

**BDK English Tripiṭaka 25-IV**

**THE SCRIPTURE ON THE  
EXPLICATION OF  
UNDERLYING MEANING**

Translated from the Chinese of Hsüan-tsang  
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## Chapter IV

# The Characteristic Patterns of All Things<sup>18</sup>

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At that time the great Bodhisattva Guṇākara addressed the Buddha and said: “World-honored One, you have spoken about bodhisattvas skilled in the characteristic patterns of all things. Why do you so speak of them? Why do you describe them so?”

Then the World-honored One addressed the Bodhisattva Guṇākara and said: “It is excellent, Guṇākara, that you have been able to question the Tathāgata about this profound theme. You bring forth this question because you desire to benefit and gladden unlimited sentient beings, because you have compassion for the world with all its gods, men, angels, and so forth, so that they might be led to attain meaning, benefit, and happiness. Attend and I will explain the marks of all things for you.

“In sum, the marks of all things are threefold. The first is the characteristic pattern of clinging to what is entirely imagined. The second is the characteristic pattern of other-dependency. The third is the characteristic pattern of full perfection.

“The pattern of clinging to what is entirely imagined refers to the establishing of names and symbols for all things and the distinguishing of their essences, whereby they come to be expressed in language. The pattern of other-dependency refers to the pattern whereby all things arise co-dependently: for if this exists, then that exists, and if this arises, then that arises. This refers to [the twelvefold conditions, starting with] ‘conditioned by ignorance are karmic formations,’ [and ending with] ‘conditioned by origination is this grand mass of suffering,’ [the last of the twelve conditions].

The pattern of full perfection refers to the universally equal suchness of all things. Bodhisattvas penetrate to this suchness because of their resolute zeal, intelligent focusing, and true reflection. By gradually cultivating this penetration, they reach unsurpassed true awakening and actually realize perfection.

693b “Good son, the pattern of clinging to what is entirely imagined is like the defective vision of one who has cataracts in his eyes. The pattern of other-dependency is like those deceptive images in the confused vision of the one with the cataracts, for they appear to be distinct images, such as hairs, flies, small particles, or patches of different colors. The pattern of full perfection is like the unconfused objects seen by the pure vision of one with sound eyes and no cataracts.

“Good son, it is just as when a pure crystal comes into contact with and is tinted with the color blue, it appears to be a blue sapphire or a blue gem. Because it takes on the appearance of a blue sapphire or a blue gem, it confuses sentient beings. When it comes into contact with the color red, it appears to be a ruby and so confuses sentient beings. When it comes into contact with the color green, it appears to be an emerald and so confuses sentient beings. When it comes into contact with the color yellow, it seems to be gold and so confuses sentient beings. Similarly, Guṇākara, just as those tinted colors appear upon the pure crystal, so the propensity toward language of the characteristic pattern of clinging to what is imagined is superimposed upon the other-dependent pattern. Just as upon that pure crystal one falsely clings to blue sapphires, rubies, emeralds, or gold, so upon the other-dependent pattern of consciousness one clings to the imagined, for that other-dependent pattern is like the crystal. Just as, when in a constant and continual fashion the pure crystal no longer has any images of sapphires, rubies, emeralds, or gold, it is without [their] reality or essence, so when the pattern of other-dependency no longer has imagined images in it, it is also in fact without [their] reality or essence, and is then the pattern of full perfection.

“Furthermore, Guṇākara, the imagined pattern can be understood as caused by the interplay between images and words. The

other-dependent pattern can be understood as caused by the grasping of those imagined images upon that other-dependent pattern. The pattern of full perfection can be understood as caused by the absence of grasping the imagined pattern upon the other-dependent pattern.

“If bodhisattvas are truly able to understand the imagined pattern as it arises upon the other-dependent pattern in all things, they then will be truly able to understand all things as unmarked. If bodhisattvas are truly able to understand the other-dependent pattern [of their consciousness], they then will be truly able to understand all things as defiled. If bodhisattvas are truly able to understand the fully perfected pattern, they then will be truly able to understand all things as purified. If bodhisattvas truly understand all things as unmarked in the other-dependent pattern, they then will be able to abandon defiled things. If they are able to abandon defiled things, they will be able to realize things as purified. In this fashion, Guṇākara, since they truly understand all three patterns [of consciousness], they will truly know things as unmarked, defiled, and purified. Because they abandon defiled things, they will realize things as purified. And this is why those bodhisattvas are described by the Tathāgata as skilled in the characteristic patterns of all things.”

