

The Nature and Location of the Mind

The Request for Dharma

When Ānanda saw the Buddha, he bowed and wept in sorrow. He regretted that, since time without beginning, he had devoted himself to erudition but had not fully developed his practice on the Path. Respectfully and repeatedly he asked the Buddha to explain for him the elementary steps that lead to attainment in the wondrous practices of calming the mind, contemplative insight, and meditation in stillness — practices through which the Thus-Come Ones from all ten directions had become fully awakened.

Meanwhile, as many Bodhisattvas as there are sand-grains of the River Ganges, along with the great Arhats, Solitary Sages, and others from the ten directions, all eagerly wished to listen. They sat down and waited silently to hear instruction from the Sage.

Then the World-Honored One, before the great assembly, extended his golden-hued arm, circled his hand on the crown of Ānanda's head, and said to Ānanda and to all gathered there, "There is a samādhi called 'The Great and Royal Śūraṅgama that Is Spoken from above the Crown of the Buddha's Head and that Is the Perfection of the Myriad Practices.' It is a wondrous and magnificent Path, the unique portal through which the Buddhas in all ten directions have passed in order to transcend the conditioned world. You should all now listen attentively." Ānanda humbly bowed and waited for compassionate instruction.

Why was Ānanda unable to resist the evil spell, even though he was already a first-stage Arhat? He had been practicing samādhi with his conscious mind. For instance, when he listened to sutras, he remembered the principles that the Buddha spoke of. But the conscious mind which remembers the principles cannot lead to the fundamental solution, and so when Ānanda

1 Skt. śamatha, samāpatti, dhyāna.

2 A gesture giving comfort and blessing. The teacher places his hand on the crown of the disciple's head and then rubs the disciple's head in a circling motion.

3 Skt. citta, Ch. xin 心, the mind in which distinctions are made based on ignorance.

encountered a demonic influence, he failed to recognize it. . . . The conscious mind is subject to coming into being and ceasing to be and is not ultimate. . . . If instead one bases one's practice on the true nature which neither comes into being nor ceases to be, one can develop a samādhi which neither comes into being nor ceases to be. That is a genuine samādhi, one that cannot be affected by outside forces. . . . The power of such a samādhi can be victorious in any set of circumstances, agreeable or disagreeable. In the midst of them all, one can remain "still and just as one is, fully and forever luminous." That is genuine samādhi. If happy situations make you happy and sad events make you sad, you're being influenced by circumstances. If you keep jumping from joy to anger to sorrow to happiness, you're being influenced by circumstances. Instead, you should be like a mirror, which reflects what appears in it and then is still. . . . That is to have genuine wisdom. (I, 146–7)

The Buddha said to Ānanda, "You and I are members of the same family, and we share the affection that is natural among relatives. At the time you first made the resolve to become enlightened, what excellent attributes did you see in my Dharma that immediately led you to reject the deep familial affection and conjugal love found in the world?"

Ānanda said to the Buddha, "I saw the thirty-two hallmarks of the Thus-Come One, which were so supremely wondrous and incomparable that his entire body shone like crystal, with an interreflecting radiance.

I often thought to myself that a body with such hallmarks could not be the consequence of an act of sexual love. Why? The energies of desire are coarse and murky. Foul and putrid intercourse results in a turbid merging of procreative substances; such things as that cannot generate a body with such a wondrous, pure, magnificent, and brilliant concentration of purple-golden light. That is why I admired the Buddha and why I let the hair fall from my head so I could follow him."

4 Ānanda and the Buddha were paternal first cousins.

5 See the prologue, note 29.

6 Buddhist monks and nuns shave their heads upon entering the monastic life. The practice continues to this day.

THE REQUEST FOR DHARMA

The Buddha said, “Excellent, Ānanda! All of you should know that since time without beginning, all beings have been undergoing death and rebirth over and over simply because they have not been aware of the pure understanding which is the essential nature of the everlasting true mind. Instead, the workings of their minds are distorted, and because the workings of their minds are distorted, they are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth.

“Now you all wish to inquire about unsurpassed enlightenment and to discover the truth of your own nature. You should answer my questions straightforwardly, because that is the path that the Thus-Come Ones everywhere throughout the ten directions have taken as they freed themselves from death and rebirth. Their minds and their words were straightforward, and therefore, at every point in their progress from the first stage to the last, they were never in the least evasive.

“Now, Ānanda, I ask you this: when, in response to the thirty-two hallmarks of the Thus-Come One, you first made the resolve to attain full awakening, just what was it that saw those hallmarks, and who was it that took delight in them and loved them?”

Ānanda said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, I delighted in them and loved them with my mind and eyes. Because I saw with my eyes the excellent hallmarks of the Thus-Come One, my mind admired and delighted in them. In this way I became resolved to extricate myself from death and rebirth.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “It is as you say: your mind and eyes were the reason for your admiration and delight. Someone who does not know where his mind and eyes are will not be able to overcome the stress of engagement with perceived objects.

Consider, for example: when bandits invade a country and the king sends forth his soldiers to drive them out, the soldiers must first know where the bandits are. It is the fault of your mind and eyes that you are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth. I am now asking you: precisely where are your mind and eyes?”

7 Ch. chen lao 塵勞. This is the first mention of a theme to which the Buddha returns frequently in the Sutra: the stress and weariness that inevitably results

from immersion in the world of the senses. The theme is developed in full below in Parts IV and V.

The Location of the Mind

A. Ānanda Proposes That the Mind Is in the Body “World-Honored One,” Ānanda then said to the Buddha, “The ten classes of beings in all the worlds believe that the conscious mind dwells in the body; and as I regard the blue-lotus eyes of the Thus-Come One, I know that they are part of the Buddha’s face. Clearly they are also part of his body. It is evident that those physical organs which respond to four kinds of perceived objects are part of my face, and so, my conscious mind, too, is surely found within my body.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Now as you sit in the Dharma Hall of the Thus-Come One, you can see Prince Jetri’s Grove. Where is the grove?”

