance on Lanka Sutra” translated by Red Pine  
from the Chinese translation by Gunabhadra (around the year 450), Taisho Tripitaka vol. 16, number 670

## Chapter 1: King Ravana’s Request

Thus have I heard: Once the Bhagavan was staying in the South Seas on the peaks of (Sri) Lanka in a place adorned by countless jewels and flowers. In addition to an assembly of great monks, he was also joined by a host of great bodhisattvas from other buddhalands. Led by Mahamati Bodhisattva-Mahasattva, they were masters of every kind of Samadhi, spiritual power and psychic ability and were the recipients of the blessings of countless Buddhas. Skilled in the knowledge that external objects are perceptions of one’s own mind (sva-chitta-drshya), they had opened the doors of liberation for beings of every mental capacity and were thoroughly versed in:

- the five dharmas (appearance, name, projection, correct knowledge, suchness),
- the (three) modes of reality (imagined, dependent, perfect),
- the (eight) forms of consciousness (five sense consciousnesses, conceptual mental consciousness, will / self-identity, repository consciousness),
- and the two kinds of no-self (of sentient beings and of all other phenomena)...

## Chapter 2: Mahamati’s Questions, excerpts on 8 consciousnesses: repository consciousness, will, etc

...Mahamati Bodhisattva again asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, in how many ways do the various forms of consciousness arise, persist, and cease?”...

(section VII, page 71)

...“There are other monks and priests, Mahamati, who see things as devoid of self-existence (svabhava), as clouds in the sky or wheels of fire or cities of gandharvas and as not arising, as illusions or mirages or dreams or moonlight on the water, and – regardless of whether they appear to be inside or outside the mind – as projections (vikalpa) from the beginningless past and as not existing apart from one’s own mind. And when the causes of such projections cease, and the repository consciousness (alaya-vijnana) becomes free from projections of a body, its possessions and the world around it, and from what speaks and what is spoken, and from what sees and what is seen, they accordingly see what grasps and what is grasped as no longer interacting in the realm of consciousness and whatever the mind gives rise to as existing in a projection-free realm devoid of origination, duration, and cessation.

“Mahamati, such bodhisattvas soon realize the identity of samsara and nirvana. With effortless compassion and skillful means, Mahamati, they view the realms of all beings as illusions and not subject to causation. Transcending internal and external realms, and seeing nothing outside the mind, they accordingly proceed from one stage to the next in samadhis that are free from appearances. And upon examining the three realms and finding them illusory, they attain the Samadhi of the Illusory. And once the perceptions of their own minds are free of projections, they are able to dwell in the perfection of wisdom (prajna paramita) and to let go of their life and their practice and to enter the Diamond Samadhi that accompanies a tathagata’s body and that accompanies the transformation of suchness (tathata). Thus endowed with higher powers and masteries as well as compassion and skillful means, they enter the sanctuaries of other paths in every buddhaland. And transcending the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness, these bodhisattvas gradually transform (paravrtti) their body into the body of a tathagata.

“Therefore, Mahamati, those who seek the body that accompanies a tathagata should avoid the fabricated projections of origination, duration, or cessation regarding the skandhas, dhatus, ayatanas, consciousness, causation, or forms of practice.”

(section VIII, page 73)

“Who sees that the habit-energy of projections of the beginningless past is the cause of the three realms and who understands that the tathagata stage is free from projections or anything else that arises, attains the personal realization of buddha knowledge and effortless mastery over their own minds. And like gems capable of reflecting every color, they enter the subtlest thoughts of other beings and in their apparition

bodies teach them ‘nothing but mind’ (chitta-matra) while establishing them in the sequence of stages. Therefore, Mahamati, you should devote yourself to the cultivation of personal attainment.”