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Then the World-honored One recited these verses to emphasize his meaning:

If one does not understand things as unmarked, one will be unable to abandon defiled things. Not being able to abandon defiled things, one will obstruct the realization of wondrously purified things. Not gaining insight into the sinfulness of all one's actions, one will be wild, sinful, and injurious to sentient beings. Sadly enmeshed in transient things, are not such people lost and pitiable?<sup>19</sup>



## Chapter V

### The Absence of Essence

At that time the great Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata addressed the Buddha and said: “World-honored One, once when I found myself alone in a quiet place, I thought to myself: ‘The World-honored One in an immeasurable number of sermons has explained the aggregates, their specific characteristics, their arising, their destruction, their abandonment, their full understanding. In like fashion he has explained the bases of consciousness, dependent co-arising, and sustenance. In an immeasurable number of sermons, he has explained the [four] truths, their specific characteristics, full understanding, abandonment, and the practices that lead to their realization. In an immeasurable number of sermons, he has explained all the realms, their specific characteristics, varieties, differentiation, nondifferentiation, abandonment, and full understanding. In an immeasurable number of sermons, he has explained the stations of recollection, their specific characteristics, the act of controlling [mental states], which [states] are controlled, how by meditation what has not yet arisen can be produced, how what has already arisen can be maintained, their unforgettability, repeated practice, growth, and increase. And just as he has explained the stations of recollection, so he has explained true abandonment, the supernatural abilities, the sense faculties, the factors of awakening. In an immeasurable number of sermons, he has explained the eightfold holy path, its specific characteristics, the act of controlling [states of mind], which [states] are thus controlled, how by meditation what has not yet arisen can be produced and what has already arisen can be maintained, its unforgettability, repeated practice, growth, and increase.’”

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“World-honored One, you also have explained that all things have no-essence, no arising, and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation. I do not know what to make of this, World-honored One. With what implicit intent did you explain that things have no-essence, no arising, and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation? I wish to question the Tathāgata about this. I pray that the Tathāgata will deign to explain what his underlying intent was in saying this.”

Then the World-honored One addressed Paramārthasamudgata and said: “Excellent indeed, Paramārthasamudgata, your thinking is indeed intelligent. Excellent indeed, good son, that you have been able to question the Tathāgata concerning this profound theme. You raise this question because you desire to benefit and gladden immeasurable sentient beings, for you have compassion for the world and all its gods, men, angels, etc., so that they may be led to attain meaning, benefit, and happiness. Attend and I will explain my underlying intent in saying that all things have no-essence, no arising, no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation.

“Paramārthasamudgata, you should understand that, in reliance upon the three kinds of no-essence, I have explained that all things whatsoever have no-essence, for descriptive marks have no-essence, arising has no-essence, and ultimate meaning has no-essence. Good son, descriptive marks have no-essence, for all things are characterized by imaginative clinging. This is so because it is names and symbols that establish those marks, and there is no inherent characteristic in things. This then is what I call the no-essence of marks. The arising of things has no-essence, for all things arise in dependence upon others. This is so because they depend upon the causal power of others and do not arise from themselves. Therefore this is what I call the no-essence of arising. The ultimate truth of all things has no-essence, for, from their arising, all things have no-essence. This is what I call the no-essence that is identical with the conditioned arising of things. I also call it the no-essence of ultimate meaning because I preach that among all

things, that realm of the purified content of understanding is to be regarded as the no-essence of ultimate meaning. The characteristics of the other-dependent pattern of consciousness are not, however, themselves this realm of the purified object of understanding. Therefore I call this the no-essence of ultimate meaning. Moreover, that fully perfected pattern of all things I also term the no-essence of ultimate meaning, for the absence of selfhood in all things whatsoever I call ultimate meaning, or no-essence, because this is the truth of ultimate meaning, because it is manifested by the absence of essence. For these reasons I call it the no-essence of ultimate meaning.

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“Good son, flowers in the sky are like the essential no-essence of descriptive marks. The arising of magical images is like the essential no-essence of arising, as well as one aspect of the essential no-essence of ultimate meaning. Just as empty space is manifested everywhere by the absence of material forms, so is the other aspect the essential no-essence of ultimate meaning, which is manifested everywhere by the absence of selfhood in all things.