“This great and sacred Dharma Hall, with its many stories, World-Honored One, is in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Childless, and the Prince Jetri’s Grove is outside the hall.”

“Ānanda, what is the first thing that you see from your place in the hall?”

“World-Honored One, here in the hall I am looking first at the Thus-Come One. I can also see the great assembly; then, as I gaze out, I see the grove in the park.”

“Why is it, Ānanda, that when you look out, you can see the grove in the park?”

“World-Honored One, since the doors and windows of this great hall have been thrown open wide, I can be in the hall and yet see into the distance.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “It is as you say. Someone in the hall can see far into the grove and park when the doors and windows are open

8 In part 9.2 below, the Buddha describes twelve kinds of beings according to the manner of their birth.

9 Eyes, ears, nose, and tongue, responding respectively to visible objects, sounds, odors, and flavors. The fifth pair — the body and objects of touch — is understood to be included.

wide. Now, could that person in the hall not see the Buddha and yet see outside the hall?”

Ānanda answered, “It would not be possible, World-Honored One, to be in the hall and be able to see the grove and fountains, and yet not be able to see the Thus-Come One.”

“Ānanda, the same is true of you. You have the intelligence to understand everything clearly. If your mind, with its clear understanding, were inside your body, then the inside of your body would be what your mind would first come into contact with and have knowledge of. Are there beings that see the inside of their bodies first, before they can observe things outside? Even if they could not see their heart, liver, spleen, or stomach, they still at least would detect the growing of their nails and hair, the twisting of their sinews, and the throbbing of their pulse. Why then are you not able to see these things? And since your mind is definitely not visually cognizant of what is inside your body, how can it have knowledge of what is outside your body? Thus you can know that when you say the mind that is aware and makes distinctions is inside the body, you state what is impossible.”

Ānanda Proposes That the Mind Is Outside the Body

Ānanda bowed and said to the Buddha, “Now that I have listened to the Thus-Come One explain the Dharma in this way, I realize that my mind must be located outside my body instead. Why do I say this? For example, a lamp lit in a room will certainly illuminate the inside of the room first, and then its light will stream through the doorway and reach the recesses of the hall beyond it. Since beings do not see inside their bodies but only see outside them, it is as if the lamp were placed outside the room, so that it cannot shed its light inside the room. This principle is perfectly clear and beyond a doubt; it conforms to the Buddha’s ultimate teaching — and so it can’t be wrong, can it?”

10 According to Buddhist teaching, the cognitive faculty acts together with the eye-faculty in the process of visual perception of objects. The eye-faculty senses the objects and the mind recognizes what they are.

11 Here Ānanda offers a second proposition and he brings forth his own instance, which is, however, very similar to the one the Buddha proposed above. Ānanda has merely substituted the lamp and its light for himself and his vision. The Buddha refutes this second proposition in two steps: the first, by

showing that Ānanda's example is logically flawed because it cannot be correctly applied to his proposition; the second, by offering the counter-example of the physical separateness of the monks seated at their meal.

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “The monks who followed me to Śrāvastī to receive their alms in sequential order have by now returned to Prince Jetri's Grove, and they are eating their meal with their fingers. I have finished my meal, but consider the monks: can all of them be full when only one person has eaten?”

Ānanda answered, “No, World-Honored One. Why not? These monks are all Arhats, but their physical bodies, their own separate lives, are distinct. How could one person cause everyone to be full?”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Then if your mind that sees, is aware, discerns, and knows really were outside your body, your body and mind would be separate and unrelated to each other. The body would not be aware of what the mind has knowledge of, and the mind would have no knowledge of what the body is aware of. Now as I hold up my hand, which is as soft as cotton, does your mind distinguish it when your eyes see it?”

Ānanda said, “It does, World-Honored One.”

The Buddha told Ānanda, “Then if your mind and eyes work together to perceive my hand, how can the mind be outside? In this way you can know that when you say the mind that is aware and makes distinctions is outside the body, you state what is impossible.”

The Buddha shows that if the mind which is aware, knows, and makes distinctions were outside the body, then there would be no connection between them. . . . The body would not be aware of the mind or be influenced by it. If

12 A traditional manner of eating in India.

13 Following the conventions for stating a syllogism (see section 8 of the introduction), the Buddha now suggests an apt instance drawn from ordinary life to demonstrate the truth of what he is proposing, which is that Ānanda is wrong to suggest that the mind is located outside the body. He applies the instance to his proposition in the sentence beginning “Then if your mind that sees . . .” and states his conclusion in the sentence beginning “In this way you can know. . . .” This pattern is repeated to refute each of Ānanda's propositions concerning the location of the mind.

your awareness were in your body, your mind would not have an awareness of it. . . . But if your mind knows what your eyes are seeing, how can you say that your mind is outside your body? . . . Note, though, that the Buddha does not say that the mind is inside the body. He has already made clear that that, too, is a mistake. . . . Ānanda only knows how to analyze the Buddha's teachings by means of his conscious mind, which comes into being and ceases to be.

He is not aware of his everlasting true mind. (I, 179–81)

Ānanda Proposes That the Mind Is in the Eye-Faculty

Ānanda said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, it is as the Buddha has said. Because I do not see inside my body, my mind is not located there, and because the body and the mind work together and are not separate from each other, my mind is not outside my body either. Now that I think of it, I know just where the mind is.”

The Buddha said, “Where is it, then?”

