

Samdhinirmochana Sutra

Sutra Explaining the Thought

translated from Tibetan by John Powers in "Wisdom of Buddha"

Chapter 5 - The Questions of Vishalamati

Then Bodhisattva Vishalamati questioned the Bhagavan: "Bhagavan, when you say, 'Bodhisattvas are wise with respect to the secrets of mind, thought, and consciousness; Bodhisattvas are wise with respect to the secrets of mind, thought, and consciousness,' Bhagavan, just how are Bodhisattvas wise with respect to the secrets of mind, thought, and consciousness? For what reason does the Tathagata designate a Bodhisattva as wise with respect to the secrets of mind, thought, and consciousness?"

The Bhagavan replied to the Bodhisattva Vishalamati: "Vishalamati, you are involved in [asking] this in order to benefit many beings, to bring happiness to many beings, out of sympathy for the world, and for the sake of the welfare, benefit, and happiness of many beings, including gods and humans. Your intention in questioning the Tathagata about this subject is good. It is good! Therefore, Vishalamati, listen well and I will describe for you the way [Bodhisattvas] are wise with respect to the secrets of mind, thought, and consciousness.

"Vishalamati, whatever type of sentient being there may be in this cyclic existence with its six kinds of beings, those sentient beings manifest a body and arise within states of birth such as egg-born, or womb-born, or moisture-born, or spontaneously-born.

"Initially, in dependence upon two types of appropriation - the appropriation of the physical sense powers associated with a support and the appropriation of predispositions which proliferate conventional designations with respect to signs, names, and concepts - the mind which has all seeds ripens; it develops, increases, and expands in its operations. Although two types of appropriation exist in the form realm, appropriation is not twofold in the formless realm.

"Vishalamati, consciousness is also called the 'appropriating consciousness' because it holds and appropriates the body in that way. It is called the 'basis-consciousness' because there is the same establishment and abiding within those bodies. Thus they are wholly connected and thoroughly connected. It is called 'mind' because it collects and accumulates forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects.

"Vishalamati, the sixfold collection of consciousness - the eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mind consciousness - arises depending upon and abiding in that appropriating consciousness. An eye consciousness arises depending on an eye and a form in association with consciousness. Functioning together with that eye consciousness, a conceptual mental consciousness arises at the same time, having the same objective reference.

"Vishalamati, [an ear consciousness, a nose consciousness, a tongue consciousness, and] a bodily consciousness arise depending on an ear, a nose, a tongue, and a body in association with consciousness and [sound, smell, taste, and] tangibles. Functioning together with [nose, ear, tongue, and bodily] consciousness, a conceptual mental consciousness arises at the same time, having the same objective reference.

"If there arises one eye consciousness, there arises together with it only one mental consciousness, which has the same object of activity as the eye consciousness. Likewise, if two, three, four, or five consciousnesses arise together, then there still arises, together with them, only one conceptual mental consciousness, which has the same object of activity as the fivefold collection of consciousness.

"Vishalamati, for example, if the causal conditions for the arising of one wave in a great flowing river are present, then just one wave will arise. If the causal conditions for two waves or many waves are present, then multiple waves will arise. But the river's own continuity will not be broken; it will never be entirely stopped.

"If the causal conditions for the arising of a single image in a perfectly clear round mirror are present, then just one image will arise. If the causal conditions for the arising of two images or of many images are present, then multiple images will arise. However, that round mirror will not be transformed into the nature of the image; they will never be fully linked.

"Vishalamati, just as it is with the water and the mirror, if, depending upon and abiding in the appropriating consciousness, the causal conditions for the simultaneous arising of one eye consciousness are present, then just one eye consciousness will arise one time. If the causal conditions for the single arising of up to the fivefold assemblage of consciousness are present, then up to that fivefold assemblage of consciousness will also arise one time.

"Vishalamati, it is like this: Bodhisattvas who rely on knowledge of the system of doctrine and abide in knowledge of the system of doctrine are wise with respect to the secrets of mind, thought, and consciousness. However, when the Tathagata designates Bodhisattvas as being wise with respect to the secrets of mind, thought, and consciousness, it is not only because of this that he designates those Bodhisattvas as being [wise] in all ways.