(section IX, page 73)

At that time, Mahamati Bodhisattva said, “May the Bhagavan teach us about the characteristics of the mind (chitta), the will (manas) and conceptual consciousness (mano-vijnana), the five dharmas, and the modes of reality (svabhava) cultivated by buddhas and bodhisattvas that differ from the external realms perceived by our mind. And may the Tathagata reveal all the teachings marked by suchness that comprise the heart of the words of every buddha. And may he explain for the great bodhisattvas gathered here on Mount Malaya in the island kingdom of Lanka the ocean and waves of repository consciousness and the realm of the dharma body (dharmakaya) praised by all tathagatas.”

The Bhagavan then told Mahamati, “There are four causes that result in the functioning of visual consciousness. And what are the four? They are: a lack of awareness that what is grasped is a perception of one’s own mind, attachment to the habit-energy of erroneous fabrications of the beginningless past, the existence of consciousness, and the desire to see a multiplicity of forms. Mahamati, these are the four causes that give rise to the waves of consciousness in the ever-rolling sea of repository consciousness.

“Mahamati, as with its visual form, consciousness arises together with the minutest sensory objects and sensory material of the various sense organs, and with it arise external realms as well, like so many images in a clear mirror or like the ocean when a strong wind blows. And as the wind of externality stirs the sea of the mind, its waves of consciousness never cease. Whether there is any difference or not among the characteristics of causes and effects is due to a deep attachment to what arises from karma. Because people cannot understand the nature of such things as form, the five kinds of sensory consciousness function. And due to the differentiation of appearances, Mahamati, you should know that these five kinds of sensory consciousness serve as the cause of conceptual consciousness. But as they function, they do not think that they are the cause of changes in appearances, which change as a result of attachment to projections that are perceptions of one’s own mind. And as every appearance changes and disappears, the different realms that are distinguished themselves change.

“Those practitioners who enter dhyana or samadhi but who remain unaware of the changes of the subtler forms of habit-energy (vasana) think they enter dhyana or samadhi only after consciousness ceases. But in fact their consciousness does not cease when they enter samadhi. It doesn’t cease because the seeds (bija) of habit-energy are not destroyed. It ceases when they no longer grasp changes among objective realms.

“Mahamati, except for tathagatas and those well along the bodhisattva path, the full extent of the subtlety of the repository consciousness remains completely beyond the ken of shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and practitioners of other paths, despite their powers of meditation and wisdom – likewise, how to distinguish the characteristics of the remaining stages, or the meaning of words about wisdom and skillful means, or how to bring to maturity the limitless good roots planted by buddhas, or how to get free from the projections and fabrications that are perceptions of their own minds.

“Mahamati, those who dwell among mountains and forests, regardless of whether they cultivate lesser, normal, or greater practices, if they are able to see how projections flow from their own minds, they will have their foreheads anointed by buddhas from countless lands. And as they attain masteries, psychic faculties, higher powers, and samadhis, they will be surrounded by bodhisattvas and spiritual friends. And because of this, they will transcend the sea of birth and death, karma, desire, and ignorance and the mistaken conceptions concerning the realms of self-existence of the mind, the will, and conceptual consciousness that are perceptions of their own minds. This is why, Mahamati, practitioners should draw near to buddhas and spiritual friends.”

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Just like waves in a boundless sea blown by a powerful wind, breakers in a vast expanse never for a moment cease.
2. In the Ocean of Alaya, stirred by the wind of externality, wave after wave of consciousness breaks and swells again.