Ānanda said, “Because the mind that discerns and is aware knows nothing of what is inside but can see what is outside, I believe, upon reflection, that the mind is hidden in the eyes. For instance, let us say that someone places transparent crystal cups over his eyes. Although the crystal cups cover his eyes, they will not obstruct his vision. In this way his eyes can see, and discernments are made accordingly. And so my mind that is aware and knows does not see inside because it is in the eye-faculty. It gazes at what is outside the body, seeing clearly and without impediment, for the same reason: the mind is hidden in the eyes.”

Ānanda says, “I believe” and “upon reflection.” It's still his ordinary mind at work. We reflect and consider with the ordinary mind, the mind that comes into being and ceases to be.

Ānanda does not yet understand what the Buddha is driving at. In general, people can't expect to understand the Śūraṅgama Sūtra having studied it only this far. You have to study the entire Sutra; then you will come to understand it. . . . There's no sense in saying to yourself, “I don't understand this Sutra, so I'm not going to study it.” It's precisely because you don't understand it yet that you should study it. (I, 183)

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Let us assume the mind is hidden in the eyes, as you assert in your instance of the crystals. When the person in your

example places crystal cups over his eyes and looks at the mountains, the rivers, and all else on this great earth, does he see the crystal cups too?”

“He does, World Honored One. He sees the crystal cups when he places them over his eyes.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “If in fact your mind can be compared to someone’s eyes with crystals placed over them, then when you look at the world of perceived objects, why don’t you see your own eyes? If you could see your eyes, your eyes would be part of your external surroundings. But then your mind and eyes could not work together to make distinctions. And since you cannot see your eyes, why did you say that the mind that is aware and makes distinctions is concealed within the eye-faculty, as in the example of the eyes with crystal cups placed on them? Know then that when you say the mind that is aware and makes distinctions is concealed in the eye-faculty, like eyes with crystal cups placed on them, you state what is impossible.”

The Buddha points out that if Ānanda could see his eyes, that would mean that his eyes would be outside of him, not part of his body. But if they were outside of his body, he would not be able to see, because the eyes need to be connected to the mind to complete the process of seeing. (I, 187)

Ānanda Reconsiders Seeing Inside and Seeing Outside

Ānanda said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, I now offer this reconsideration. Our viscera are located inside our bodies, while our orifices are open to the outside. Our viscera lie concealed in darkness, but at the orifices there is light. Now, facing the Buddha, with my eyes open, I see light. Seeing that light I would call ‘seeing outside.’ Seeing darkness when I close my eyes I would call ‘seeing inside.’ How does that idea sound?”

14 Ānanda now proposes, in his fourth supposition, that what is dark is inside and what is light is outside, so that he can return to his first supposition, that the mind is located inside the body. If the inside of the body is dark, the Buddha’s objection that the mind should see the internal organs first is removed.

15 The Buddha demolishes Ānanda’s new position in two stages. He first analyzes the darkness that is seen when the eyes are closed. According to the Buddhist understanding of perception, what we see, including the darkness we see when our eyes are closed, must be before the eye-faculty in order for the

eye-faculty to perceive it, and therefore it must be outside the body, not inside it. Then, taking up the case of the darkness that we see when our eyes are open, such as in a room that is completely dark, the Buddha points out that if darkness is internal, as Ānanda contends, then everything in a pitch-dark external environment must be inside of our bodies.

16 If one sees internal darkness and external light, then although the face cannot be seen as part of the illuminated external world, it ought to be seen as an illuminated internal opposite. Or to put it the other way around, when one opens one's eyes and sees the illuminated external environment, one can't turn one's vision around to see one's face; why then should we suppose that when one's eyes are closed, one can turn one's vision around to see the darkness inside one's body? If one's own face could be seen — if it had become part of the normally seen external environment — it would have to be external to one's eyes and mind. Since the face is part of the body, the eyes and mind would then have to float in empty space, external to the body. The Buddha continues to explain to Ānanda that if his eyes and mind are not part of his body, then his body must be an external object like any other. Or vice versa: if Ānanda's mind and eyes are part of his body after all, despite their being suspended in space, then other people's minds and eyes, which are also external to Ānanda's body, should also be part of his body. Therefore, the Buddha concludes that it should be the case that "the Buddha, who now sees your face, would be part of your body as well."

Ānanda is more intelligent than we are. We couldn't think of so many ways to answer. How many options has he come up with already? He has one opinion after another. Whatever the Buddha asks, he has an answer. He's always got something to say; he's full of theories and arguments and thoughts and considerations. He was, after all, foremost among the disciples in learning. (I, 189)

The Buddha said to Ānanda, "Consider this question, then: when you close your eyes and see darkness, is that darkness in front of your eyes? If the darkness is in front of your eyes, how can it be inside? But if in fact it were inside, then if you were in a room that was completely dark because it was not lit by the sun or by the moon or by lamps, the darkness in the room would have to be the darkness of your own insides. Besides, if the darkness were not in front of you, how could you see it? But suppose you did see inside in a way that is distinct from how you see outside. In that case — if we grant that

closing your eyes and thus seeing darkness would be to see the inside of your body — then when you open your eyes and see light, why don't you see your own face? Since you can't see your own face, there can be no seeing inside, because if you could see your face, then your eyes and also your mind that knows and understands would be suspended in the air. How then could they be part of your body?

The Buddha continues his questioning. . . Ānanda argues that to see darkness is to see inside the body; then when one opens one's eyes to look outside, one ought to be able to see one's own face. . . . But if one can't see one's own face with one's eyes open, how could it be that upon closing one's eyes, one would see inside? What Ānanda has contended has no basis in fact. (I, 191)

“If your eyes and mind were actually suspended in the air, then it would follow that they would not be part of your body. If, however, they were part of your body and yet they were suspended in the air, then the Buddha, who now sees your face, would be part of your body as well.