“Good son, this is my underlying intent about the three kinds of essential no-essence whereby I have preached that all things have no-essence. *Paramārthasamudgata*, you should understand that it was with this underlying intent about the essential no-essence of marks that I preached that all things have no arising and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation.<sup>20</sup> For if the descriptive marks of things do not exist in themselves, then they do not arise. If they do not arise, then they do not pass away. If they do not pass away, then they are originally quiescent. If they are originally quiescent, then they are essentially in cessation, for herein there is not the slightest part that could be led once again into final cessation. Therefore, with this underlying intent concerning the essential no-essence of marks, I have preached that all things have no arising and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation. Good son, it was with this underlying intent about the essential no-essence of ultimate truth manifested through the no-self of

things that I preached that all things have no arising and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation. This no-essence of ultimate meaning manifested through the no-self of things is for all times and forever, because the reality nature of all things abides in an unconditioned state and is not associated with any of the defilements. Because at all times and forever the reality nature of all things abides, it is unconditioned. Because it is unconditioned, it has no birth and no passing away. Because it is not yoked to any of the defilements, it is originally quiescent and essentially in cessation. Therefore, with this underlying intent concerning the no-essence of ultimate meaning manifested by the absence of selfhood in things, I have preached that all things have no birth and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation.

“Moreover, Paramārthasamudgata, I am not propounding these three kinds of no-essence because among the varieties of sentient beings in the world, some regard the pattern of imaginative clinging as a distinct essence, or because they regard the pattern of other-dependency or the pattern of full perfection as distinct essences. Rather it is because sentient beings superimpose the pattern of imaginative clinging over that of other-dependency and full perfection that I propound these three kinds of no-essence.<sup>21</sup> Sentient beings, because they imagine there are essences and characteristics to be clung to in the other-dependent and fully perfected patterns, produce language about this and that. To the degree that they produce language, they cling to images of essences in the other-dependent and fully perfected patterns because their minds are permeated with language, their understanding follows upon language, their inclinations are toward language. Thus they cling to various imagined essences and characteristics in their other-dependent and fully perfected patterns of consciousness. And, clinging to such in those patterns, they cling to the imagined pattern. Therefore they will bring forth their other-dependent pattern in future [lives]. Defiled by passion, actions, and birth, they will gallop about in transmigration for a long time. For a long time

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they will circle about without surcease and experience suffering, whether in the hells, among animals, among ghosts, in the heavens, among angels, or among men.<sup>22</sup>

“Moreover, Paramārthasamudgata, I preached the teaching on the essential no-essence of arising for all those sentient beings who have not yet planted roots of goodness, who have not yet purified themselves from obstacles, who have not yet matured their continuity [of consciousness], who have not yet cultivated liberation, who have not yet been able to accumulate the two requisites of merit and wisdom. When they attend to this teaching, they will partially be able to understand that all conditioned states, which are dependently co-arisen, are impermanent, inconstant, not comforting, grievously transient, and destructive. Then their minds will produce deep dread and detestation for all conditioned states. When this has happened, then they will reject all evil. When they no longer do evil, they will be able to cultivate and practice good. And, practicing good, they will be able to plant roots of goodness not previously planted, they will be able to purify obstacles not previously purified, they will be able to mature their continuities not previously matured. Because of this they will cultivate liberation and accumulate the two requisites of merit and wisdom.

“But even though they plant roots of goodness until they accumulate these two requisites of merit and wisdom, yet in the essential no-essence of arising, they will not really be able to understand the essential no-essence of marks and the two kinds of essential no-essence of ultimate meaning. They will not yet perfectly be able to detest all conditioned states. They will not yet be able to sever their desires or be perfectly liberated. They will not be altogether liberated from the defilements of passion, action, and birth. It is for them that the Tathāgata once more preaches this doctrine on the essential no-essence of marks and the essential no-essence of ultimate meaning. He indeed desires to lead them to be able perfectly to detest all conditioned states, perfectly to sever their desires, perfectly to be liberated, and to transcend the defilements of all passion, action, and birth.

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“When they attend to this teaching, then in the essential no-essence of arising, they will be perfectly able to believe and understand the essential no-essence of marks and ultimate meaning. They will ponder, think, and really understand, for in their other-dependent pattern of consciousness, they will cling to no imagined essences or marks. Because of a wisdom not permeated by language, because of an insightful wisdom not formed by language, because of a wisdom freed from inclinations toward language, they will be able to destroy the pattern that arises dependent upon others, for, sustained by the wisdom power of this teaching, they will eternally be able to sever all causes for future [rebirths] forever. Because of this they will be able to detest all conditioned states, they will be able to sever all their desires and be perfectly liberated. They will be able to be entirely liberated from the three defilements of passion, action, and birth.

