

svacittam : The Basic Standpoint of the Laṅkāvatāra sūtra (continued)

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I. The 108 questions and answers :

We considered “svacittamātram,” the basic standpoint of the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra* (*Laṅkā*), and we should now ask what kind of concern this comes from. At the beginning of the second chapter the sutra cites Mahāmati’s “108 questions” and the Buddha’s “108 phrases” as answers to the questions. It is those questions that seem to show the sutra-compiler’s existential concern. One of the questions which attracts our attention most is: “samādhyate kathaṃ cittam.” (2, k 19a) This reminds us of the question Hui-k’o asked of Bodhidharma: 請和尚安心 (『祖堂集』第二).

A question like “baddhaḥ kaḥ” (k 14b) sounds really penetrating. Another question, “dhyāyināṃ viṣayaḥ ko’sau,” (k 14c) asks not only the nature of a special yoga experience but the very nature of what is external to the yogin himself.

Many of the questions concern doctrinal concepts of Buddhism, but some of them are about actual human life, and others about natural phenomena. One may wonder, then, in what respect these various questions are related to each other. It seems to me that they are all deeply related in the sense that they arise from and return to the very question, “samādhyate kathaṃ cittam.” The term “cittam” here means not only an individual’s religious anxiety but the whole world questioned as one’s own total being. The phenomenal world is rid of its miscellaneousness in that it is none other than “svacitta-dṛśyamātram.” This point is suggested by the 108 phrases as answers to the 108 questions.

It is not very clear how Mahāmati’s questions are counted as 108. In my counting they amount to 112 (kaḥ, kim, 10; kasmāt, kena, kutas, katham, 62; kat-

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ham, as asking how to be emancipated, 26; kutra, 2; katividham, 12). Meanwhile, the 108 phrases (“aṣṭottaraṃ padaśatam”), are actually counted as 104 in the present text. Every phrase is made up of a pair of phrases, one affirmative and the other negative.

Immediately after these questions and answers, the sutra begins to unfold its content with Mahāmati’s question, “katividho bhagavanvijñānānamutpādashitinirodho bhavati,” and the Buddha’s detailed answer to this follows. After that, Mahāmati goes on questioning with the same zeal as that with which he asked the 108 questions, while the Buddha keeps on answering Mahāmati’s or his own self-posed questions. The manner in which the Buddha answers not only to Mahāmati’s questions but those posed by himself was foreseen in how the Buddha rearranged Mahāmati’s questions and added his own apparently abrupt ones to ask the weight of the minutest soil particles of Mt. Sumeru (kk 72-77). How is the latter point to be interpreted?

It seems that the sutra could not help letting its original intent come out in that manner. The *Laṅkā*, in advocating its basic standpoint, bases itself upon the prajñāpāramitā view, especially that of the *Vajracchedikā*. Since the last of the added questions in the *Laṅkā*, “etena piṇḍalakṣaṇaṃ meruḥ kati palo bhavati,” (part of k 77) has for its answer such of the 108 phrases as “aṇupadam-anaṇupadam” or “saṃkhyāgaṇitapadam-asamkhyāgaṇitapadam,” it seems to anticipate the *Vajracchedikā* view,

“yo’sau bhagavan paramāṇusamcayasthāgatena bhāṣitaḥ, asaṃcayaḥ sa tathāgate-
na bhāṣitaḥ ;sacedbhagavan lokadhāturabhaviṣyat, sa eva piṇḍagrāho’bhaviṣyat ;
yaścaiva piṇḍagrāhasthāgatena bhāṣitaḥ, agrāhaḥ sa tathāgatena bhāṣitaḥ ; teno-
cyate piṇḍagrāha iti.” (30)

In other words, the apparently abrupt addition helps to strengthen the consistency, rather than the supposed miscellaneousness, of the sutra, though the sutra-compiler sounds rather laconic in this regard.