Thus, when your eyes became aware of something, your own body would be unaware of it. If you press the point and say the body and the eyes each have a separate awareness, then you would have two awarenesses so that you, one person, would eventually become two Buddhas. Therefore, you should know that when you say that to see darkness is to see inside, you state what is impossible.”

Ānanda Proposes That the Mind Comes into Being in Response to Conditions

Ānanda said to the Buddha, “I have heard the Buddha teach the four assemblies that because a state of mind arises, various perceived objects

17 In the second part of his refutation the Buddha shifts his focus from what is seen to the one who sees. He points out that if the eyes and mind are separate from the body, then if awareness is located in the eyes and mind, the body is left without awareness.

If both nevertheless have their own separate awareness, and accordingly two different stores of knowledge, then two different sets of consciousness are involved, and therefore two different people. Therefore, the Buddha concludes that “you, one person, would eventually become two Buddhas.”

18 That is, monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

arise, and that because perceived objects arise, various states of mind arise. I am now thinking, and that very act of thinking, which is an instance of a state of mind arising in response to perceived objects, is my mind's true nature. Thus the mind comes into being by combining with perceived objects wherever they arise. It does not exist in just one of the three locations — inside, outside, and the middle.”

Then the Buddha said to Ānanda, “Now you are saying that when perceived objects arise, various states of mind arise, and therefore that the mind comes into being by combining with those perceived objects wherever they arise. But such a mind as this would have no essential nature of its own, and so could not combine with anything. If, having no essential nature of its own, it still were able to combine with perceived objects, then there would be a nineteenth constituent element of perception, because such a mind would be combining with a seventh category of perceived object — and that is impossible.

19 The Buddha refutes Ānanda's new proposition as follows. If the mind had location but no essential nature, it would lie outside of the eighteen constituent elements of perception. The eighteen constituents are the six perceptual faculties, the six kinds of perceived objects corresponding to the perceptual faculties, and the six consciousnesses. . . .The Buddha points out that the logical extension of Ānanda's argument is that there is a nineteenth constituent, the place in which a supposedly insubstantial mind comes into being when it “combines with perceived objects.” The objects the mind would combine with would constitute a seventh category of perceived object. But there is no such category of object. (I, 195–6)

19 The Buddha discusses the ramifications of Ānanda's new proposition in terms of the essential nature and location of the mind. First, if the mind has no essential nature of its own, it either lacks a location or has a location. Second, if the mind indeed has no essential nature, then (a) to be in accord with conditions it must have a definite locus as it moves from one set of conditions to the next, and (b) it must be composed either of a single essential nature which pervades the body or of multiple essential natures. If the mind has no essential nature of its own, it makes no sense to talk about its uniting with something else. Were it to have a location without an essential nature, it would not be located within any of the eighteen constituent elements (Skt.

dhātu, Ch. jie 界), which contradicts fundamental tenets of the Buddhist teaching.

20 Contact between faculty and object is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the arising of one of the six consciousnesses.

“Furthermore, if such a mind did have an essential nature of its own, then if you were to pinch yourself, where would your mind that has awareness of the pinch be coming from? Would it be coming forth from the inside of your body, or would it be coming in from outside? If it came out from inside, then once again, you would see the inside of your body.

If it came in from outside, it would see your face first.” Ānanda said, “It is the eyes that see. It is the mind, and not the eyes, that is aware. To suppose that the mind sees is not my idea.”

The Buddha said, “If the eyes could see, then by analogy, when you were in a room, it would be the doorway, not you, that would see what is outside the room. Not only that: when someone has died with his eyes still intact, his eyes would see. But how could a dead person see?

“Ānanda, if your mind which is aware and knows and makes distinctions indeed has an essential nature of its own, then would it have a single essential nature or multiple essential natures? Would this essential nature pervade your body or wouldn't it? Suppose it were a single essential nature: then if you were to pinch one limb, wouldn't you feel that pinch in all four limbs? If you did, the feeling of the pinch would not be confined to one place. And if the feeling of the pinch were confined to one place, it would follow that your mind cannot have only one essential nature. But if your mind had multiple essential natures, you would be many people. Which of those essential natures would you be?

Furthermore, if a single essential nature did pervade your body, then a single pinch — as in the previous instance — would be felt throughout your body. But if this mental essence does not pervade your body, then if you touched your head and touched your foot at the same moment, you would feel the touch on your head but would not feel the touch on your foot. Yet that is not what your experience is.

21 By referring to the instance of someone pinching himself, the Buddha further shows that it is not logical to suppose that the mind has an essential nature and yet has no definite location. According to Ānanda's idea, the mind cannot exist

until the necessary conditions arise. A pinch is located on the boundary between internal and external; therefore, before the mind can come into existence at the location of the pinch, the essential nature of the mind must be located either inside or outside the body — alternate possibilities that have already been refuted.

“Therefore, you should know that when you say the mind comes into being by combining with perceived objects wherever they arise, you state what is impossible.”

Ānanda Proposes That the Mind Is in the Middle

Ānanda said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, I have also listened when the Buddha was discussing true reality with Mañjuśrī and other disciples of the Dharma-King. The World-Honored One then said that the mind is neither inside the body nor outside of it. And so I am now thinking that if the mind were inside, it would not see anything, and if it were outside, its awareness would be separate from the body. But since the mind is not aware of what is inside, it cannot be inside; and since the awareness of the mind is not separate from the body, it makes no sense to say the mind is outside. Therefore, since the mind’s awareness and the body’s awareness are not separate, and since the mind does not see what is inside, the mind must be in the middle.”

The Buddha replied, “You say that it is in the middle. A middle must be in some certain place. Propose a middle. Where is this ‘middle’ of yours?”