“Moreover, Paramārthasamudgata, because they follow this path, all those sentient beings who belong to the word-hearers’ vehicle will realize unsurpassed, quiescent cessation, as will all those who belong to the solitary enlightenment vehicle or to the Tathāgata vehicle. For all word-hearers, solitary enlightened ones, and bodhisattvas, this is the one wondrous path of purification. This is the one ultimate purification. There is no other. It is with this underlying intent that I have preached that there is only one vehicle. It is not that in the world of sentient beings there are not sentient beings of various different lineages, for some are slow to understand, some are not so slow, and some are quick to understand.<sup>23</sup>

“Good son, a person of the word-hearers’ lineage, turned toward quiescence, even if he were to be skillfully led by the energetic perseverance of all the Buddhas, would yet be unable to be led to sit upon the wisdom seat and realize full, supreme awakening. This is so because from their origin they possess only an inferior lineage, because their compassion has been weak, because they have lived in fear of suffering. Since their compassion has been weak, they have turned their backs upon deeds that benefit and

gladden all sentient beings. Since they have lived in fear of suffering, they have turned their backs upon engendering any conditioned activities. I have never taught that one who turns his back upon deeds to benefit and gladden all sentient beings, who turns his back upon engendering conditioned activities, will sit upon the wisdom seat and realize supreme awakening. Therefore I teach that such persons are termed word-hearers totally intent upon quiescence.

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“But if a person of the word-hearers’ lineage were to turn toward wisdom, I would identify him as a bodhisattva. This is so because, having already been liberated from the obstacle of passion, when he receives the universal awakening of all Tathāgatas his mind will also be liberated from the obstacle to knowing.<sup>24</sup> Because initially [such a person] was intent upon his own benefit, the intensity of his practices liberated him from the obstacle of passion, and therefore the Tathāgata designated him as belonging to the lineage of the word-hearers.

“Moreover, Paramārthasamudgata, sentient beings have various commitments both to the doctrinal discipline I have well presented and to the doctrine of the good teaching enunciated by my fully purified intent. But a Tathāgata relies upon the three kinds of essential no-essence; and with such a profound intent he has presented a summary of that doctrine when he preached the scriptures of implicit meaning, saying that all things have no-essence and no arising, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation, for such are their hidden and profound marks.<sup>25</sup>

“If then sentient beings, who have already planted roots of superior goodness, who have already been purified from all obstacles, who have already matured the continuities [of their consciousness], who have already repeatedly cultivated liberation, who have already been able to accumulate the requisites of superior merit and wisdom, if such were to attend to the doctrine of these scriptures [of implicit meaning], they would truly understand the underlying intent of my words and would engender a deep faith in and understanding of this doctrine, for they would truly penetrate

this meaning in an infallible understanding. Relying upon the practices of that penetration, they would quickly be able to realize the final stage. Because of their deeply engendered pure faith in me, they would know that the Tathāgata is supremely awakened and manifests true wisdom in all things.

“There are [other] sentient beings of upright disposition, who have already planted roots of superior goodness, who have already been purified from all obstacles, who have already matured the continuities [of their consciousness], who have already repeatedly cultivated liberation, but who are yet unable to accumulate the requisites of superior merit and wisdom. Although [they have] such upright dispositions, they lack the ability thoughtfully to make judgments on [doctrinal] propositions. Yet, because they do not set up their own views, when they attend to this doctrine, even though they lack the ability truly to understand the underlying intent of my words, yet they will be able to engender a deep faith in this teaching. They will believe in this scripture: ‘The teaching of the Tathāgata is a most profound revelation, is associated with the most profound emptiness, is difficult to glimpse, difficult to understand, is beyond thinking, is not within the sphere of rational reflection, is to be subtly interpreted, is understood [only] by the wise.’ But they abide in it with humility and say: ‘The wisdom of all the Buddhas is profound indeed! The reality of all things is profound indeed! Only the Buddha Tathāgatas are able to understand it well, for it is not something we are able to understand. For the sake of sentient beings of various commitments, all the Buddha Tathāgatas have turned the wheel of the true doctrinal teaching, for the wisdom and insight of all Buddha Tathāgatas is infinite, while our wisdom and insight follows in their wake.’ Although they are able to revere this scripture and declare it to others, to copy it and protect it, to unroll it and disseminate it, to venerate and honor it, to recite it and review it, yet they will still be incapable of the effort of meditating upon it, and thus they will be incapable of penetrating the underlying intent of my words. But those sentient beings

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will be able to increase the requisites of merit and wisdom, and they will be able to mature the continuities [of their consciousnesses] that have not been matured.