3. Blue and red and every color, milk and sugar and conch shells, fragrances and fruits and flowers, the sun and moon and light,
4. Like the ocean and its waves are neither separate nor not separate, seven forms of consciousness rise together with the mind.
5. Like the ever-changing sea gives rise to different waves, repository consciousness gives rise to different forms.
6. Mind, will, and consciousness: these refer to different forms, but forms devoid of differences, no seer or thing seen.
7. As the ocean and its waves cannot be divided, the mind and the forms of consciousness cannot be separated.
8. The mind is what gathers karma, the will considers what is gathered, the forms of consciousness are conscious of five apparent worlds.  
Mahamati Bodhisattva then asked in verse:
9. “When colors such as blue and red appear in someone’s consciousness, and every thought is like a wave, what does all this mean?”  
The Bhagavan then replied in verse:
10. Blue and red and other colors can’t be found in any wave; we say the mind gathers karma to awaken foolish beings.
11. But karma isn’t real; thus to make their minds let go, what grasps and what is grasped, I liken it to waves.
12. Their body, possessions, and the world, this is what they’re conscious of; this is how their karma appears, just like surging waves.”  
Mahamati Bodhisattva then asked in verse:
13. “The ocean and its waves exist; we can see them dance. Why then are we not aware of alaya consciousness and karma?”  
The Bhagavan then replied in verse:
14. “For fools bereft of wisdom, alaya is likened to an ocean, and karma to its waves; through simile they understand.”  
Mahamati then said in verse:
15. “Sunlight shines the same on beings of all classes, since tathagatas light the world to teach the truth to fools.
16. Versed in every kind of teaching, why don’t they teach the truth?”  
To which the Buddha then replied in verse: “If they taught the truth, in beings’ minds would be no truth.
17. Like the ocean and its waves, a dream or image in a mirror, both appear together, as do the mind and objective realms.
18. But objective realms are never perfect, and karma keeps arising, while consciousness is conscious, likewise the will just wills.
19. And fivefold are appearances, except in meditation; as a master artist works and the master’s students
20. Draw forms and spread colors, I, too, teach like this; the colors don’t contain a pattern, nor do the brush or pristine surface.
21. To please the host of beings, they render figures with their art, but teachings are unfaithful for truth isn’t in the words.
22. I make distinctions for beginners, for practitioners I teach the truth, the truth they realize themselves, free from knowing and the known.
23. This I teach to bodhisattvas, a broader view to fools; all manner of illusions, but nothing I reveal is real.
24. Thus my teachings are diverse, tailored to the situation; if a teaching doesn’t fit, then it isn’t taught.
25. Because each patient differs, good physicians adjust their cures; buddhas thus teach beings according to their capacities.

26. A realm without projections, unknown to shravakas, this is what the compassionate teach – the realm of inner realization.”

(section X, page 79)

“Moreover, Mahamati, if bodhisattvas wish to understand the realm of projection in which what grasps and what is grasped are nothing but perceptions of their own minds, they should avoid social intercourse and sleep and cultivate the discipline of mindfulness during the three periods of the night. And they should avoid mistaken teachings and texts as well as the characteristics of the shravaka and pratyekabuddha paths and become versed instead in the characteristics of the projections that are the projections of their own minds.”

(section XIX, page 91)

“Furthermore, Mahamati, nothing arises. This is what the tathagatas of the past, the present, and the future teach. And how so? Because existence and nonexistence are perceptions of one’s own mind, the existence or nonexistence of which does not arise. Mahamati, nothing that exists arises. Everything is like horns on a rabbit or a horse, the mistaken projections of an imagined reality by ignorant beings. Therefore, Mahamati, nothing that exists arises. The non-arising that characterizes all that exists, this is the personal realization of the realm of buddha knowledge, not the dualistic realm of projections of the ignorant. The existence that characterizes such things as your body, your possessions, and the world around you, Mahamati, is the interplay of the grasping and the grasped of the repository consciousness. Trapped by their dualistic views of origination, duration, and cessation and their wish for things to arise, the ignorant give rise to projections of existence and nonexistence, not the wise. Mahamati, you should reflect on this in your practice.”

(section LIII, page 155)

“Moreover, Mahamati, according to followers of other paths, there are four kinds of nirvana. And what are the four? They include the nirvana in which the self-existence of what exists does not exist, the nirvana in which the existence of characteristics does not exist, the nirvana in which the awareness of one’s own characteristics and self-existence does not exist, and the nirvana in which the continuity of the individual and shared characteristics of the skandhas ends. These are what are meant by the four kinds of nirvana taught by followers of other paths. They are not what I teach. What I teach, Mahamati, is that nirvana is the cessation of the consciousness that projects.”