22 The Buddha asserts that if the mind is composed of a single essential nature which pervades the body, then the pinch should be discerned not only at its actual location but wherever the mind extends (i.e., over the entire body). On the other hand, if the mind is composed of more than one essential nature, then Ānanda would have to be two people, as the Buddha has just demonstrated in refuting Ānanda’s fifth supposition. Were the mind to have a single essential nature that nevertheless did not pervade the body, then when one touched one’s head and foot at the same time, one could not be aware of both at the same time.

23 Ch. shi xiang 實相. The Sanskrit equivalent for this term is uncertain, perhaps dharmatā or bhūtatathatā. Numerous equivalents to this central

concept are given in the text, including “true mind,” “suchness of reality,” “Matrix of the Thus-Come Ones,” “Dharma-body,” “Buddha-nature,” “enlightened nature,” and others.

24 Ānanda is not saying that we cannot be aware of any internal sensations but that, in the case of seeing, which is being discussed, the mind has no visual data about the inside of the body to make distinctions about.

Is it outside the body or inside it? If your ‘middle’ were inside the body, it might exist at the surface of the body or else somewhere within it. If it existed at the surface, it would not be in the middle, and to be within it would be the same as to be inside it. Does this ‘middle’ have a location, then? If so, is there some indication of that location? If there were no indication of its location, then the middle would not exist. And even if there were some indication of its location, that location would be indefinite. Why? Suppose that someone were to place a marker to indicate the location of a middle. Seen from the east, it would be in the west; seen from the south, it would lie to the north. Such a marker would not mark a definite middle, and in the same way, it is unclear what it might mean for the mind to be located in a ‘middle.’”

Ānanda said, “The middle I speak of is in neither of those places. For seeing to occur — as the World-Honored One has said — the eyes and visible objects are necessary conditions. The eyes record visual distinctions; the objects that are seen have no awareness. Between them, eye-consciousness is produced. The mind is there.”

The Buddha said, “If your mind were located between the eye-faculty and the objects it perceives, would the mind’s essential nature be the same as the essential natures of the eye-faculty and of its objects, or would it not? If the mind’s essential nature were the same as the essential natures of the eye-faculty and of its objects, it would be a confused combination of what is aware and what is not aware. That is contradictory. Where would this ‘middle’ be, then? And even if the mind’s essential nature were not the same as the essential natures either of the eye-faculty or of its objects, then the mind would be neither aware nor unaware. Such a mind would have no essential nature at all. How then could it be in the middle?”

25 In order to clarify his statement in this sixth supposition, Ānanda says that by “middle” he means between the faculty and its perceived object. He argues that since the Buddha taught that contact between faculty and

perceived object is a necessary precondition of the arising of consciousness, then consciousness must arise in the “middle,” between the two, and must constitute the location of the mind.

26 The Buddha refutes Ānanda’s argument by considering whether the mind’s essential nature includes the essential nature of the eye-faculty and the essential natures of the visible objects that are perceived by it. Here the Buddha returns to an argument similar to one he made in response to Ānanda’s fourth supposition, namely, that it would be impossible for the mind to consist of two different essential natures that are aware. But in the present case, one entity, the eye-faculty, is aware, and the other, the visual object, is not. If the mind includes both, then we are left with “a confused combination of what is aware and what is not aware.”

Therefore, you should know that it would be impossible for the mind to be in the middle.”

Ānanda Proposes That the Mind Has No Specific Location

Ānanda said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, when, along with Mahā-Maudgalyāyana, Subhūti, Pūrṇamaitrāyaṇīputra, and Śāriputra – four of the great disciples — I have listened to the Buddha as he turned the Wheel of Dharma, I have often heard him say that the mind that is aware and makes distinctions is not located inside or outside or in the middle; it is not located in any one of those places. That which has no specific location must be what is called the mind. Can what has no specific location be called my mind?”

The aware, perceiving mind is not located anywhere at all. . . . Basically, Ānanda’s view here would be acceptable from the point of view of ordinary people. But the mind the Buddha is speaking of is not the ordinary conscious mind. It is the everlasting true mind, not the mind of deluded mental processes. Yet Ānanda still thinks his deluded mind is his true mind; he has mistaken a burglar for his child. (I, 208)

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “You say the mind that is aware and makes distinctions is not located in a specific place. However, the air, the

lands, the waters, and the creatures that fly over them or move on them or in them — all things, in fact, existing in the world — do have specific locations.

“Then does the mind that you suppose has no specific location exist in some place, or else does it exist in no place? If it is located nowhere, then it is an absurdity — like a turtle with fur or a hare with horns. How can you speak of something that does not have a specific location? Suppose, however, things could in fact exist without a definite location. Now, what does not exist lacks attributes. What does exist has attributes. And whatever has attributes does have a location. How can you say then that the mind has no specific location? Therefore, you should know that when you say the mind which knows and is aware has no specific location, you state what is impossible.”

27 The Buddha shows Ānanda that if having no specific location is an attribute of something that really exists, then by definition it must have a specific location, and that is contradictory. Therefore, nonattachment implies that something exists and has characteristics and therefore location. Having a definite location is a form of attachment, and so Ānanda’s argument collapses.

The Conditioned Mind and the True Mind

Then Ānanda stood up in the midst of the great assembly. He uncovered his right shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground, put his palms together respectfully, and said to the Buddha, “The Buddha has bestowed his loving-kindness on me as his youngest cousin, but now that I have entered the monastic life, I have continued to presume upon his kindness, and as a result, all I have done is to become learned, and so I am not yet free of outflows.

According to the customs of India, uncovering the right shoulder is a gesture of respect, especially in the Buddhist tradition. It represents the purification of the karma of the body. Putting the palms together represents the purification of the karma of the mind, and speaking to the Buddha represents the purification of the karma of speech. (I, 211–2)

“Since I could not resist the Kapila spell, I was lured into a house of courtesans, all because I did not know how to find the realm of true reality.