“There are [other] sentient beings who, just like those [described above], have not yet been able to accumulate the requisites of merit and wisdom, but whose lineages are not of an upright disposition or character. Although they do have the ability to make judgments on [doctrinal] propositions, yet, abiding in their own views, even if they hear this doctrine, they will be unable truly to understand the underlying intent of my words. Even if they were to engender faith and understanding in this doctrine, they would only be clinging to the words that express the meaning, that is: that all things most certainly have no-essence and no arising, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, they take up the view of nihilism and the nonexistence of all marks. With this view of nihilism and the nonexistence of all marks, they negate all marks, for [they think that] everything is [simply] unmarked. They dispense with and negate not only those marks of things clung to in imagination, but also the marks of other-dependency and full perfection. Now, the very ability to designate the imagined pattern presupposes that other-dependency and full perfection are described by marks.<sup>27</sup> If, then, in dispensing with and negating the descriptive marks of the imagined, they regard the marks of other-dependency and full perfection as unmarked, they in fact dispense with and negate all three characteristic patterns. They do form concepts about my teaching, but, in their negation of meaning, they do not form concepts of its meaning. Because, while forming concepts of my teaching, in their negation of meaning, they do not form concepts of its meaning. They do maintain this doctrine, but they do not maintain its meaning. Nevertheless, because they have engendered faith and understanding in regard to this doctrine, their merit will increase, but they will turn away from and lose wisdom because they engender clinging to what is meaningless. Because they turn away from wisdom, they will lose that wide, limitless doctrine.

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“Yet other sentient beings listen to them and take their doctrine as the [true] doctrine and their negation of meaning as [true] meaning. If they follow that view, they will form their concept of doctrine from that doctrine and their concept of meaning from that negation of meaning; they will devote themselves to that doctrine as doctrine and to that negation of meaning as meaning. Therefore they likewise will turn away from and lose the good doctrine.

“Other sentient beings do not follow this view, but as soon as they hear that all things have no-essence and no arising, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation, they feel dread. Feeling such dread, they say: ‘This is not the teaching of the Buddha, but rather the teaching of a demon.’ With such an understanding, they attack and curse this scripture. Therefore they encounter great misfortune and are blocked by the obstacle of their action [against the doctrine]. This is why I have taught that if one forms the view that all descriptive marks are no marks and propounds this meaninglessness as meaning, this will bring about the obstacle of action [against the doctrine]. Because they beguile limitless sentient beings, they cause them also to be blocked by this obstacle of action [against the doctrine].

“Good son, there are other sentient beings who have not yet planted roots of goodness, who have not yet been purified from all obstacles, who have not yet matured their continuities [of consciousness], who have not repeated their commitments, who have not yet accumulated the requisites of merit and wisdom, and whose lineage is not of an upright disposition or character. Even though they are able thoughtfully to judge [doctrinal] propositions, yet they always maintain their own views. Even if they hear this doctrine, they will be unable truly to understand the underlying intent of my words or to have deep faith in this doctrine. They will form the concept that this doctrine is not [true] doctrine and that this meaning is not meaning. Clinging to the idea that this doctrine is not [true] doctrine and that this meaning is not meaning, they publicize their evaluation, saying: ‘This is not the teaching of the Buddha, but of a demon.’ With such an

understanding they slander, reject, curse, and revile this scripture as useless and mistaken; and in untold ways they attack, criticize, and discard this scripture. They regard all those who have faith in this scripture as a rival faction. From the very beginning they are blocked by the obstacle of their action [against doctrine], and thus they impede [others] by means of this obstacle of action [against doctrine]. It is easy to describe the beginning of this obstacle of action and to estimate how many hundreds of thousands of eons it will take for it to be overcome. Good son, these are the differences in the various kinds of commitments of sentient beings to my well-enunciated and well-controlled doctrinal discipline and my good doctrinal teaching expressed with a purified intent.”