"Vishalamati, those Bodhisattvas [wise in all ways] do not perceive their own internal appropriators; they also do not perceive an appropriating consciousness, but they are in accord with reality. They also do not perceive a basis, nor do they perceive a basis-consciousness. They do not perceive accumulations, nor do they perceive mind. They do not perceive an eye, nor do they perceive form, nor do they perceive an eye-consciousness. They do not perceive an ear, nor do they perceive a sound, nor do they perceive an ear-consciousness. They do not perceive a nose, nor do they perceive a smell, nor do they perceive a nose-consciousness. They do not perceive a tongue, nor do they perceive a taste, nor do they perceive a tongue consciousness. They do not perceive a body, nor do they perceive a tangible object, nor do they perceive a bodily consciousness. Vishalamati, these Bodhisattvas do not perceive their own particular thoughts, nor do they perceive phenomena, nor do they perceive a mental consciousness, but they are in accord with reality. These Bodhisattvas are said to be 'wise with respect to the ultimate'. The Tathagata designates Bodhisattvas who are wise with respect to the ultimate as also being 'wise with respect to the secrets of mind, thought, and consciousness'.

"Vishalamati, this is how Bodhisattvas are wise with respect to the secrets of mind, thought, and consciousness. When the Tathagata designates Bodhisattvas as being 'wise with respect to the secrets of mind, thought, and consciousness', he designates them as such for this very reason."

Then the Bhagavan spoke this verse:

"If the appropriating consciousness, deep and subtle,
all its seeds flowing like a river,
were conceived as a self, that would not be right.
Thus I have not taught this to children."

This completes the fifth chapter of Vishalamati

Chapter 6 - The Questions of Gunakara

Then Bodhisattva Gunakara questioned the Bhagavan: "Bhagavan, when you say 'Bodhisattvas are wise with respect to the character of phenomena; Bodhisattvas are wise with respect to the character of phenomena,' Bhagavan, just how are Bodhisattvas wise with respect to the character of phenomena? For what reason does the Tathagata designate a Bodhisattva as being wise with respect to the character of phenomena?"

The Bhagavan replied to the Bodhisattva Gunakara: "Gunakara, you are involved in [asking] this in order to benefit many beings, to bring happiness to many beings, out of sympathy for the world, and for the sake of the welfare, benefit, and happiness of many beings, including gods and humans. Your intention in questioning the Tathagata about this subject is good! It is good! Therefore, Gunakara, listen well and I will describe for you how [Bodhisattvas] are wise with respect to the character of phenomena.

"Gunakara, there are three characteristics of phenomena. What are these three? They are the imputational character, the other-dependent character, and the thoroughly established character. Gunakara, what is the imputational character of phenomena? It is that which is imputed as a name or symbol in terms of the own-being or attributes of phenomena in order to subsequently designate any convention whatsoever. Gunakara, what is the other-dependent character of phenomena? It is simply the dependent origination of phenomena. It is like this: Because this exists, that arises; because this is produced, that is produced. It ranges from: 'Due to the condition of ignorance, compositional factors [arise],' up to: 'In this way, the whole great assemblage of suffering arises.' Gunakara, what is the thoroughly established character of phenomena? It is the suchness of phenomena. Through diligence and through proper mental application, Bodhisattvas establish realization and cultivate realization of [the thoroughly established character]. Thus it is what establishes [all the stages] up to unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment.

"Gunakara, for example, the imputational character should be viewed as being like the defects of clouded vision in the eyes of a person with clouded vision. Gunakara, for example, the other-dependent character should be viewed as being like the appearance of the manifestations of clouded vision in that very [person], manifestations which appear as a net of hairs, or as insects, or as sesame seeds; or as a blue manifestation, or a yellow manifestation, or a red manifestation, or a white manifestation. Gunakara, for example, the thoroughly established character should be viewed as being like the unerring objective reference, the natural objective reference of the eyes when that person's eyes have become pure and free from the defects of clouded vision.