Mahamati asked the Buddha, “But does the Bhagavan not put forward eight forms of consciousness?”

The Buddha answered, “Yes, I do.”

Mahamati asked again, “If so, then why does the Bhagavan speak of getting free from conceptual consciousness and not the seventh form (or: seven other forms) of consciousness?”

The Buddha replied, “Because, Mahamati, it is the cause and the supporting condition whereby the seventh form of consciousness does not arise (or: arises). And it is the division and attachment of conceptual consciousness regarding external realms that produces the habit-energy that nourishes repository consciousness. And it is the will, together with the attachment to a self and what belongs to a self and its reflection on causes and conditions, that gives rise to the characteristics of an indestructible body. And it is attachment to an external world that is a perception of one’s own mind that is the cause and supporting condition of the repository consciousness. Thus, this system of consciousness arises through mutual causation. It is like the ocean and its waves, which rise or cease as the wind of externality that is a perception of one’s own mind blows. Thus, when conceptual consciousness ceases, the seventh form of consciousness also ceases.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Mine isn’t a nirvana that exists, a created one or one with attributes; the consciousness that projects what we know – the cessation of this is my nirvana.
2. This is the cause and supporting condition whereby thoughts create the body; on this is what the mind is based, on this is what consciousness depends.
3. When the great river quits flowing, waves no longer stir; when conceptual consciousness ceases, the other forms don’t rise.”

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## Chapter 2: Mahamati’s Questions, excerpts on 3 modes of reality (imagined, dependent, perfected)

(section XXIII, page 99)

“Moreover, Mahamati, bodhisattvas should be well acquainted with the three modes of reality (tri-svabhava). And what are the three modes of reality? Imagined reality (parikalpita-svabhava), dependent reality (paratantra-svabhava), and perfected reality (parinishpanna-svabhava).

“Mahamati, imagined reality arises from appearances (nimitta). And how does imagined reality arise from appearances? Mahamati, as the objects and forms of dependent reality appear, attachment results in two kinds of imagined reality. These are what the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones describe as ‘attachment to appearance (nimitta)’ and ‘attachment to name (nama).’ Attachment to appearance involves attachment to external and internal entities, while attachment to name involves attachment to the individual and shared characteristics of these external and internal entities. These are the two kinds of imagined reality. What serves as the ground (ashraya) and objective support (alambana) from which they arise is dependent reality (a.k.a. alaya-vijnana).

“And what is perfected reality? This is the mode that is free from name or appearance or from projection (samkalpa). It is attained by buddha knowledge (arya-jnana) and is the realm where the personal realization of buddha knowledge takes place. This is the perfected reality and the heart of the tathagata-garbha.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

“Name and appearance and projection: these characterize two modes of reality (imagined and dependent). Correct knowledge (samyag-jnana) and suchness (tathata): these characterize the perfected mode.”

“Mahamati, this is what is known as the teaching of how to view what characterizes the five dharmas and the modes of reality. This is the realm where the personal realization of buddha knowledge takes place and which you and other bodhisattvas should cultivate.”

(section LV, page 159)

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “When the mind is tied to external realms, knowledge is subject to speculation; where freedom from projection prevails, impartial wisdom rises.
2. What exists in imagined reality in dependent reality doesn’t; imagined reality is what is grasped, dependent reality is not imagined.
3. Where a myriad distinctions arise, like illusions they aren’t real; where characteristics multiply, because they’re projections, they aren’t perfect.
4. Characteristics are mistakes, rising from a mind in bondage; projections of what isn’t known, based on dependent reality.
5. What exists in imagined reality is simply dependent reality, projections of all kinds, based on dependent reality.
6. There’s conventional truth and ultimate truth, and a third that denies causation; projections refer to conventional truth, their cessation is the realm of sages.
7. Like someone who contemplates, who perceives a multitude in one, where no multitude exists: this is what projections resemble.
8. Like someone with cataracts who imagines different forms, which neither are nor aren’t cataracts, dependent reality is thus mistaken.
9. Like gold that has been refined, free from dross and impurities, the sky without a cloud: imagined reality purified.
10. Imagined reality doesn’t exist, dependent reality does; assertions and denials by projections are undone.
11. If imagined reality doesn’t exist, and dependent reality does, if one doesn’t and the other does, from what doesn’t comes what does.
12. Thus is dependent reality based upon projection, from which name and appearance follow, giving rise to more projections.