At that time the World-honored One recited these verses to emphasize his meaning: 696b

All things have no-essence, no arising, and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation. What wise man speaks thus without an underlying intent? I have taught the no-essence of marks, arising, and ultimate meaning, but one who does not know the underlying intent of the Buddha will lose the true path and be unable to travel thereon. All those paths of purity and all the purifications rely upon this one [path] only, for there is no second. Thus herein I have established the single vehicle, but this does not mean that there are no differences in the lineages of sentient beings. In the world of sentient beings, unlimited beings simply are delivered in their individual persons and enter quiescence, for it is difficult to attain that cessation realized together with the great compassion and courage that does not turn away from sentient beings. In the uncontaminated realm, subtle and difficult to conceive, liberations are equal and undifferentiated, for [there] all meaning is complete and free from delusion and suffering, without duality or comparison, for this is eternal happiness.

At that time the Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata addressed the Buddha and said: “World-honored One, the intent underlying the words of all Buddha Tathāgatas is rare, rare indeed! It is subtle, subtle indeed! It is profound, profound indeed! It is difficult to penetrate, difficult to penetrate indeed! I now understand this meaning enunciated by the World-honored One as follows. The World-honored One has designed [the teaching] so that the marks of all things are essentially without essence in reference to the pattern of clinging to what is imagined, whereby the attribution of names and symbols to conditioned images, that support those imagined descriptive marks clung to within the range of discrimination, are taken to be the aggregate of material form, the descriptive marks of its essence, the descriptive marks of its specific difference, whereby the attribution of [such] names and symbols is taken to be the mark of the essence or difference of the arising of material form, the passing away of material form, or [the complete knowledge] of the eternal severance from material form.

“The World-honored One has designed [the teaching] that the arising of all things is essentially without essence, and one aspect of [the teaching] is that ultimate meaning is essentially without essence in reference to the pattern of other-dependency, which is the conditioned image supporting those imagined descriptive marks clung to within the realm of discrimination. I now understand this meaning enunciated by the World-honored One as follows, for those marks clung to by imagination upon the conditioned images that support such imaginative clinging within the range of discrimination, validate nothing real, and this is their essential nature as no-essence.

“The World-honored One has designed the other aspect of [the teaching] that ultimate meaning is without essence in reference to the pattern of full perfection, the purified content of understanding that is the no-self of things, that is suchness, that is termed the pattern of full perfection. This is how the material aggregate or the other aggregates should be explained. This is how each of the twelve bases should be explained. This is how each of

the twelve branches of existence should be explained. This is how each of the four sustenances should be explained. This is how each of the six realms and the eighteen elements should be explained.

“I understand this meaning enunciated by the World-honored One as follows. The World-honored One has designed [the teaching] that the marks of all things are essentially without essence in reference to the pattern of clinging to the imagined, i.e., the fact that the attribution of names and symbols to the conditioned images that support clinging to imagined descriptive marks within the realm of discriminations is taken to be the truth on suffering. The World-honored One has designed [the teaching] that the arising of all things is essentially without essence in reference to the pattern of other-dependency, i.e., those conditioned images that support clinging to imagined descriptive marks within the realm of discrimination. I now understand this meaning enunciated by the World-honored One as follows. Since those conditioned images that support clinging to the imagined within the realm of discrimination validate nothing real, their essence is precisely without essence, for this is the no-self of things, suchness, the purified content of understanding. It is this that is termed the pattern of full perfection. In reference to this, the World-honored One has designed the other aspect of [the teaching] that ultimate meaning is essentially without essence. The other three truths should be explained like this first truth of suffering, as should the stations of recollection, true severance, the supernatural abilities, the sense faculties, the powers, the factors of awakening, and the factors of the path. All these should be explained in this manner.

“I understand this meaning enunciated by the World-honored One as follows. The World-honored One has designed [the teaching] that the marks of all things are essentially without essence in reference to the pattern of clinging to the imagined, i.e., the fact that the attribution of names and symbols to the conditioned images that support clinging to the imagined within the realm of discrimination is taken to be either the essential or the specific mark of true concentration, its ability to control, that which it

must control, its true cultivation to elicit what has not yet been elicited, its strengthening of what has already been elicited, its unforgettability, its repeated cultivation, its increase, and its expansion. The World-honored One has designed [the teaching] that the arising of things is essentially without essence, and one aspect of [the teaching] is that ultimate truth is essentially without essence in reference to the pattern of other-dependency, i.e., those conditioned images that support clinging to the imagined within the realm of discrimination. I would explain the meaning enunciated by the World-honored One as follows: if, in those conditioned images that support clinging to imagined marks in the realm of discrimination, those marks clung to by imagination validate nothing real, then this is the essence that is essentially without essence, the no-self of things, suchness, the purified content of understanding. It is this that is termed the pattern of full perfection.