"Gunakara, for example, when a very clear crystal comes in contact with the color blue, it then appears as a precious gem, such as a sapphire or a mahanila. Further, by mistaking it for a precious gem such as a sapphire or a mahanila, sentient beings are deluded. When it comes in contact with the color red, it then appears as a precious gem such as a ruby and, by mistaking it for a precious gem such as a ruby, sentient beings are deluded. When it comes in contact with the color green, it then appears as a precious gem such as an emerald and, further, by mistaking it for a precious gem such as an emerald, sentient beings are deluded. When it comes in contact with the color gold, it then appears as gold and, further, by mistaking it for gold, sentient beings are deluded.

"Gunakara, for example, you should see that in the same way as a very clear crystal comes in contact with a color, the other-dependent character comes in contact with the predispositions for conventional designations that are the imputational character. For example, in the same way as a very clear crystal is mistaken for a precious substance such as a sapphire, a mahanila, a ruby, an emerald, or gold, see how the other-dependent character is apprehended as the imputational character.

"Gunakara, for example, you should see that the other dependent nature is like that of very clear crystal. For example, a clear crystal is not thoroughly established in permanent, permanent time or in everlasting, everlasting time as having the character of a precious substance like a sapphire, a mahaniila, a ruby, an emerald, or gold, and is without the natures [of such things].

"In the same way, you should see that since the other dependent character is not thoroughly established in permanent, permanent time, or in everlasting, everlasting time as being the imputational character, and is without its nature, it is the thoroughly established character.

"Gunakara, in dependence upon names that are connected with signs, the imputational character is known. In dependence upon strongly adhering to the other-dependent character as being the imputational character, the other dependent character is known. In dependence upon absence of strong adherence to the other-dependent character as being the imputational character, the thoroughly established character is known.'

"Gunakara, when Bodhisattvas know the imputational character as it really is with respect to the other-dependent character of phenomena, then they know characterless phenomena as they really are. Gunakara, when Bodhisattvas know the other-dependent character as it really is, then they know the phenomena of afflicted character as they really are. Gunakara, when Bodhisattvas know the thoroughly established character as it really is, then they know the phenomena of purified character as they really are.

"Gunakara, when Bodhisattvas know characterless phenomena as they really are with respect to the other-dependent character, then they completely abandon phenomena of afflicted character. When they have completely abandoned phenomena of afflicted character, they realize phenomena of purified character.

"Therefore, Gunakara, Bodhisattvas know the imputational character of phenomena, the other-dependent character, and the thoroughly established character of phenomena as they really are. Once they know characterlessness, the thoroughly afflicted character, and the purified character as they really are, then they know characterless phenomena as they really are. They completely abandon the phenomena of afflicted character, and when they have completely abandoned phenomena of afflicted character, then they realize phenomena of purified character.

"This is how Bodhisattvas are wise with respect to the character of phenomena. When the Tathagata designates Bodhisattvas as being wise with respect to the character of phenomena, he designates them as such for this very reason."

Then the Bhagavan spoke these verses:

"When one knows characterless phenomena,
one abandons phenomena of afflicted character.
When one abandons phenomena of afflicted character,
one attains phenomena of pure character.

"Heedless beings, overcome by faults and lazy,
do not consider the faults of compounded phenomena.
Weak regarding stable and fluctuating phenomena,
they are objects of compassion."

This completes the sixth chapter of Gunakara.

Chapter 7 - The Questions of Paramarthasamudgata (partial)