13. Though they remain unperfected, once you get past all projections, knowledge is thus purified: this is ultimate truth.
14. Projections are twelve in number (words, the object of words, characteristics, value, self-existence, causes, views, reasoning, arising, non-arising, continuity, bondage and emancipation), dependent reality is sixfold, the knowledge known to oneself includes not one distinction.
15. The truth includes five dharmas, reality has three modes, practitioners who distinguish these don't separate from suchness (tathata).
16. Dependent reality and appearances, imagined reality and names; from the characteristics of projection, dependent reality arises.
17. In the radiant light of wisdom, dependent and imagined reality vanish, nor does perfected reality exist, so how is anything distinguished?
18. Because their natures are distinguished, the two realities are established; where a myriad projections appear lies the realm of pure buddha knowledge.
19. Imagined reality is like a painting, projecting dependent reality; something other than projection, this is the view of other schools.
20. What is projected by projection, they see coming from causes; beyond the duality of projection, this is where perfection occurs."

#### **Chapter 4: excerpts on 5 dharmas (appearance, name, projection, suchness, correct knowledge)**

(section LXXXIII, page 245)

"Mahamati, as for appearance (nimitta), what appears to visual consciousness, we name 'form.' What appears to auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, or conceptual consciousness, we name 'sound,' 'smell,' 'taste,' 'feeling,' or 'thought.' These are the names for appearances.

"Mahamati, projection (samkalpa) fabricates names (nama) and points to appearances as being 'like this and not something else.' What we name an elephant or a horse, a charioteer or a foot soldier, a man or a woman, this is what is meant by projection.

"Mahamati, according to correct knowledge (samyag-jnana), names and appearances are indistinguishable – like passerby. When the different forms of consciousness do not arise, and they are neither annihilated nor eternal, and one does not end up in the realms of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, or other paths, this is what is meant by correct knowledge.

"Moreover, Mahamati, as a result of correct knowledge, bodhisattvas neither assert names nor appearances, nor do they not assert names or appearances. They avoid dualistic views of assertion or denial because they know that names and appearances do not arise. This is what is meant by suchness (tathata)...

The Buddha told Mahamati, "The three modes of reality as well as the eight forms of consciousness and the two kinds of no-self (persons and things) are all included in the five dharmas. Mahamati, name and appearance are the imagined mode of reality. Mahamati, because the mind and what belongs to the mind are dependent on projection for their existence and arise together with name, just as do the sun and its rays, and because they are supported by the differentiation of their various appearances, they constitute the dependent mode. And, Mahamati, because correct knowledge and suchness are indestructible, they make up the perfected mode."

(section LXXXIV, page 247)

"Moreover, Mahamati, the five dharmas include appearance, name, projection, suchness, and correct knowledge. Mahamati, appearance is what is perceived as having physical shape and features. This is what is meant by appearance. If a certain appearance is referred to as a pot and not something else, this is what is meant by name. Designating names and pointing to appearances, as in the case of a pot, involve the mind and what belongs to the mind. This is what is meant by projection. But names and appearances are essentially ungraspable and ultimately unknowable. What is not affected by anything and what transcends mistaken projections, this is what is meant by suchness. What is real, true, certain, ultimate, self-existent, and ungraspable, these are the characteristics of suchness. The characteristics I and all buddhas accordingly attain and truly explain and designate and indicate to others so that they are able to reach a true understanding of what is neither annihilated nor eternal and so that they do not give rise to projections but reach the realm of the personal realization of buddha knowledge beyond the reach of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas and followers of other paths, this is what is meant by correct knowledge.