697a “World-honored One, just as dried ginger must be put into the prescriptions of all medicinal powders and elixirs, just so, World-Honored One, the explicit teaching that all things have no-essence, no arising, and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation must be put into all the scriptures of implicit meaning. World-honored One, just as pigments pervade all they color with the identical, single hue of their coloring, whether blue, yellow, red, or white, and thus demonstrate that coloring action, just so, World-honored One, the explicit teaching that all things have no-essence, etc., pervades all scriptures of implicit meaning with its identical, single hue, and thus demonstrates the implicit meaning of those scriptures. World-honored One, just as the addition of warm cheese to cooked delicacies like cakes or fruit produces an exquisite taste, just so, World-honored One, the addition of the explicit teaching that all things have no-essence, etc., to scriptures of implicit meaning produces exquisite delight. World-Honored One, just as empty space pervades everywhere with its identical, single flavor and obstructs no activity, just so, World-Honored One, the explicit teaching that all things have no-essence, etc., pervades all scriptures of implicit meaning with its identical,

single flavor and obstructs no activity performed by word-hearers, solitary enlightened ones, or bodhisattvas.”

At that time the World-honored One praised the Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata and said: “Excellent, excellent it is, good son, that you have been able to understand so well the underlying intent enunciated by the Tathāgata. Also the similes of the dried ginger, the pigment, the warm cheese, and empty space were right to the point. Paramārthasamudgata, it is exactly as [you have explained], not different at all. It is exactly as you have maintained.”

At that time the Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata addressed the Buddha and said: “In the country of Benares at Rṣipatana in the Deer Park, the World-honored One first turned the wheel of doctrine, [teaching] the four holy truths for those setting out in the word-hearers’ vehicle. This turning of the wheel was marvelous and wonderful, such as nobody, whether gods or men, had been able to turn in the world before. Nevertheless there were superior teachings, for [this first turning] had to be interpreted and occasioned controversy. Then the World-honored One with an underlying intent turned the wheel for the second time for the sake of those setting out in the great vehicle, [teaching] that all things have no-essence, no arising, and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation. This turning of the wheel was marvelous and wonderful indeed. Nevertheless there were teachings superior to this, for it also had to be interpreted and occasioned controversy. The World-honored One then with an explicit meaning for the third time turned the wheel of doctrine for those setting out in all the vehicles, [teaching] that all things have no-essence, no arising, and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially in cessation. This turning was the most marvelous and wonderful that had ever occurred in the world. It had no superior nor did it contain any implicit meaning nor occasion any controversy.<sup>28</sup>

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“World-honored One, if a good son or good daughter, having heard this teaching that all things have no-essence, no arising, and no passing away, are originally quiescent, and are essentially

in cessation, with the explicit meaning as it was enunciated by the Tathāgata, were to believe, copy, protect, honor, disseminate, recite, or meditate and reflect upon it, how much merit would they engender through their effort of meditating upon it?”

At that time the World-honored One addressed the Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata and said: “Paramārthasamudgata, the merit engendered by that good son or good daughter would be limitless, incalculable, incomparable. I can but suggest a small part of it for you, like a bit of dirt on one’s fingernail in comparison to the earth. It does not amount to one-hundredth part, nor one-thousandth part, nor one-hundred-thousandth part. It cannot be reckoned as even the tiniest part. Or it is like the pool in a cow’s tracks compared to the waters of the four great oceans, which does not reach one-hundredth part, etc. Such would be the merit attained by hearing and believing and by the effort expended to meditate upon the teaching of the scriptures of implicit meaning. But even this does not come to one-hundredth, not to the tiniest part of the merit attained by hearing and believing and by the effort expended in meditating upon this scripture of explicit meaning.”

Then the Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata addressed the Buddha and said: “World-honored One, how should we designate this teaching on the explication of underlying intent? How should we reverence it?”

697c The Buddha answered Paramārthasamudgata and said: “Good son, it is designated the explicit teaching on ultimate meaning, and you should reverence it as such.” When this explicit teaching on ultimate meaning was enunciated in the great assembly, six hundred thousand sentient beings produced the mind of supreme awakening, three hundred thousand word-hearers removed themselves far from defilement and pollution and in this doctrine attained the wisdom eye of doctrine, one hundred fifty thousand word-hearers separated themselves definitively from all contaminated states of mind and attained liberation, and seventy-five thousand bodhisattvas attained the patience of the doctrine of no arising.