Then Bodhisattva Paramarthasamudgata questioned the Bhagavan: "Bhagavan, when I was in seclusion there arose this thought: 'The Bhagavan has spoken in many ways of the own-character of the aggregates and further spoken of their character of production, their character of disintegration, and their abandonment and realization. Just as he has spoken of the aggregates, he has also spoken of the sense spheres, dependent origination, and the sustenances. The Bhagavan has also spoken in many ways of the [own-] character of the [four] truths and further spoken of the realization [of suffering], abandonment [of the source of suffering], actualization [of the cessation of suffering], and meditative cultivation [of the path]... The Bhagavan has also spoken in many ways of the own character of the mindful establishments and further spoken of their discordances and antidotes, their meditative cultivation, the production of [the mindful establishments] that have not yet arisen, the abiding of those that have arisen, their nonforgetting, continued arising, increasing, and extending. Just as he spoke of the mindful establishments, he has also spoken of the correct abandonings, the bases of magical abilities, the powers, the forces, and the branches of enlightenment. The Bhagavan has also spoken in many ways of the own-character of the eight branches of the path of the Aryas and further spoken of their discordances and antidotes, their meditative cultivation, the production of those that have not yet arisen, the abiding of those that have arisen, their nonforgetting, continued arising, increasing, and extending.

" 'The Bhagavan has also said that all phenomena lack own being, that all phenomena are unproduced, unceasing, quiescent from the start, and naturally in a state of nirvana.' Then I thought, 'Of what was the Bhagavan thinking when he said, "All phenomena lack own-being; all phenomena are unproduced, unceasing, quiescent from the start, and naturally in a state of nirvana?" Why was the Bhagavan thinking, "All phenomena lack own-being; all phenomena are unproduced, unceasing, quiescent from the start, and naturally in a state of nirvana?" ' I ask the Bhagavan the meaning of this."

The Bhagavan replied to Bodhisattva Paramarthasamudgata: "Paramarthasamudgata, your thought, virtuously arisen, is good! It is good! Paramarthasamudgata, you are involved [in asking] this in order to benefit many beings, to bring happiness to many beings, out of sympathy for the world, and for the sake of the welfare, benefit, and happiness of beings, including gods and humans. Your intention in questioning the Tathagata about this subject is good! Therefore, Paramarthasamudgata, listen well and I will explain to you what I was thinking when I said: 'All phenomena lack an own being; all phenomena are unproduced, unceasing, quiescent from the start, and naturally in a state of nirvana.'

"Paramarthasamudgata, thinking of the three types of lack of own-being of phenomena - the lack of own-being in terms of character, the lack of own-being in terms of production, and an ultimate lack of own-being - I taught, 'All phenomena lack own-being.'

"Paramarthasamudgata, what is the lack of own-being in terms of character of phenomena? It is the imputational character. Why is this? The [imputational character] is a character posited as names and symbols, but it does not subsist by way of its own character. Therefore, it is the 'lack of own-being in terms of character'. Paramarthasamudgata, what is the lack of own-being in terms of production of phenomena? It is the other-dependent character of phenomena. Why is this? The [other-dependent character] arises through the force of other conditions and not by itself. Therefore, it is the 'lack of own-being in terms of production'. Paramarthasamudgata, what is an ultimate lack of own being of phenomena? Phenomena that are dependently originated lack an own-being due to the lack of own-being in terms of production. They also lack own-being due to an ultimate lack of own-being. Why is this? Paramarthasamudgata, I teach that whatever is an object of observation for

purification of phenomena is the ultimate. Since the other-dependent character is not an object of observation for purification, it is an 'ultimate lack of own-being'. Moreover, Paramarthasamudgata, the thoroughly established character of phenomena is also 'an ultimate lack of own-being'. Why is this? Paramarthasamudgata, that which is the 'selflessness of phenomena' of phenomena is known as their 'lack of own-being'. That is the ultimate. Since the ultimate is distinguished as the lack of own-being of all phenomena, it is an 'ultimate lack of own-being'.

"Paramarthasamudgata, for example, you should view lack of own-being in terms of character as being like a sky-flower. For example, Paramarthasamudgata, you should also view the lack of own-being in terms of production as being like a magical apparition. The ultimate lack of own-being should be viewed as being something other than those [first two characters]. For example, Paramarthasamudgata, just as [space] is distinguished by being just the lack of own-being of forms in space and as pervading everywhere, in the same way the ultimate lack of own-being is distinguished by being the selflessness of phenomena and should be viewed as all-pervasive and unitary.