I only hope that the World-Honored One, out of pity and great kindness, will instruct us in the path of calming the mind, will guide people who have no trust in the Dharma, and will counteract the wrong tendencies of the

uncivilized.” When he had finished speaking, Ānanda bowed to the ground and, with the rest of the great assembly, prepared himself with keen anticipation to listen reverently to the teaching.

At that time, an array of lights as dazzling and as brilliant as a hundred thousand suns poured forth from the World-Honored One’s face. Six kinds of quaking shook the lands of the Thus-Come Ones, and an infinite number of worlds appeared throughout all ten directions all at the same time. The Buddha’s awe-inspiring spiritual power caused all these worlds to merge into a single world, and in that world, all the great Bodhisattvas — while remaining in their own lands — placed their palms together and listened.

28 Ch. *zhen ji* 真際, probable Skt. *bhūta-koṭi*.

29 Skt. *icchāntika*.

30 Skt. *mlecchā*.

Earthquakes occurred in their six aspects in all the billions of worlds in which there were Buddhas — not only in our Sahā world,³¹ but all the others. Three of these aspects involve movement: quaking, erupting, and upward heaving.

“Quaking” is the motion of the earth during an earthquake. “Erupting” refers to intermittent agitations which cause lava to little by little seep forth like water from a fountain. “Heaving upward” refers to continual, violent upward movements of the earth. . . . At present our planet earth is in the midst of changes brought about by the six aspects of earthquakes. The other aspects of earthquakes — cracking, roaring, and striking — involve sound. When there is cracking, whole sections of the earth are torn asunder. The earth splits apart and often rends whole buildings in the process. Roaring occurs when the earth emits strange sounds. Striking occur after the ground has split apart and the two faces of the crevasse strike against one another. (I, 218–9)

The Buddha used his awe-inspiring spiritual power to bring all the lands together into one. . . . Nowadays we can greatly enlarge a very small photograph and reduce a large photograph into a very small one. . . . In the same way, the Buddha, by means of his spiritual power, made distant places close, brought all the myriad lands throughout the universe into one, as if he were reducing a photograph. And yet, though the lands were united into one, each remained located in its respective position without being mixed up. . . . The Buddha brought these lands together so that everyone, including

Bodhisattvas in every land, could listen as he spoke about the Great Śūraṅgama Samādhi.

(I, 220–1)

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Since time without beginning, all beings, because of the many distortions in their minds, have been creating seeds of karma, which then grow and ripen naturally, like a cluster of fruit on a rūkṣa tree.

31 In Buddhist cosmology, the Sahā world is the world-system we inhabit. The name is interpreted as “what must be borne.”

32 Ch. e cha 𑖀𑖂, elaeocarpus ganitrus. The berry-like fruit grows in tight clusters of three. The round seeds are used for recitation beads.

The conditioned mind and the true mind

The rūkṣa represents delusion, intentional action, and the consequences of action, which are interconnected as if they were joined on a single stem. You can’t say which precedes the other; they follow after one another in a continuing cycle, life after life, eon after eon. When would you say it all began? It has no beginning. It’s an endless cycle as one is bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in the six destinies. 33 Each of us born here in the world is like a fine mote of dust which suddenly rises high and suddenly falls low. When your actions are meritorious, you are born higher. When you commit offenses, you fall. Therefore, we people should only do things that are good. Don’t commit offenses, because the world runs on the principle of cause and effect, the principle of karma. The seeds of karma develop of their own accord, bringing you the appropriate consequences of whatever you have done, for good or for evil. (I, 225)

“People who undertake a spiritual practice but who fail to realize the ultimate enlightenment — people such as the Hearers of the Teaching the Solitary Sages, as well as celestial beings and others, such as demon-kings and members of the demons’ retinues, who follow wrong paths – all fail because they do not understand two fundamentals and are mistaken and confused in their practice. They are like someone who cooks sand, hoping to prepare a delicious meal. Even if the sand were cooked for eons numberless as motes of dust, no meal would result from it. People are born in a stupor and die in the

midst of a dream. . . . With nothing to do, they go looking for something to do. They fail to recognize their pure and fundamental nature and devote themselves to deluded thinking instead. . .

They divide experiences into good and bad, right and wrong. . . . But in the Matrix of the Thus-Come One 37 there are no such distinctions. In the Matrix of the Thus-Come One there isn't anything at all. It is absolutely pure. Our eyes may see the world of perceived objects, but they are simply manifestations of consciousness. When you really understand the truth that there isn't anything that comes into being and ceases to be, then you will understand that basically there isn't anything at all. But this principle is not easy to comprehend.

We must come to understand its meaning gradually. (I, 224–5)

33 That is, beings in the heavens, humans, asuras (beings addicted to anger and violence), animals, ghosts, and beings in the hells. See part 9, in which a seventh destiny, the ascetic masters, is listed as well. Which destiny beings are born into depends upon the karma they have created in previous lives.

34 Skt. śrāvakas, Ch. sheng wen 聲聞, that is, practitioners who have become Arhats through hearing the Buddha teach.

35 Ch. wai dao 外道.

36 Skt. kalpa, Ch. jie 劫.

“Ānanda, what are the two fundamentals? The first is the mind that is the basis of death and rebirth and that has continued since time without beginning. This mind is dependent on perceived objects, and it is this mind that you and all beings make use of and that each of you consider to be your own nature.

“The second fundamental is full awakening, which also has no beginning; it is the original and pure essence of nirvana. It is the original understanding, the real nature of consciousness. All conditioned phenomena arise from it, and yet it is among those phenomena that beings lose track of it. They have lost track of this fundamental understanding though it is active in them all day long, and because they remain unaware of it, they make the mistake of entering the various destinies.