II. The *Laṅkā*’s view of the 108 phrases :

How does the *Laṅkā* regard the 108 phrases as answers to the 108 questions? The sutra refers to the phrases as follows :

- (1) “āryajñānavastupravicaayaṃ nāma dharmaparyāyam aṣṭottarapadaśataprabhedāśrayam, yamāśritya tathāgatā.....svasāmānyapatitānāṃ parikalpitasvabhāvagatiprabhedam deśayanti.....” (Vaidya 23, Nanjo 50-51)
- (2) “kleśajñeyāvaraṇadvayaviśuddhyartham sārthavāhavadānupūrvyā aṣṭottare nirābhāsapadaśate pratiṣṭhāpayanti yānabhūmyaṅgasuvibhāgalakṣaṇe ca.” (V 40, N 97)

The 108 phrases are considered in (1) to be the “āśraya” upon which the “āryajñāna” investigates “vastu” (here “śaśaviṣāṇam”), while in (2) the 108 phrases are qualified as “nirābhāsa,” and are considered to be something one is expected to be introduced into “ānupūrvyā” like the three yānas and the ten bhūmis. The above two statements combined roughly mean this: The realization of the “nirābhāsa” nature of the world as well as oneself, frees one from the two hindrances “kleśa” and “jñeya,” enabling one to have “ārya- jñāna” function through the actualities of life. Now we must see what characteristics are shown of the 108 phrases when the sutra in regard to them mentions (a) “ānupūrvyā” and (b) “nirābhāsa.”

(a) The sutra seems to consider that the 108 phrases have a regular order as clear as that of the three yānas and the ten bhūmis. But it does not clearly mention what it means by “ānupūrvyā.” It is, however, noticed that the 108 phrases begin with “utpādapadam-anutpādapadam” and the Buddha, after stating,

“sādhu sādhu mahāprajña mahāmate nibodhase;
bhāṣiṣyāmyanupūrveṇa yattvayā paripreçchitam.” (k 61)

first mentions, in his rearrangement of Mahāmati’s questions,

“utpādamaṭha notpādam nirvāṇam śūnyalakṣaṇam.” (k 62ab)

We have thus far examined the beginning of the 108 phrases. Next, the last of them, “akṣarapadam-anakṣarapadam,” reminds us of the *Lalitavistara* statement (10), where coming to “kṣa,” the last of the māṭṛkās which the bodhisattva, together with other boys and girls, learns from “a, ā, i, ī,.....,” the boys pronounce “kṣa,” then under the bodhisattva’s influence, from their mouths naturally comes forth the voice: “kṣaṇaparyantābhilāpya-sarvadharmāḥ.” (V 89, R 146, L 128)

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To an impatient modern reader like myself there does not seem to be any regular order throughout the phrases except for the beginning and the end, though one sees a good many two successive phrases closely related.

Another possibility as regards successive order in the 108 phrases, which sounds far more essential and which seems to be the real intent of the sutra, is that each phrase is made up of a pair of statements, the first affirmative, about being something, the second negative, about not being something, and that each pair of statements is counted as one phrase. The first three phrases are:

“utpādapadam-anutpādapadam,” “nityapadam-anityapadam,” and “lakṣaṇapadam-ala-kṣaṇapadam.”

Let me represent all the 108 phrases by a pair of statements:

“dharmapadam-adharmapadam.”

This means that something is originally not anything, that is, “nirābhāsa”; that is to say, any delusive manifestation originally is beyond being itself. Here the order is from “dharmapadam” to “adharmapadam.”

(b) When Mahāmati asks the Buddha what kind of situation the term “nitya” can be applied to, the Buddha says that it most befits “bhṛānti.” Delusive manifestations such as “mṛgatṛṣṇā, alātacakra, keśonduka, gandharvanagara, māyā, svapna, pratibimba, and akṣapuruṣa,” display the characteristic of “nitya” in that they are always beyond being or nonbeing. (V 44, N 106)

Why are they beyond being or nonbeing? Just as the waves of the sea or the waters of the Ganges appear to those “preta” -bound not as water but as flames of fire, things are seen variously, the sutra states, because of the varieties of perception of all the ignorant. Although things are seen, it is not their being seen but their not being seen as such that is true (“darśanādarśanatah,” *ibid.*). Things are seen variously (“vaicitryam”), in which respect they are called delusive manifestations (“bhrānti”). They invariably (“nityam”) delude people. At the same time they are truly eternal (“nitya”) in the sense that these manifestations are originally nothing. Seeing finds not-seeing ultimate because what manifests itself as something originally goes beyond being and nonbeing (“bhāvābhāvavivarjitatvāt,” *ibid.*). When the waters of the Ganges or waves of the ocean appear as flames of fire, that is due to the seer’s own “preta” way of being. The waves

themselves have nothing to do with flames. Those delusive manifestations, therefore, cease to be grasped as such by those who in their original way of being are thoroughly beyond being and nonbeing.