## **Chapter 2: Mahamati's Questions, excerpts on tathagata-garbha**

(section XXVIII, page 109)

Mahamati Bodhisattva then asked the Buddha, "In the sutras, the Bhagavan says that the tathagata-garbha is intrinsically pure, endowed with thirty-two attributes and present in the bodies of all beings, and that, like a priceless jewel wrapped in soiled clothing, the ever-present, unchanging tathagata-garbha is likewise wrapped in the soiled clothing of the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas and stained with the stain of the erroneous projections (parikalpa) of greed, anger, and delusion, and that is what all buddhas teach. How is it that what the Bhagavan says about the tathagata-garbha is the same as what followers of other paths say about a self (atman)? Bhagavan, followers of other paths also speak of an immortal creator without attributes, omnipresent and indestructible. And they say this, Bhagavan, is the self."

The Buddha replied, "Mahamati, the tathagata-garbha of which I speak is not the same as the self mentioned by followers of other paths. Mahamati, when I speak about the tathagata-garbha, sometimes I call it 'emptiness' (shunyata), 'formlessness' (animitta), or 'intentionlessness' (apranihita), or 'realm of reality' (bhutakoti), 'dharma nature' (dharmata), or 'dharma body' (dharmakaya), or 'nirvana,' 'what is devoid of self-existence' (nisvavabhavata), or 'what neither arises nor ceases,' or 'original quiescence,' or 'intrinsic nirvana,' or similar expressions.

"It is to put an end to the fear foolish beings have about the expression 'no self' (nairatmya) that the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones proclaim the teaching of the tathagata-garbha as a projectionless (nirvikalpa) realm devoid of fabrications. Mahamati, bodhisattvas of the present and the future should not become attached to any view of a self.

"Take for example a potter who applies such things as manual labor, water, a stick, a wheel, and a string to a lump of clay to make different kinds of vessels. The Tathagata is also like this, applying wisdom and a variety of skillful means to what has no self and is free from projection. Sometimes I speak about the tathagata-garbha and sometimes no self. Thus, the tathagata-garbha of which I speak is not the same as the self spoken of by followers of other paths. This is what is meant by the teaching of the tathagata-garbha. The tathagata-garbha is taught to attract those members of other paths who are attached to a self so that they will give up their projection of an unreal self and will enter the threefold gate of liberation (emptiness, formlessness, intentionlessness) and aspire to attain unexcelled, complete enlightenment forthwith. This is why the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones speak in this manner about the tathagata-garbha. To speak otherwise would be to agree with the followers of other paths. Therefore, Mahamati, in order to avoid the views of followers of other paths, you should rely on the selfless tathagata-garbha (tathagata-nairatmya-garbha).

## **Chapter 3: More Questions, excerpts on tathagata-garbha and repository consciousness**

(section LXXXII, page 240)

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, would you please explain again the arising and cessation of the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas? If they contain no self, who arises, and who ceases? Foolish people rely on arising and cessation and fail to experience an end of suffering and fail to know nirvana."

The Buddha said, "Excellent. Listen carefully, and I will tell you."

Mahamati replied, "May we be so instructed."

The Buddha said, "The tathagata-garbha is the cause of whatever is good or bad and is responsible for every form of existence everywhere. It is like an actor who changes appearances in different settings but who lacks a self or what belongs to a self. Because this is not understood, followers of other paths unwittingly imagine an agent responsible for the effects that arise from the threefold combination (of sensory power, domain, and consciousness).

"When it is impregnated by the habit-energy (vasana) of beginningless fabrications (prapancha), it is known as the repository consciousness (alaya-vijnana) and gives birth to fundamental ignorance along with seven kinds of consciousness. It is like the ocean whose waves rise without cease. But it transcends the misconception of impermanence or the conceit of a self and is essentially pure and clear.