“Ānanda, because you now wish to know about the path of calming the mind and wish to be subject to death and rebirth no longer, I will question you again.” Then the Thus-Come One raised his golden-hued arm and bent his five fingers — each of them marked with lines in the shape of a wheel — and he asked Ānanda, “Did you see something?”

Ānanda said, “I did.”

37 The Buddha’s Dharma-body, which is immanent in all things. See part 3.

38 Ch. pan yuan 攀緣.

39 “Nirvana” here does not signify the passing of the Buddha into a state of cessation after the death of his body; it means simply the state of the enlightened mind.

40 “Understanding” here and elsewhere renders the Ch. ming 明, which also carries the meaning of “light” and, at the esoteric level, the meaning of “illumination” as experienced in enlightenment.

41 Lines in the shape of wheels on the pads of the fingers are among the thirty-two hallmarks that characterize the body of a Buddha.

The Buddha said, “What did you see?”

Ānanda said, “I saw the Thus-Come One raise his arm and bend his fingers into a fist that sends forth light, dazzling my mind and eyes.”

Why did the Buddha ask about such a simple matter? You may see it as simple now, but actually it is not. The more the Buddha’s question is examined as the text continues, the deeper and more wonderful it becomes. It is just in the course of ordinary everyday matters that you can become fully aware of the Buddha that is inherent in you. The familiar places you come in contact with every day are the representations of the Buddha-nature. But you need to know that through your own experience; otherwise what is wrong seems right to you, and what is right seems wrong, and what is not lost seems lost. In fact, you haven’t lost your Buddha-nature, but it seems lost to you. . . . Since time without beginning, the root of death and rebirth, which is the mind that is dependent on conditioned phenomena, has been too strong. If that mind were to disappear, you would become aware of your Buddha-nature in an instant. (I, 241–2)

The Buddha said, “When you saw my fist emit light, what did you see it with?”
 Ānanda said, “All of us in the great assembly saw it with our eyes.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “You have answered that the Thus-Come One bent his fingers into a fist that sent forth light, dazzling your mind and eyes. Your eyes can see my fist, but what do you take to be your mind that was dazzled by it?”

Ānanda said, “The Thus-Come One has just now been asking me about my mind’s location, and my mind is what I have been using to determine where it might be. My mind is that which has the capability of making such determinations.”

The Buddha exclaimed, “Ānanda! That is not your mind!”

Startled, Ānanda stood up, placed his palms together, and said to the Buddha, “If that is not my mind, what is it?”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “It is merely your mental processes that assign false and illusory attributes to the world of perceived objects.

That is, the internal and external objects of awareness.

These processes delude you about your true nature and have caused you, since time without beginning and in your present life, to mistake a burglar for your own child — to lose touch with your own original, everlasting mind — and thus you are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth.”

Ānanda said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, I am the Buddha’s favorite cousin. It was my mind that loved the Buddha and led me to enter the monastic life. That mind of mine has been responsible not only for my serving the Thus-Come One but also for my serving all Buddhas and all good and wise teachers throughout as many lands as there are sand-grains in the River Ganges. It has always been that mind that has marshaled great courage to practice every difficult aspect of the Dharma. If I were ever to slander the Dharma and forsake forever my good roots in it, that mind of mine would be the cause even of that. If this activity of comprehending is not the mind, then I have no mind, and I am the same as a clod of earth or a piece of wood, because nothing exists apart from my mind’s awareness and its knowledge. Why does the Thus-Come One say that this is not my mind? Now I am genuinely alarmed and frightened; neither I nor anyone else here in the

great assembly is free of doubt. I only hope that the Thus-Come One, with great compassion for us, will instruct all those among us who are not yet awake.”

Ānanda says that everyone who was also listening to his dialogue with the Buddha had doubts about what they had just heard, but in fact that too was a deduction Ānanda made with his conscious mind. . . . He didn't realize that the great Bodhisattvas who were present had already understood, although they hadn't said anything. (I, 251)

Then to Ānanda and the others in the great assembly the World-Honored One gave instruction in gaining patience with the state of mind in which no mental objects arise.

Before you understand, you think: “Oh no, nothing comes into being or ceases to be, and all the myriad mental objects vanish!” A fear arises in your heart; you can't bear the idea of it. But if you actually experience the state of mind in which nothing comes into being or ceases to be, it will not seem at all unusual, and you will be able to bear it because you will have gained patience with the state of mind in which no mental objects arise. . . . A special experience occurs when you are about to become enlightened. When the special experience happens, the only thing you can do is cherish it in your heart. You yourself know, but you cannot tell people about it. It is inexpressible. That is patience with the state of mind in which no mental objects arise. When you can see that the entire world of perceived objects is within your essential nature, that the three realms of existence are made from the mind alone — when you can see that the entire world of perceived objects is the mind only, that the myriad phenomena are consciousness only — then mental objects will no longer come into being or cease to be. (I, 253)

43 Skt. anutpattikadharmakṣānti, Ch. wu sheng fa ren 無生法忍.

From the Lion's Seat he reached out and circled his hand on the crown of Ānanda's head, saying to him, “The Thus-Come One has often explained that all phenomena that come into being are nothing more than manifestations of the mind. All things that are subject to the principle of cause and effect — from the largest world to the smallest mote of dust — come into being because of the mind. If we examine the fundamental nature of each

thing in the world, Ānanda, down to even the smallest wisps of grass, we will see that all have reality. Even space has a name and attributes. Given that, how could the clear wondrous, pure mind — the mind that truly understands and is the basic nature of all mental states — itself lack reality?