"Paramarthasamudgata, thinking of those three types of lack of own-being, I taught, 'All phenomena lack own-being.' Paramarthasamudgata, thinking of lack of own-being in terms of character, I taught: 'All phenomena are unproduced, unceasing, quiescent from the start, and naturally in a state of nirvana.' Why is this? Paramarthasamudgata, that which does not exist by way of its own character is not produced. That which is not produced does not cease. That which is not produced and does not cease is quiescent from the start. That which is quiescent from the start is naturally in a state of nirvana. That which is naturally in a state of nirvana does not have even the slightest remainder that could pass beyond sorrow. Therefore, thinking of lack of own-being in terms of character, I taught, 'All phenomena are unproduced, unceasing, quiescent from the start, and naturally in a state of nirvana.'

"Moreover, Paramarthasamudgata, thinking of an ultimate lack of own-being that is distinguished by being the selflessness of phenomena, I taught: 'All phenomena are unproduced, unceasing, quiescent from the start, and naturally in a state of nirvana.' Why is this? An ultimate lack of own-being, distinguished by being the selflessness of phenomena, abides solely in permanent, permanent time and everlasting, everlasting time. That uncompounded reality of phenomena is free from all afflictions. That which is uncompounded, which abides in permanent, permanent time and everlasting, everlasting time due to being this very reality, is uncompounded. Therefore, it is unproduced and unceasing. Because it is free from all afflictions, it is quiescent from the start and is naturally in a state of nirvana. Therefore, thinking of an ultimate lack of own-being that is distinguished by being the selflessness of phenomena, I taught, 'All phenomena are unproduced, unceasing, quiescent from the start, and naturally in a state of nirvana.'

"Paramarthasamudgata, I do not designate the three types of lack of own-being because sentient beings in the realms of sentient beings view the own-being of the imputational as distinct [from the other-dependent and the thoroughly established character] in terms of own-being; or because they view the other-dependent and the thoroughly established as distinct in terms of own-being. Superimposing the own-being of the imputational onto the own-being of the other-dependent and the thoroughly established, sentient beings subsequently attribute conventions of the character of the own-being of the imputational to the own-being of the other-dependent and the thoroughly established. To the extent that they subsequently attribute such conventions, their minds are infused with conventional designations. Thereafter, because of being bound to conventional designations or due to predispositions toward conventional designations, they strongly adhere to the character of the own-being of the imputational as the own-being of the other-dependent and the thoroughly established."

Chapter 8 - The Questions of Maitreya (partial)

Then the Bodhisattva Maitreya asked the Bhagavan: "Bhagavan, abiding in what and depending upon what do Bodhisattvas in the Great Vehicle cultivate shamatha and vipashyana?"

The Bhagavan replied: "Maitreya, abiding in and depending upon an unwavering resolution to expound doctrinal teachings and to become unsurpassably, perfectly enlightened, [Bodhisattvas cultivate shamatha and vipashyana]."

"The Bhagavan has taught that four things are objects of observation of shamatha and vipashyana: conceptual images, non-conceptual images, the limits of phenomena, and accomplishment of the purpose. Bhagavan, how many of these are objects of observation of shamatha?"

[The Bhagavan] replied: "One: non-conceptual images."

"How many are objects of observation of vipashyana?"

[The Bhagavan] replied: "Only one: conceptual images."

"How many are objects of observation of both?"

[The Bhagavan] replied: "There are two: the limits of phenomena and accomplishment of the purpose."

"Bhagavan, abiding in and depending upon these four objects of observation of shamatha and vipashyana, how do Bodhisattvas seek shamatha and become skilled in vipashyana?"

"Maitreya, I have set forth these [twelve forms of] doctrinal teachings to Bodhisattvas: Sutras, discourses in prose and verse, prophetic discourses, verses, purposeful statements, specific teachings, narratives, historical discourses, stories of [the Buddha's] former lives, extensive discourses, discourses on miraculous phenomena, and discourses that delineate [topics of specific knowledge]. Bodhisattvas hear well, apprehend well, repeat well, analyze well with their minds, and through insight, fully realize these [teachings].