"The seven kinds of thoughts of the remaining forms of consciousness – the will (manas), conceptual consciousness (mano-vijnana), and the others – rise and cease as the result of mistakenly projecting (abhutaparikalpa) and grasping external appearances. Because people are attached to the names and

appearances (nama-nimitta) of all kinds of shapes, they are unaware that such forms and characteristics are the perceptions of their own minds (sva-chitta-drshya) and that bliss or suffering do not lead to liberation (moksha). As they become enveloped by names and appearances, their desires arise and create more desires, each becoming the cause or condition of the next. Only if their senses stopped functioning, and the remaining projections of their minds no longer arose, and they did not distinguish bliss or suffering, would they enter the Samadhi of Cessation of Sensation and Perception (nirodha-samapatti) in the fourth dhyana heaven. However, in their cultivation of the truths of liberation (four noble truths), they give rise to the concept of liberation and fail to transcend or transform (paravrtti) what is called the repository consciousness of the tathagata-garbha. And the seven kinds of consciousness never stop flowing. And how so? Because the different kinds of consciousness arise as a result of causes and conditions. This is not the understanding of shravaka or pratyeka-buddha practitioners, as they do not realize there is no self that arises from grasping the individual or shared characteristics of the skandhas, dhatus, or ayatanas (they have seen through the self of persons but not the self of dharmas).

For those who see the tathagata-garbha, the five dharmas, the modes of existence (svabhava), and the two kinds of no-self cease to exist. And once they progress through the sequence of stages (bhumi) and are not swayed by the views of other paths, they are said to dwell in the unshakable stage of bodhisattvas (achala-bhumi, the eighth stage), where they enjoy the bliss of the ten samadhis. Supported by the buddhas during such samadhis, they reflect on the inconceivable Dharma. But because of their vows, they do not grasp the bliss of samadhi or ultimate reality (bhuta-koti). And by means of the personal realization of buddha knowledge (sva-pratyatma-arya-jnana), which is not among the practices of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, or followers of other paths, they complete the ten-stage path of the lineage of sages, and they acquire bodies of knowledge and projection that transcend samadhi.

“Therefore, Mahamati, bodhisattvas who seek the highest goal should purify what are called the tathagata-garbha and the repository consciousness. Mahamati, if there were nothing called the repository consciousness, the tathagata-garbha [ , then the external world of things] would neither arise nor cease. But sages and fools alike experience arising and cessation, Mahamati. Therefore, practitioners who cultivate the personal realization of buddha knowledge dwell in the bliss of whatever is present and do not abandon their practice.

“Mahamati, although this repository consciousness of the tathagata-garbha (tathagata-garbha-alaya-vijnana) seen by the minds of shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas is essentially pure, because it is obscured by the dust of sensation (klesha), it appears impure – but not to tathagatas. To tathagatas, Mahamati, the realm that appears before them is like an amala fruit in the palm of their hand.

“Mahamati, I have used my spiritual power to support Queen Shrimala and other bodhisattvas of deep wisdom to explain the meaning of what are called the repository consciousness and the tathagata-garbha, which appear together with the seven other kinds of consciousness, so that those shravakas still attached to them might see that persons and dharmas are without a self. Thus supported by the power of the Buddha, Queen Shrimala explained the realm of understanding of tathagatas and not the realm of understanding of shravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, or other paths. The repository consciousness of the tathagata-garbha is something only buddhas and those wisest of bodhisattvas who rely on meaning understand. Therefore you and the other bodhisattvas should diligently reflect on the repository consciousness of the tathagata-garbha. Don’t simply think hearing about this is enough.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Deep is the tathagata-garbha with seven kinds of consciousness; the two kinds of grasping that arise are avoided by the wise.
2. The mind is like a reflected image, the result of habit-energy without beginning; for those who see what is real, whatever is seen isn’t seen.
3. Like fools who see me point to the moon, look at my finger and not at the moon, those who cling to names don’t see this truth of mine.
4. The mind (chitta/alaya) is the hero in a play, the will (manas) is the hero’s confidant, the five forms of consciousness are the cast, projections are the audience [or stage].”