“But if, as you insist, that which makes distinctions and is aware of them, which knows and understands them is indeed the mind, then that mind would necessarily have its own essential nature independent of its involvement with objects — with visible objects, sounds, odors, flavors, and objects of touch. Yet now, as you listen to my Dharma, it is due to sounds that you can distinguish my meaning. Even if you were to withdraw into a state of quietude in which all seeing, hearing, awareness of tastes, and tactile awareness ceased, you still would be making distinctions among the shadowy objects of cognition in your mind.

In that kind of state you would still be making distinctions among the objects of your mental awareness. A state of quietude is still just a function of the sixth consciousness, the mind-consciousness. . . . Dreaming, for example, is a function of the mind-consciousness, as are psychotic states and also our ordinary state of scattered thoughts and discriminations. A state of quietude, which the Buddha mentions here, is another example. The first five consciousnesses have ceased functioning, yet you still have thoughts. . . . You feel that what is going on is very fine; but from the point of view of the Buddhist teaching, you haven’t even taken the first step. Don’t feel satisfied; instead, you should continue to make progress. If you stop at that place, it is easy to fall into a void . . . which is of no benefit in developing your skill in meditation. (I, 257–8)

“I am not demanding that you just accept that this distinction-making capacity is not the mind. But examine your mind in minute detail to determine if a distinction-making capacity exists independent of its perceived objects of awareness. That would truly be your mind. If, on the other hand, your distinction-making capacity does not have an essential nature apart from its perceived objects, then it too would be a perceived object — a shadowy mental object. Perceived objects are not permanent, and when that mind ceased to exist such that it had no more reality than a turtle with fur or a hare with horns, then your Dharma-body would cease to exist along with it. Then who would be left to practice and to perfect patience with the state of mind in which no mental objects arise?”

At that point Ānanda and the others in the great assembly were utterly dumbfounded. They had nothing to say.

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “The reason why so many practitioners in the world do not succeed in putting an end to outflows and becoming Arhats — though they may have passed through all nine of the successive stages of samādhi -- is that they are attached to distorted mental processes that come into being and then cease to be, and they mistake these 44 Ch. jiu zhu xin, 九住心. Müller lists them as follows: “1) The mind holds deep concentration upon one object with ease(安住心); 2)The mind, supposed to be concentrated upon one object, drifts to other objects; a reaction occurs, and the mind promptly switches back to its chosen object (攝住心); 3) The mind, concentrating upon an object for the processes for what is real. That is why, even though you have become quite learned, you have not become a sage.”

When Ānanda had heard that, he again wept sorrowfully. He then bowed to the ground, knelt on both knees, placed his palms together, and said to the Buddha, “Ever since I followed the Buddha and resolved to enter the monastic life, I have relied on the Buddha’s awe-inspiring spirit.

I have often thought, ‘There is no reason for me to toil at spiritual practice,’ because I just expected that the Thus-Come One would graciously transfer some of his samādhi to me. I never realized that in fact he simply could not stand in for me, in body or in mind. Thus I abandoned my original resolve, and though my body has indeed entered the monastic life, my mind has not entered the Path. I am like that poor son who ran away from his father.

Today I realize that, though I am learned, I might as well not have learned anything if I do not practice, just as someone who only talks of food never gets full.

“World-Honored One, we all are bound by two obstructions, and as a consequence we are unaware of the mind that is everlasting and still. I only hope the Thus-Come One will take pity on us who are destitute and homeless, will disclose the wondrous mind that truly understands, and will open our eyes to the Path.”

purpose of grasping its nature by analysis, drifts to other objects; a reaction occurs, and the mind instantly returns to its work (解住心); 4) The mind ceases

to grasp the nature of things by analysis. When this occurs, the mind has entered deep concentration (轉住心);

5) The mind, after prolonged meditation, experiences a feeling of fatigue; a reaction occurs, and immediately the mind is revitalized (伏住心); 6) The inner mind becomes agitated, whereupon a reaction occurs, and the mind is quickly soothed (息住心); 7) When greed, desire, and attachment arise in the mind, a reaction occurs which eliminates them (滅住心); 8) When various temptations appear in the mind, distracting it, a reaction occurs, and the mind becomes cognizant that it is pure in nature. This realization enables the mind to function correctly again (性住心); 9) As the result of extended practice, the person is able to remain in meditation. The person is therefore in a blissful condition, which enables him to maintain virtue steadily and avoid falling into error (持住心).” Charles A. Müller, ed.,

Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. “Nine Stages of Meditation,” www.buddhism-dict.net.

45 A reference to the parable of the errant son in chapter four of the Lotus Sūtra.

46 The two obstructions are the obstruction of affliction, which arises from attachment to self, and the obstruction of knowledge, which arises from attachment to phenomena and which leads to arrogance.

Then the Thus-Come One poured forth resplendent light from the symbol of purity on his chest. The brilliant light, radiant with hundreds of thousands of colors, shone all throughout the ten directions simultaneously to illuminate Buddha-lands as many as motes of dust, and it shone upon the crowns of the heads of the Thus-Come Ones in every one of those radiant Buddha-lands. Then the light returned to shine upon the great assembly — upon Ānanda and all the others.

Earlier in the Sutra the Buddha emitted light from his face — a blazing light as brilliant as a hundred thousand suns. That light represents the dispelling of delusions. Now he again emits light, this time from the symbol of purity on his chest. This light represents the disclosing of the true mind. (I, 268)

Thereupon the Buddha said to Ānanda, “I now will raise for all of you a great Dharma-banner so that all beings in all ten directions can gain access to what is wondrous, subtle, and hidden — the pure and luminous mind that understands — and so that they can open their clear-seeing eyes.”

47 *Skt. svastika. In contradistinction to its perverted use in the twentieth century, the svastika was in ancient India a symbol representing spiritual goodness and purity.*

48 *A reference to the "Hidden Basis" in the Sutra's title.*