"Then, remaining in seclusion, having genuinely settled [their minds] inwardly, they mentally attend to those doctrines just as they have contemplated them. With continuous inner attention, they mentally attend to that mind which is mentally contemplated by any mind. The physical and mental pliancy that arises through engaging [in this practice] in this way and continuing in this [practice] is 'shamatha'. This is how Bodhisattvas seek shamatha.

"Having obtained physical and mental pliancy, they abide in only that. Having abandoned [certain] aspects of the mind, they analyze and inwardly consider those very doctrines in the way they have been contemplated as images that are the focus of samadhi. The differentiation, thorough differentiation, thorough investigation, thorough analysis, forbearance, interest, discrimination, view, and investigation of the objects that are known with respect to images that are the focus of such samadhi is 'vipashyana'. This is how Bodhisattvas become skilled in vipashyana."

"Bhagavan, prior to attaining physical and mental pliancy, when a Bodhisattva inwardly attends to the mind observing the mind, what is this mental activity called?"

"Maitreya, this is not shamatha. Know that it resembles intensified interest concordant with shamatha."

"Bhagavan, prior to attaining physical and mental pliancy, when a Bodhisattva inwardly attends to those doctrines just as they have been contemplated as images that are the focus of samadhi, what is this mental activity called?"

"Maitreya, this is not vipashyana. Know that it resembles intensified interest concordant with vipashyana."

"Bhagavan, are the path of shamatha and the path of vipashyana 'different' or 'not different'?"

The Bhagavan replied: "Maitreya, although they are not different, they are also not the same. Why are they not different? Because [shamatha] observes the mind, which is [also] the object of observation of vipashyana. Why are they not the same? Because [vipashyana] observes a conceptual image."

"Bhagavan, what is the image, the focus of samadhi which perceives [an image]? Is it 'different from the mind' or is it 'not different'?"

"Maitreya, it is 'not different'. Why is it not different? Because that image is simply cognition-only." Maitreya, I have explained that consciousness is fully distinguished by [the fact that its] object of observation is cognition-only."

"Bhagavan, if that image, the focus of samadhi, is not different from the physical mind, how does the mind itself investigate the mind itself?"

The Bhagavan replied: "Maitreya, although no phenomenon apprehends any other phenomenon, nevertheless, the mind that is generated in that way appears in that way. Maitreya, for instance, based on form, form itself is seen in a perfectly clear round mirror, but one thinks, 'I see an image'. The form and the appearance of the image appear as different factualities. Likewise, the mind that is generated in that way and the focus of samadhi known as the 'image' also appear to be separate factualities."

"Bhagavan, are the appearances of the forms of sentient beings and so forth, which abide in the nature of images of the mind, 'not different' from the mind?"

The Bhagavan replied: "Maitreya, they are 'not different'. However, because childish beings with distorted understanding do not recognize these images as cognition-only, just as they are in reality, they misconstrue them."

"Bhagavan, at what point do those Bodhisattvas solely cultivate [the practice of] vipashyana?"

The Bhagavan replied: "When they attend to mental signs with continuous mental attention."

"At what point do they solely cultivate shamatha?"

The Bhagavan replied: "When they attend to the uninterrupted mind with continuous mental attention."

"At what point, having combined the two, shamatha and vipashyana, do they unite them?"

The Bhagavan replied: "When they mentally attend to the one-pointed mind."

"Bhagavan, what are mental signs?"

"Maitreya, they are the conceptual images that are the focus of samadhi, the objects of observation of vipashyana."

"What is an uninterrupted mind?"

"Maitreya, it is a mind that observes the image, the object of observation of shamatha."

"What is the one-pointed mind?"

"It is the realization that: 'This image which is the focus of samadhi is cognition-only.' Having realized that, it is mental attention to suchness."

. . .

Then the Bodhisattva Maitreya asked the Bhagavan: "Bhagavan, what is the name of this form of Dharma discourse that explains your thought? How should it be apprehended?"

The Bhagavan replied, "Maitreya, this is the teaching of the definitive meaning of yoga. Apprehend it as 'the teaching of the definitive meaning of yoga.' "