

## Lankavatara Sutra

Before we dive into the details of the Lankavatara Sutra I wanted to provide an overview of this sutra and its relationship to other sutras. Perhaps you have all studied the Diamond Sutra that teaches the detachment from dharmas and the Heart Sutra that covers the emptiness of dharmas. Before both of these sutras was the Lankavatara Sutra that teaches the nonprojection of dharmas and the necessity of realizing this teaching yourself. Both the Diamond Sutra and Heart Sutra would not be possible if we did not project dharmas as existing or not existing in the first place. From a linear timeline, first in the Lotus Sutra translation in 286. Next the Lankavatara Sutra comes first followed by the Diamond Sutra, the Heart Sutra and several centuries later, the Sutra of Hui-neng.

From a historical perspective, the Lankavatara Sutra came from India by Dharmashema in 414 along the Silk Road. There he translated the Sanskrit Nirvana Sutra into Chinese. The context of the period is that magic and prophecy were important powers associated with sutras. Specifically mantras had political and military applications. A second translation of the Lankavatara Sutra was done by Gunabhadha, another monk from Central India who traveled by sea to China, arrived in Kuangchou and was invited by the ruler of Liu Sung kingdom to come to the capitol for the next 30 years. He completed the Lankavatara Sutra translation in 443.

Our Ancestor, Bodhidharma, entered China with a copy of Gunabhadha's translation and it is recorded that he gave it to his disciple Hui-ko.

Fast forwarding to the period of our 6<sup>th</sup> century Chinese Ancestor, Hui-neng, there is a little known fact that the Head teacher, Shen-hsiu, the loser of the poetry contest that made Hui-neng the 6<sup>th</sup> Patriarch, asked to be buried beneath a small hillock he named Mt. Lanka. He considered the Lankavatara Sutra an important text. However, most people found the Lankavatara Sutra difficult material and it was said you either needed a teacher or good karma to penetrate the meaning. As a result, the Diamond Sutra became popular and was more accessible to Zen students.

To circle back to the main themes of the Lankavatara Sutra:

1. Projections of one's own mind
2. Personal realization

Buddha says to Mahamati, a key Bodhisattva spokesman, "Because the various projections of people's minds appear before them as objects, they become attached to the existence of their projections.

How to free one of such attachments?

"By becoming aware that projections are nothing but mind. Thus, do they transform their body and find and finally see clearly all the stages and realms of self-awareness of tathagatas and transcend views and projections regarding five dharmas [*appearance, name, discrimination, right knowledge and reality*] and modes of reality." Modes of reality are the imagined reality, a dependent reality or the reality of dependent origination which was the reality realized by the Buddha the night of his Enlightenment – but not before he had

broken through the imagined reality of ignorant beings as well as the **perfected reality** of the spiritual elite.

The main teachings are “nothing but mind” of Yogacara and the “self-realization” of Zen. One must “transcend” all conjured landscapes.

What the Buddha is teaching in the Lankavatara Sutra is that the individual and shared characteristics of every dharma are due to the habit-energy of the perceptions of the mind and to the continued attachment to an imagined reality, that is no more real than an illusion - and one that cannot be grasped.

The imagined reality arises from attachment to a **dependent reality**. How does this work for us? An example might be work situation that has a manager requesting a project to be completed using computer software tools, iPhoto and Microsoft Presentation to create a presentation based on survey results data. The staff member creates a final presentation with photos and conclusions that are an illusion of what really transpired. This in turn gives rise to different projections that are not real. This imagined reality is dependent on the material presented based on the presenter's projections of appearances that are the habit-energy of attachment to projections. Meanwhile, a similar process occurs in the audience. [We believe the data that is presented.]

Recently, I was reading an article in Huffington Post about relieving stress. The MD's advice was to observe your perceptions of stress

and once noticed, let them go and watch the body relax. This takes repeated effort to build up the muscle of letting go, but it does work!

Sound familiar? Once again:

It all starts with perceptions about appearance and names. Imagined reality arises from appearances. The Buddha states: “as the objects and forms of dependent reality appear, attachment results in two kinds of reality: **attachment to appearance and attachment to name**. Attachment to appearance involves attachment to the external and internal entities. Attachment to name involves attachment to the individual and shared characteristics of these external and internal entities. The ground and objective support from which they arise is dependent reality.

The third mode of reality is the perfected reality. This is the mode that is free from name or appearance or from projection. It is attained by Buddha knowledge and is the realm where the personal realization of Buddha knowledge takes place. This is perfected reality and the heart of the tatagata-garbha, or womb of buddhas, also known as the repository consciousness when it is transformed. (8<sup>th</sup> consciousness or storehouse consciousness).

The practice is to transcend the self-existent appearances of the mind, establish a Buddha realm on which personal realization is based. The Buddha teaches charity, morality, forbearance, zeal, meditation, and wisdom of the mind, detachment from the aggregates.

The Buddha instructs bodhisattvas to become adept at examining the two kinds of phenomena that have no self. What are they? Neither beings nor dharmas have a self.

What does it mean that beings have no self? The assemblage of the five aggregates, the dhatus (the 6 sensory powers, 6 sensory domains & 6 forms of consciousness that arise from their conjunction) and ayatanas (5 powers of sensation [feelings] & 5 domains of sensation along with the 6<sup>th</sup> power of mind & its domain of thought) Arise from ignorance, karma, and desire and includes neither a self nor anything that belongs to a self. As the grasping and attachment of such senses as the eye to form give rise to consciousness, bodies, repository consciousness, and the world of objects that are perceptions of own's own mind are fabricated and manifested from one's own projections. They change and disappear every moment, impelled by habit-energy without beginning. To be skilled in the knowledge of such appearances means to know that beings have no self.

What does it mean to know that dharmas have no self? It means to be aware that the self-existence of the 5 aggregates, dhatus, and ayatanas is imaginary and devoid of a self or anything that belongs to a self. They are tied to desire and karma and arise from the interplay of conditions, but are themselves passive. Bodhisattvas become adept at seeing no self in dharmas. They gain insight into the freedom from projections that characterizes the initial bodhisattva stage they delight in examining the characteristics of such awareness.

Buddha says, you should cultivate this. Thank you!