In this regard the content of Subhūti's reply to the tathāgata, who asks whether or not the tathāgata should be considered to have special marks, and of the latter's paraphrasing of that reply in the *Vajracchedikā* (5), is applicable to the present theme. Subhūti states,

“no hīdaṃ bhagavan, na lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ, tatkasya hetoḥ. yā sā bhagavan lakṣaṇasampattathāgatena bhāṣitā saivālakṣaṇasampat.” Then the tathāgata states,

“yāvatsubhūte lakṣaṇasampat tāvanmṛṣā, yāvadalakṣaṇasampat tāvanna mṛṣā iti hi lakṣaṇālakṣaṇatas tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ.”

Manifestations do not delude those who realize their true characteristics. In other words, those who realize that the true characteristic of something is its not being anything, are no longer deluded by any of the manifestations. In this regard, the “lakṣaṇālakṣaṇatas” of the *Vajracchedikā* and the “darśanādarśanataḥ” of the *Laṅkā* both point to the same matter. What these statements refer to is not limited to the tathāgata and the waves of the Ganges. They state the true characteristics of both individuals and the world. This is true of all the 108 phrases of the *Laṅkā*. In other words, “utpāda” is free from “utpāda,” “nitya” is beyond “nitya,” “lakṣaṇa” is rid of “lakṣaṇa.” Their not being anything is their true characteristic. What is seen as something is none other than “svacittam.”

Cf. “utpādānutpāda-svacittadṛśyamātrāvabodhāt-sadasator-bāhyabhāvābhāvānutpattidarśanāt.” (V 46, N 111)

III. “dharmadvaya” and “ekadharmapada”:

The *Laṅkā* thus shows how its 108 “nirābhāsa” phrases are closely connected with its basic standpoint, “svacittadṛśyamātram.” The sutra impresses its readers with the depth of its thought based on practice.

The order of the 108 phrases, we now notice, is “utpāda” returning to “anutpāda,” “nitya” to “anitya,” “lakṣaṇa” to “alākṣaṇa.” At the same time “anut-

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pāda,” which is beyond the delusive manifestation of “utpāda,” can in the reverse direction manifest itself as “utpāda.” The same is true of other phrases.

Cf. “bālapṛthagjanābhūtaparikalpitasvabhāvavikalpitaṅvān-mahāmate anutpannāḥ sarvabhāvāḥ; pratyātmāryajñānagatigocarō hi mahāmate sarvabhāvasvabhāvalakṣaṇotpādaḥ, na bālapṛthagjanavikalpadvayagocarāsvabhāvāḥ.” (V 27, N 62)

In this case “anutpāda,” “anitya” or “alakṣaṇa” is called “nirābhāsa,” “pratyātmāryajñānagatigocara,” because it goes beyond the relativities of “utpādān-utpāda,” “nityānitya,” or “lakṣaṇālakṣaṇa.” What it radically criticizes as a delusive manifestation, for instance, “utpāda,” “nitya,” or “lakṣaṇa,” is, summarily speaking, “dharmādharma” (i. e., either “dharma” or “adharmā”). This is what the *Vajracchedikā* (6) tells us to get free from in its quotation from an ancient source: “kolopamaṃ dharmaparyāyamājñānadbhir-dharmā eva prahātavyāḥ prāgeva adharmā iti.”

The *Laṅkā* (1) also quotes the latter half of this statement as the Buddha’s reply to Rāvaṇa’s “praśnadvaya,” for which “dharmadvaya” is afterwards substituted. Here “adharmā,” which is a “dharma” in the negative form, together with “dharma,” constitutes “svavikalpagrahana,” and prevents one from calming oneself in “praśama,” “ekāgra[-samādhi],” or “tathāgatagarbha.” (V 9, N 19-20) When either “dharma” or “adharmā” returns to their original “adharmā,” they cease to be “dharmadvaya,” and “dharma” immediately emerges as the Self-expression of the original “adharmā.” This seems to be what is meant in the *Laṅkā* by each of the 108 phrases, represented by the statement “dharmapadam-adharmapadam.” This seems to be what Vasubandhu meant by “ekadharmapada” in an extant Pure Land Buddhist text in Chinese, 『無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈』.

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