- <sup>7</sup> Beyond language and words, ultimate meaning finds nothing that might support reasoning, which assumes the validity of words and concepts.
- <sup>8</sup> Such final cessation eliminates all fabricated notions of selfhood.
- <sup>9</sup> That which is not known by differentiation is not known at all. Thus, ultimate meaning is indescribable because it is not knowable.
- <sup>10</sup> All opinions and theories take their validity from their context, in light of the background store of images and words already imprinted onto consciousness. Thus, no viewpoint can attain a final standpoint of ultimate truth. Here, either option of the identity or difference of the marks of ultimate meaning becomes false, if held to the exclusion of the other, in dismissal of the varying contexts in which images and words differ for different persons.
- <sup>11</sup> Interpretations are thus deemed to be untrue if put forward through cherished pride which precludes awareness of the one unified taste of the truth of ultimate meaning. Errors in orthopraxis are errors in orthodoxy.
- <sup>12</sup> That is to say, purified from the duality fabricated through attachment to that which is imagined.
- <sup>13</sup> The entire section is a rejection of the Abhidharma quest for a metaphysics of reality.
- <sup>14</sup> The two worlds of form are the worlds of desire and form, which have material forms and in which one appropriates a material body. The third world is that of no-form, wherein there is no such material appropriation.
- <sup>15</sup> These are the central themes of Yogācāra: that the mind constructs its realms of meaning through the interplay of conscious activity. See Chapter 2 of the *Mahāyānasamgraha*.
- <sup>16</sup> The mind itself is thus dependently co-arisen, relying on whatever factors are present. Yogācāra takes the established doctrine of dependent co-arising and understands consciousness as dependently co-arisen.
- <sup>17</sup> This passage is often cited as scriptural authority for the *ālaya-vijñāna* in later Yogācāra texts.
- <sup>18</sup> This section presents the basic Yogācāra philosophy of conscious functioning, in light of which further topics will be considered in subsequent chapters.
- <sup>19</sup> This section on the marks of all things understood by consciousness (*dharmalakṣaṇa*) is the source for the Chinese name for Yogācāra, i.e., Fa-hsiang.

- <sup>20</sup> These are the principal concerns of the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures with their theme of the emptiness of all things, here called the no-essence of all things.
- <sup>21</sup> The doctrine of no-essence or emptiness is not then a final viewpoint, but an antidote to the imaginative clinging of sentient beings. Yogācāra attempts to embrace the doctrine of emptiness in terms of its understanding of the three patterns of conscious functioning.
- <sup>22</sup> The crux of the genesis of delusion is found in language permeations which distort the other-dependent patterns into the imagined pattern of clinging to entities as if they had essential being.
- <sup>23</sup> This doctrine equates the one vehicle (*ekayāna*) with the explicit teaching (*nītārtha*) of Yogācāra, while recognizing the reality of the three vehicles (*triyāna*), which are reduced to implicit teaching (*neyārtha*).
- <sup>24</sup> This obstacle (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) consists in clinging to the imagined. Its reversal is not only the realization of full perfection, but also the reclamation of the other-dependent pattern of understanding.
- <sup>25</sup> Even explicit teaching (*nītārtha*) is empty of essence, for at the end of the day of transmigration, it too is beyond language altogether.
- <sup>26</sup> This sentence echoes Nāgārjuna's insistence that all views are empty, not merely incorrect views.
- <sup>27</sup> Thus understanding within the other-dependent pattern, recognized as such, supports the validity of conventional, language-formed truths.
- <sup>28</sup> This teaching of the three turnings of the wheel is the first Yogācāra application of its philosophy of meaning directly to issues of hermeneutics, and shows perhaps that the basic intent of Yogācāra thought was to develop such a critical philosophy of meaning and interpretation.
- <sup>29</sup> After presenting the basic philosophy of Yogācāra in the previous sections, the text turns now to explanations and interpretations of practices central to the tradition, all to be understood within the other-dependent pattern of enlightened consciousness.
- <sup>30</sup> Yogācāra thought is also known as "conscious construction only" (*viññapti-mātratā*), for this is a central theme. There are disputes whether this entails a doctrine of idealism. Clearly the texts do negate the reality of external objects, because they are constructed by consciousness. Perhaps this is but a move toward a critical philosophy of meaning.